

Unified and New – Ephesians 4

On my TV there is a station called Motor Trend and it is one of my favorites. It's all about cars. Most of the shows are about fixing up or customizing cars, trucks, Jeeps, classics, whatever. And this is how the show usually starts out. The customer comes in and tells the car builder-upper guy that he wants him to fix up his car. Let's say it's a '57 Chevy. The customer says he wants a show car with a huge engine and lots of power and he needs it to be really nice inside and out.

The car builder says, "Yea, sure, we can do that. Let's go have a look in the parking lot at the car." So, they go outside and the customer has a rust bucket of a shell of a '57 Chevy on a trailer. All that is left is a rusty body. No engine, wheels, glass, or even a chassis. Just a body that needs lots of work. And he wants the car guy to build a show car / race car out of this junk box and money is no object.

So, the car builder goes to work. And it may take months or even a year or more but the end result is a work of rolling art with a custom chassis, big wheels and tires, big brakes, big engine, all new amazing interior with all the modern creature comforts and it looks great and runs fast and loud. I can't imagine how much a build like that costs but the end result is always mind-blowing. It's still a '57 Chevy but it is a completely different car than what came in on a trailer.

Now, I want you to get this picture in your mind. YOU are the '57 Chevy. And God is the custom car builder. That is the picture we are being shown by Paul in **Ephesians chapter 4, verses 17-24**. Paul starts off describing what we all looked like before we were rebuilt and customized by God. We were all rusty, dented, worn out shells with missing parts and good for nothing. Then God takes us and, over time, rebuilds us into the beautiful masterpieces that He wants us to look like.

We are still who we are but we are new creations. We don't look the same or run the same or sound the same or handle the same. And we are different from all the other '57 Chevys out there. We are unique. It doesn't happen all at once but after a while, nobody is going to confuse us with an ordinary factory '57 Chevrolet. We are not the same anymore. Does that describe you? Some of you are more like a Stanley Steamer than a '57 Chevy but you get my point. We are new creations. Let's see how Paul describes it in **Ephesians chapter 4, verses 17-24**.

Let me just tell you before we read this that when Paul talks about Gentiles, he is talking about unconverted people, unbelievers, people that do not know or follow Jesus. He's not just picking on Gentiles because he is writing to Gentiles but they would have understood that Paul is talking about people who were not Christians and he talks about them first and then describes believers.

Let's read it. *"So, I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. ²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² 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; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

Let's go back to that car illustration for a minute. So, remember, you are a '57 Chevy and now you have a big block Chevrolet race engine with a tunnel ram and two-four barrel carbs and nitrous and a blower and all the goodies making 1,000 horsepower. But then one day you decide, "You know what, I think I want the original 6-cylinder, one

barrel carb making 140 hp. I don't want to go too fast." That's the ridiculous notion that Paul is wanting us to get rid of here.

He describes the Gentiles, the unbelievers, as "*futile in their thinking*" in **verse 17**. That doesn't mean they are stupid intellectually. It means that they are spiritually worthless in how they think. Have you ever heard an unbeliever talk about spiritual things? They always come from the aspect of what they would do if they were God. They don't know God so they use their reasoning to say what they think God should do. It's a complete waste of time to listen to them. It's futile.

In **verse 18** Paul gives them what I think is a great, subtle put-down. "*They are darkened in their understanding..*" That's a real nice way of saying spiritually stupid. That's something my mother would have said. "*That lady is just darkened in her understanding. Bless her heart!*" He continues on in **verse 18** to say they are spiritually ignorant because they have hardened their hearts. And in **verse 19**, he continues that thought by saying those hardened hearts have lost all sensitivity to God. For believers, we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us that tells us, "*Uh, hey, Todd, don't do that. That's not good.*" But they have no such sensitivity so they just do whatever they can get away with.

But Paul's point in this passage is not to be mean or rude to unbelievers. He's just pointing out some facts to make it obvious that there is a difference between believers and unbelievers. And in **verse 20**, he tells us how we are supposed to live. And if we don't live this way, then something is terribly wrong with our relationship with the Lord or it doesn't exist. Look at **verse 20** again. That is not the way of life you learned.

