

“Dress For Success!”

November 6, 2005



Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Please be turning in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Ever since last year’s brawl at the Palace, the National Basketball Association has been looking for ways to improve its image and send a message to fans that its players are more like “professional athletes” and less like “out of control pop stars.” To that end, they recently instituted a new dress code that is aimed at replacing sleeveless shirts, sneakers, and “bling-bling” with collared shirts, dress slacks, and sports jackets. Why?

Apparently the NBA Commissioner, David Stearns, got his hands on a book that I read several years ago entitled: Dress For Success. It was written back in the mid-seventies by a best selling author named John T. Molloy. His book claims to explain “***how your clothes can help you look more powerful, friendly, or competent—for the results you want.***” Malloy’s underlying premise has some serious weaknesses because it favors *image* over *character*. But his point, nonetheless, is worth considering, especially if you are preparing for a job interview or are trying to make a convincing sales presentation. Why is that?

Because in our culture—as in almost every culture—how you dress sends a message about the kind of person you are. Now I know what some of you are thinking. Clothes don’t *make* a person. They certainly can’t *change* a person. Ron Artest may appear to be more civil and therefore safe to take your family to see the next time he comes to the Palace. But underneath that Brooks Brothers suit is the same man that went berserk at the Palace not many months ago.

Well this evening you are about to learn something that may surprise you. You are about to set your eyes on some clothing that will *truly* change your life! In fact, you can read about God’s *Dress For Success* line of clothing in Ephesians 4:25-5:2. Let’s read about it together:

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

You already learned about God’s wardrobe change in verses 22-24 two weeks ago. Using the metaphor of clothing, Paul tells us to remember the garments of the old nature that we took off when we initially came to Christ and to recall the new garments that we have received as a benefit of being in Christ and having His righteousness. Contrary to how some teach this passage, Paul isn’t saying get rid of those old filthy rags of the old man and replace them with Christ’s new line of clothing. He is reminding you and me that such a transaction has *already* taken place. What He is saying here is that you must let your thinking catch up with *reality*. You must be renovated in the spirit of your mind to grasp what Christ has already done and begin to live that out reality in your *present* experience. This is what many refer to as the **already/not yet** tension of the Christian life. We are *already* clothed in His righteousness—yet the implications have to be continually understood and worked out in our daily living. It is the task of *progressive sanctification* to reduce this gap between what we *already are* in Christ and how we behave each day. Or to put it another way, spiritual growth involves being *reminded* daily from God’s Word of our new wardrobe that needs to be continually applied so we won’t keep going back to the dumpster of our old life “because after all, we must have *something* to wear.” Yes we do. But unlike our former life—not just *any* old outfit will do! And so Paul gives us three important instructions from this text to help us to “dress for success!” The first directive is this:

I. Understand your job assignment (See Ephesians 4:3).

Now this implied here because it is merely continuing a command that was stated earlier in this passage. Go back for a moment to Ephesians 4:1, where Paul said that we are to live in a way that is *worthy* of our calling. And what is that calling? In the first three chapters of Ephesians we saw that the Triune God has worked together to rescue the Creation that sin destroyed and to renew it by reconciling sinners to God and each other. God’s salvation is more than a “get out of hell card free.” It is reuniting that which sin has broken. For our part, it is partnering with God in the restoration of the world through the message of the Gospel lived out in and through His Church. Because when the Church acts like the Body of Christ that she is, when she stands as the Temple of the Invisible God before a watching

world, believe me, the world takes notice! But how do we do that? That is where or job description comes in. It's summarized in Ephesians 4:3:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

What is our job description? We are God's peace officers. Jesus talked about this in the one of the beatitudes:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

We promote the peace by proclaiming the Gospel of Peace and pointing people to the Prince of Peace. That is a wonderful message. But its credibility is connected with you and me. You see, our platform, our soap box for proclaiming this peace is the way we live out peace in our dealings with people in general and with other believers in particular.

And this is where the outfit or uniform you wear each day is *so* critical. And so Paul says...

II. Come dressed appropriately for your job.

I know some of you are still stuck on the idea that what you wear is not all that important. And keep in mind, of course, that Paul is using clothing as a metaphor for the way we behave. Nevertheless—uniforms are important. Let me illustrate:

- If you want to hire a lawyer to represent you in a court of law, would you mind if he showed up a *clown outfit*?
- If you call for police help, do you want an officer to show up in a bright orange jumpsuit like the prisoners wear at the Macomb County Jail?
- At your wedding, would you care if the presiding pastor came dressed in a satin bathrobe with a bunny emblem on the front that looked a lot something you might expect Hugh Hefner to wear at his Playboy Mansion?
- Would you be ok if your surgeon showed up for your surgery in a sanitation department outfit?

