

What shall I wear today? Ephesians 4.17-32

Many thanks to Anna for today's TFTD.



Paul's parenting advice

The best bit of parenting advice I got when my son was born was that parenting is like a game of golf. (I have realised since that I really don't know if this advice is important for a game of golf — maybe someone can tell me — but it was useful advice for parenting.)

I was told that to play golf you have to know where the boundaries are and where the hole is. You won't have a good game if you keep hitting the ball in the wrong direction because you don't know the boundaries of the course, but if all you know is the boundaries and not where the hole is you are unlikely to win. Kids need to know both the boundaries, the lines they can't cross; and the ideal — the thing they are aiming at.

Paul is using this parenting advice in his advice to new Christians:

Verse	Boundary	Aim	Motivation
<i>Golf</i>	<i>Edge of course</i>	<i>The hole</i>	<i>To win</i>
25	Put away falsehood	Let all of us speak the	We are members of

		truth to our neighbours	one another
28	Give up stealing	Labour and work honestly with their own hands	To have something to share with the needy
29	Let no evil talk come out of your mouths	Only speak what is useful for building up, as there is need,	Your words may give grace to those who hear.
31/32	Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,	Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another	God in Christ has forgiven you.

These are examples of the actions that will change when the mind has changed to be in Christ, examples of what not to do anymore, what to try to do instead and the reason why.

Paul doesn't just give a list of do's and don'ts. Paul is trying to help people to see that living in Christ is about becoming the person "*created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*" v 24. It is about actions (don't lie — instead be truthful), but also about motivation (be truthful, not to feel superior; because it is easier; or because that is the rule; but because we are one body and lying breeds distrust and makes being one body harder). Paul isn't relying on them doing what he says, "because he said so" but is giving them a good reason to change. The reason helps them put off the old self...and be renewed in the spirit of their mind (v.23).

The reasons help them to understand what action is right in what situation. In v.26 Paul says "*Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger*" but in v.31 he says "*Put away from you all ... anger*". As a set of rules go — they are confusing. But the motivation for the list is to live in the truth that is in Jesus. Jesus got angry, and turned over the tables in the temple because people were disrespecting the house of God (Matthew 21:12-13), he also angrily called some scribes and pharisees "blind fools and hypocrites" when they were putting human rules above leading people to God (Matthew 23:17-33) but he didn't get angry when people didn't listen to him (Matthew 19:16–30) or when they crucified him (Luke 23:34). The reasons help us to know the mind of Jesus better and, along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, should help us know what to do in all situations we find ourselves in, even if they are situations Jesus didn't face and the Bible doesn't mention.

Back to the beginning

Paul begins this passage with a description of the Gentile life and it is pretty bleak

(vv.17-19). It is easy to read that and say “Well, I have never been *that* bad and nor have any of my friends!” But once we have gotten over our pride at not being as bad as the people Paul was talking about or as bad as we could be, we can see that though we might not like his black and white description — we are all a little on the grey side. We're all guilty of at least some of his charges: “futility of thinking, darkened understanding, ignorance, hard hearts, loss of sensitivity and indulging in some kind of impurity and lust”. It's part and parcel of being human.

Paul's answer is to “*put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*” (vs 22-24). But that isn't a one-time thing, it is a daily challenge. When you put on a set of clothes, you don't keep them on forever but get dressed again every morning. Every morning when we get dressed it is a challenge to also dress in the “*new self, created according to the likeness of God*” to choose each day to live by the motivation of living like Christ, and in doing that the actions Paul mentions should just follow.

Get dressed in the morning

Sometimes, like children, we just need to know simply where the boundaries are and what we should be aiming at but as we keep clothing ourselves daily with our new selves and grow into the Christian life, we should be able to understand the motivations, the mind of Christ more and more and trust that, with the Holy Spirit's nudging and guidance, we will make the right choices that lead to the right actions without the list of rules to guide us. That would be the hole in one!

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