Then in **verses 22, 23 and 24**, he tells us what we have learned or what we should have learned. Look at these three things. **Verse 22** says to take off the old self. **Verse 23** says to be made new. And **verse 24** says to put on the new self.

Now, I know what you may be thinking at this point. You're thinking, "*Oh, great. More stuff I hafta do. Take off, be renewed and put on. Okay, I'll try to be a better person.*" Nope. That's not what Paul is saying here. These are not things we have to do. These are traits that we should already have as believers. These are things done at the point of conversion and are mentioned here only as a reminder of that experience. (MacArthur, Ephesians Commentary, page 176)

Let me tell you about **Edgar**. Edgar was a homeless veteran who had lived on the streets of Baltimore for more years than he could remember. He had lost his left leg in combat in the Army and had lost a lot of his mind there as well. The PTSD led to over-the-counter meds which led to prescription meds which led to illegal drugs which led to homelessness and despair. He had learned to get by however he could, either legally or illegally and had spent years in prison where his mental problems went from bad to worse.

One cold night at the local mission, Edgar got some hot soup and a Christian pamphlet from some volunteers from a local church. Edgar had gotten this combination of soup and pamphlet many times and like every other time, he gave the soup all his attention and used the pamphlet like a potholder to hold the bowl of soup in his hands. But this time, when he had drained the last drop of soup into his mouth, he put the bowl down and looked at the pamphlet.

He didn't read well but he was enjoying the warmth of the building and so when a volunteer came around to pick up the bowl, Edgar asked him about the pamphlet. The man sat down and began to read parts of it to Edgar and even took the time to explain some things about it to him. At first, it was kind of hard for Edgar to believe that stuff about God sending His Son Jesus to die for people but, long story short, Edgar felt a pull – a longing – deep inside and he wanted to believe. And finally, after lots of questions, Edgar bowed his head right there at the table in the mission

and asked God to save him. He asked God to forgive him of all his sins and asked God to send His Holy Spirit to live inside of him forever. He truly believed.

When he opened his eyes, Edgar felt a relief he had never felt and a clarity of mind that was a distant memory. He asked the volunteer, “*Now what?*” And the volunteer suggested maybe Edgar could get a shower and some new clothes, two things he hadn’t had in years. And the shelter helped Edgar get the shower and clothes and a haircut. Over the next few months, they even helped him get a prosthetic leg through the VA and Edgar got a job working for one of the other volunteers. He was a changed man in every way.

Some time later, Edgar was doing some volunteer work himself down at the mission where he was saved and he saw a man he knew from living on the street. The man was still homeless and still struggling just like Edgar had been back in the day. When Edgar identified himself to the man, the man offered Edgar a drink from his paper bag and a couple of pills. And while the temptation was still there and something Edgar had to fight off, he remembered where he had been, physically, mentally and spiritually. And Edgar politely refused.

He said to the man, “*Why would I do that? I don’t do that. That’s not me anymore. I don’t want it or need it. That was a different person that did that stuff.*”

Later that night, as Edgar took off his clothes to get ready to sleep in his own comfortable bed, he had a memory of that night in the mission when he had taken off his old self, had his mind renewed and had put on his new self. And he wept with gratefulness to God for changing him and making him a new person.

That man Edgar is me...and you...and every other believer who has ever had their lives and minds and hearts changed and renewed by God. And just like a ’57 Chevy doesn’t want to go back to the stock engine, none of us want to go back to living like we used to when we were those Gentiles Paul is talking about. We used to be futile in our thinking, darkened in our understanding and hard-hearted lost souls lusting for more of what could never satisfy.

But God has changed our lives and so we now live gratefully every day and, as it says in **verse 24**, we are righteous and holy. Not self-righteous and holier-than-thou. We are right with God and we are set apart and different from unbelievers. There is a major change in who we are and what we do and how we live. We do not look like the world and we don’t look like we used to. Thank you, Lord! It’s all because of Him.

music

How about you? Have you put off your old self, had your mind renewed and put on the new self? You can. All you have to do is believe that Jesus – who is God – died on the cross to pay the price that God the Father said was due. He paid with His life for your sins so that you don’t have to. And when you truly believe and allow Him to come into your life and start changing you, you too will be a brand-new creation. Do it today. Do it right now as the music plays.