You say what you wear doesn't ultimately matter? It *really* does. That is why Paul spends several verses reminding you of what is in the wardrobe that God has provided for you—a wardrobe that nonetheless requires you to renew your mind each day in the closet of God's Word so you can dress according to *who and what* you are *in Christ!* In each of these commands Paul gives, before he points out what is in God's wardrobe, he first reminds you of the old garments or habits that need to be *continually* and *progressively* discarded. Lets begin with verse 25 where Paul says to...

- A. Get rid of lying and replace it with telling the truth (25)
Before you give your mind permission to go somewhere else while I talk on a point that seems so obvious, please listen *carefully*. I know you

probably think that it is obvious that Christians should not lie—but should speak the truth. And certainly that is so. But there is more going on here that I want you to see.

First, consider the original setting of passage from which Paul is quoting here. Paul is quoting from the OT—specifically Zechariah 8—a passage that speaks to a small remnant of people who have returned from the Babylonian exile to their now devastated homeland. This devastation was due to the persistent disobedience and rebellion of God’s people finally leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and 70 years of captivity (which Zechariah summarizes in chapter 7:11-14). In essence Zechariah is telling this *small remnant*—I am not through with you. I will make good on my original promise to Abraham—“*In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed!*”

The rest of chapter 8 proves his point by providing future scenes from the millennial reign of Christ. Verse 4—The elderly once again are able to sit in the streets because it is safe. Those same streets are also filled with playing children. A picture of peace and prosperity. Why is this so? How can such a thing ever happen in such a messed up world where people are the elderly are mugged and children are abused? Look back at verse 3:

3 This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.”

Peace is restored when **Truth** is on the throne. And the One who alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life has come. And with Him a kingdom of peace and righteousness. Further down in this same chapter, Zechariah spells out what God expects of His people. Look at verse 16:

*16 These are the things you are to do: **Speak the truth to each other**, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; 17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.*

Did you hear that phrase—“**Speak the truth to each other?**” How can you can live in the presence of Truth and not expect to speak the Truth! So what is my point in taking you on this little detour? Simply this: Verse 16 is what Paul is quoting here in Ephesians 4:25. And I think Paul is doing more than simply trying to support his point with the authority of an OT passage. He is making a connection between the people of God mentioned in Zechariah 8 and God’s *new* community of people in Jesus Christ—NOW! In fact, I think everything Paul is saying here in this section is done so with this connection in mind.

Can you see the point? This is more than a lesson on ethics. It is a picture of what God is doing in His re-creation of a world that has been ravaged and divided by sin. A world into which He sent His Son to destroy sin and reestablish righteousness.

Brothers and sisters—do you see what this means? Do you see the message we are to be before living before a *watching world*? Can you understand why *telling the truth to each other* is so important for God’s plan and why *lying to each other* is so incompatible with where we fit in that plan? If you can’t see it yet, let me have you took one more look at Zechariah 8: 20-23. Look at what happens when God’s people live authentically before a watching world:

20 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, 21 and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going.’ 22 And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him.” 23 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

How will they hear that God is with His people? When they talk like Him and act like Him and wear His new garments of truth. You want a formula for *church growth*? It’s right here. And it’s not about trying to cater to people’s felt desires. It’s not ultimately about providing just the “right ambience” or having a service that projects a certain image to a certain target audience. It’s about the attractiveness of our Savior when His people start *wearing His truth!*

Maybe you are wondering, what does that look like in God’s new community—the Church? Paul really doesn’t elaborate does he? It’s safe to say that outright lying is forbidden and replaced with telling the truth. But I think there is much more. Where do you struggle most to “tell the truth” among God’s people?

- If truth-telling is so important to our unity—then where does the **Evil One** assault us on this? Our cultural fixation on a good image? Our desire to be well thought of in the eyes of our brothers and sisters?
- How does our tendency to keep our “best foot forward” hinder the unity that God desires? **Example:** War on the way to church. “How are you?” GREAT! (When I really need brothers and sisters who will pray that God will help me swallow my pride and learn to deal patiently with my spouse or out of love for my struggling teen).

- How can we develop relationships that promote *truth* that leads to healthy ministry of members *to each other* in the body (instead of waiting for each individual train car to wreck thus requiring spiritual EMT's to rush in and do CPR)?
- You know one of the biggest complaints I hear from kids in Christian homes is not that their parent's aren't perfect. They already know that. It's that their parents—or one of their parents rarely admits when they are wrong!! That is not telling the truth! And it will hinder unity—and to the extent that it does—it will hinder our attractiveness to a watching world.
- God says—*Put off lying and deception and put on the garments of truth.* That is dressing for success before a watching world!

