

Ephesians 4.17 – 5.2

Made New

Amington Parish Church

Sunday 15 March 2020

Ephesians: That was then, this is now [9]

Clothes maketh the man

I have a very simple quiz for you.

Uniform quiz

How did you do?

This passage is actually where the title of this series comes from: that was then, this is now.

In verse 20 Paul says this **§**:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4.22-24 (NIV)

Being a Christian means taking your clothes off. *Pause* In a manner of speaking.

The language Paul uses makes me think of uniforms.

Why do golfers carry a spare pair of trousers?

In case they get a hole in one...

A woman tried to get on a bus but her skirt was so tight that she couldn't make the step up. So she reached behind her, lowered her zip and tried again. Still the skirt was too tight.

So again she reached behind her, lowered her zip a little more and tried to negotiate the step. But still the skirt was too tight.

Determined to catch this bus, she once more reached behind her, lowered the zip a little and attempted to climb aboard.

Then suddenly she felt two hands on her bottom, helping her on to the bus. She turned around angrily and told the man behind her: 'Sir, I don't know you well enough for you to behave in such a manner.'

The man replied: 'Lady, I don't know you well enough for you to unzip my flies three times either!'

On the one hand we have the uniform of the *old* life. Paul is not very complimentary about it – but don't you recognise it (19)?

- **They have given themselves over to sensuality**
- **They indulge in every kind of impurity**
- **They are full of greed**

He says 'they' – only he really means 'you'. He's describing the life the Ephesians led *before* they became Christians – *and the habits they were slipping back into*. But he could be describing us today.

He summarises it like this: **put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires** (22).

There's a song by Embrace which goes like this:

You should never fight your feelings
When your very bones believe them
You should never fight your feelings
But you have to follow nature's law

Nature's Law, by Embrace

The lie that is so hard to resist, is that our desires, what's in our hearts, is the deepest, truest thing there is – and so the ultimate expression of truth, is to follow our heart.

But sadly nothing could be further from the truth. Jeremiah 17.9:
§ **the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.**

Paul – who of course knew his Bible well and I'm sure had that verse in his mind at this moment – said **the old self is being corrupted by its deceitful desires** (22).

That means God isn't being cruel when he tells us we are sinful. God isn't being cruel when he tells us that we aren't living the way he intended. God isn't being cruel when he tells us the best way to life the life *he* made for us to live.

When God tells us things like this in the Bible, it comes from love, because he knows that following the desires of our deceitful hearts is corrupting, damaging, harming us.

And, he doesn't simply tell us 'no'... look in verse 23 with me §: we are to be § **made new in the attitude of our minds**, § and given a **new self to put on**, to be more **like God in true righteousness and holiness** (23-24).

In other words, this isn't pretend – it is true, *the truth*.

Friends, when we get up every morning; when we face decisions, large or small; when our tempers are frayed, when our anxieties loom large – § which uniform do we put on?

Do we put on the uniform of the *old* self, which is deceitful and damaging?

Or do we put on the uniform of the *new* self, which comes fresh from God, in **true righteousness and holiness**?

Because that is the decision we all have to make – and we have to make it every day, in all sorts of situations.

I've said it before – discipleship, following Jesus, is not really about the *big* decisions in life. They come along every now and then, and they *are* important, of course they are.

But what's *really* important is the way we respond to *every day* situations and make *every day* decisions. Do we tell a 'little white lie' here, or 'cheat a little' there?

One little trick is, if you find yourself justifying something to yourself, you almost certainly shouldn't do it. 'It doesn't really matter.' 'Who would ever find out?' 'They don't care about little old me.' 'It's only a small amount of money, who cares.' 'Everyone does it.' 'I don't want to stand out from the crowd.'

These are all phrases that belong to the *old* self.

But Paul encourages us to **put on the new self** (24).

Paul gives a couple of helpful lists here, to help us recognise what belongs to the **old self**, and what belongs to the **new self**. So I thought I would turn it into *another* little quiz for you. It's not a competition this time – it's entirely for your own benefit.

On the other side of your sheet of paper you have a list of the things Paul links to the old self, and all the things he links to the new self.

What I'd like you to do is give yourself a score for each one. It's quite simple **]** there's a yes on one side and a no on the other, with a line between the two – mark on that line where you come. You won't be sharing this with anyone else, unless you want to after the service, so be honest with yourself. I'd like you to take your time with this – think seriously about where the line should be.

Fill in the sheets.

Now I'd like you to take these sheets home with you, and use them to guide your prayers this week. Be encouraged and thank God for the ways in which you are being transformed and changed, **made new**. Say sorry and ask God's help for the ways in which you are still clinging to your **old self**.

] And let's together make a conscious decision to **put on the new self**, the new life God has won for us, and given us freely in Jesus.