So what else is in Christ's wardrobe for you and me to wear? We obviously don't have time to go in as much depth on these other points tonight. Let's look at one more illustration. And then I hope that you will look at the others and do a little study on your own this coming week. I will try to discuss them more next week and then I want to do a practical case study on how to get your new clothes on. Sound ok? Ok.

- B. Get rid of sinful anger and replace it with the righteous handling of anger (26-27)

26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

What does Paul mean here? There are a couple of things to consider. First, Paul who again is quoting an OT passage (this time Psalm 4:4) that all anger is not necessarily sinful. In fact, I strongly believe that there are times it may be a sin NOT to be angry! When is that? When we know that God is angry based on what the Scriptures tell us about the character of God.

Yet Paul is quick to add that sin so corrupts us that unless we use up that anger rather quickly—we may very well turn righteous into unrighteous anger. The capacity for anger—like all other emotions—is wired into us by God. But since the Fall, God has hung a warning sign on it. Handle with extreme caution. For if you do not, it will quickly melt down into a harmful, God-dishonoring kind of anger. In short, Paul is saying: Put off unrighteous anger and put on the limited but righteous use of anger. I say limited because we are tempted to label our anger as *righteous* and everyone else's as *unrighteous*. So what is righteous anger? I don't have time to elaborate on this, but I would encourage you to study Christ's use of anger in the Gospels. As you do, ask yourself—what is driving this? How is His anger different from my typical expressions of anger? If you do that—here is the conclusion you will come to: Godly anger—Based on "Thy will be done." Sinful anger: Based on "MY will be done."

Now in order to guard against this—or in order to address it if that has already happened—Paul uses a well-known OT formula. “*Don’t let the sun go down on your anger.*” The point is that if you **do** let it go down on your anger, righteous anger is likely to degrade into unrighteous. And the consequences of sinful anger will only get worse.

So how to use righteous anger righteously? Keep it focused on the person and work of Christ! The issue with your sinful kids is that they are sinning and in need of help. They are in danger and need of being rescued. There are always Gospel implications involved in discipline. And when it comes to the big stuff of life—like terrorists flying planes into towers—you have to bring all that into focus through the lenses of the Gospel. That is essentially where the imprecatory psalms are going. They help you to take that anger and put it to good use by attacking the problem righteously. What do you mean? The imprecatory psalms are a cry for God’s kingdom to be come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven! That is making sure the sun doesn’t go down on your good anger.

But the phrase, don’t let it go down on your wrath may also point to the timely way we address our anger when it *has been unrighteously* motivated and deployed. What do believers do when we blow it with each other?

[Explain the importance of not dealing with it right away—when not only the sun goes down—but many “moons” go up and down! (See v. 27— You give the devil an “opportunity,” a foothold). Explain how the devil divides (wall illustration). Then explain how to remove the rubble—wrong way/right way].

- C. Get rid of stealing with and replace it with working and sharing (28)
- D. Get rid of using hurtful words and replace it with helpful words (29-30)
- E. Get rid of bitterness (and all that it leads to) and replace it with kindness, sympathy, and a forgiving spirit (31-32)
- F. In short, **PUT ON** Jesus Christ! (5:1-2; Romans 13:14)

Ephesians 5:1-2

1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Finally...

III. Recognize that God has covered all of your clothing needs.

I make this a separate point because I believe it is woven into the fabric of the text—and because I think we are *so quick* to forget it. Thus we end up trying to supplement our wardrobe with our own filthy rags which is...

Inadequate. You will inevitably end up with a *mismatched* wardrobe. (That is what happens when you dress in the dark. Paul will have more to say about that next week when he talks about **Light**.)

It is also **unnecessary**. The triune God has given you everything that pertains to godliness (II Peter 1:3).

A. In forgiving you, God the Father *covered* all your clothing expenses (4:32)

“Just as in Christ, God forgave you.”

Do you remember what God did for Adam and Eve in the Garden when He provided them with a covering instead of their inadequate, manmade fig leaves? But that covering wasn't cheap. It cost a life. But it was only a temporary covering. Nevertheless, it along with the entire OT sacrificial system in general and the Day of Atonement in particular pointed to the ultimate covering—the blood of the Lamb of God! Which brings us to the second member of the Trinity.

B. In sacrificially loving you, Christ *provided* all the covering that you will ever need (5:2).

C. In sealing you until the Day of Redemption, the Spirit assures you that He is present to *personally assist* you in your daily clothing choices (4:30).

Conclusion

This passage is a call to dress up *in* Jesus (Romans 13:14) and to dress up *for* Jesus (the Great Wedding). Read Revelation 19:7-9:

*7 Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!*

*For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.*

*8 Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)*

*9 Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the **true** words of God.”*

