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EPHESIANS 4:17-25

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ

Today we're going to look at Ephesians 4 starting in verse 17. We're going to go right through the verses, verse by verse from 17-25 today, and we're going to try to understand how they apply to us. Ephesians 4:17-25.

Verse 17 says this: *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do.* What Paul is saying is that we must be different than the unsaved people. He's going to start with thinking patterns, but he starts with this very strong statement. He says, "Hey, I want to tell you something and I want to insist on it in the Lord." This is not a preference; this is a command. In other words, this is very important. What Paul's saying is very important. I'm going to *insist on it in the Lord*, he says, *that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do.*

There is a difference between the nice nonbeliever and the biblical Christian. There's a significant difference although they often look the same. The nice nonbeliever often does nice things, kind of looks like a Christian. Sometimes Christians do things that aren't so nice. They don't even look like Christians. The nice non-Christian often looks like a biblical Christian, but there's a significant difference between them because of the way they think. Even the nice non-Christian can find himself making decisions or ending up in places that are wrong or unhelpful.

Paul is making a very clear distinction here between the way the Gentiles live and the way Christians live. He's saying, "Don't live the way the other people live. You are a Christian; you want to live a different way." There's a difference between a biblical Christian and a nice non-Christian.

We know there's a difference between the wicked and the righteous. We know that. We see people and, "Oh man, that guy is a terrible person." I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the nice non-Christian. The people you hang around with that might be your neighbors. The people you work with. The nice people who are non-Christians. They are different and they think differently than Christians.

The world is now a greater enemy to the Christian than it was in New Testament times. It is a greater enemy because it often looks nice and does good to many. It then often has greater power over Christians because of the good things that it provides to them such as riches and reward and pretention. It's a more dangerous enemy because it has lost its appearance of being an enemy.

But there's a different way to think as a nice nonbeliever than as a biblical Christian. That's what I want to talk to you about today because there are different motivations, different thinking

patterns, and those become very important as the person starts to develop in their life. So even the nice non-Christian who does a lot of good things is going to end up in a bad place at some point because of the way they think.

Young people, you have friends. A lot of them are nice people. But if they are not biblical Christians they're going to end up in a place that even because they have good motivations doesn't make their indecisions right. You want to understand what's going on.

Let's dig a little deeper by going further into the passage. Each verse here.

Verse 17 we just read says, *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. There are going to be three ways talking about our thinking here. That's the first one, in the futility of their thinking. 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. 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.*

There are three statements that talk about thinking in that verse. Go back and look at the verse yourself, verses 17 and 18. Three phrases that talk about thinking. One: they have *futility* in their thinking. Number two: they're *darkened in their understanding*. And number three: there's *ignorance* that is in them.

You see what it's caused by in verse 18. We're looking at the passage and letting the passage speak to us. What is it caused by? It says, *due to the hardening of their hearts*. We're going to talk about what that looks like, what that means in just a moment. But *due to the hardening of their hearts* - notice what the result is also in verse 18 - they are *separated from the life of God*.

We're going to talk today about right thinking and that right thinking is going to start with not having a hard heart, having a softer heart, and then it's going to result in something very important. The result of not having right thinking is that you're separated from the life of God, the life that God desires for us.

The world is lost today. It's as if they're wondering around and don't have direction. But it's not as if they're stupid. People in our world who are not Christians aren't stupid people; they're very smart people. They solve all kinds of problems.

The engineers of this world are the ones who solve all kinds of problems. They solve software problems, they solve bridge problems, they solve road problems, they solve electrical problems. They are the engineers of this world. They create and they solve problems. That's what they do. We love engineers. We need them. They're very important people. They're smart people.

The Bible doesn't talk about smartness getting us into heaven. The Bible talks about a heart response to God that gets us into heaven. That's very important. There's a difference between a nice, smart person and someone who's a biblical Christian. It has to do with the way they think. It has to do with how they understand God.

There's only one social engineer truly and that's Jesus Christ. A social engineer who solves the problem of sin in our lives, who teaches us how to relate to other people, that's Jesus Christ Himself.

One of the ways that the world addresses problems, engineers' solutions to problems, is they tend to make things not black and white anymore. Now there's a lot of gray. They expand the gray area. "You could do this in this kind of circumstance" and so the line between right and wrong is grayed out a bit.

It's interesting to think about that because 1 John 1:5 says, *God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.* Gray is a dark and light mixed together. Sometimes the worldliness creeps into our thinking even as believers and we start graying things out. We start changing what we should do.

We become more tolerant, for example. This idea of tolerance is a good idea, but if you're so tolerant that you cross a line between right and wrong then you've lost something very important. Your thinking about being nice has left what a biblical Christian is all about. The world takes a good motive and turns it into something that they think is right, but they're actually going the wrong direction. Very important for us to understand that.

For example, two people who love each other and say, "We are committed to each other, therefore we can take advantage of some of the benefits that are reserved only for marriage. After all, marriage is in our hearts." That's what some people will say. So what they've done now is they've moved passed the line where there's a right and a wrong, they've left the idea of being a biblical Christian, and they've done something that they think is good motives. "I've had good motives," "we're being nice," that kind of thing.

Or here's another idea. "I'm angry; therefore my unkindness toward the other person is justified. After all, the other person is wrong. Any normal person would respond that way." That's what one man told me this week. "Any normal person would respond that way." We're not talking about normal, we're not talking about nice, we're not talking about being a good person. We're talking about being a biblical Christian. We don't want to leave that.

Here's another example. "I can afford this. I need this. I'll buy this even though I don't really have the money for it right now. I'll be able to pay for it somehow." We talk ourselves into doing something that leaves biblical Christianity and moves into some nice idea that we want to go towards.

In each of these situations there's a right and there's a wrong, but we've tended to make things gray so it's hard to distinguish good from evil today. What gets our thinking off? It has to do with us moving away from a biblical frame of reference into doing what we think to be right, everybody doing what he thinks is right in his own eyes. That's the problem. We must realize that the Bible helps us think correctly, wisely, and differently than the world.

Let me show you another verse. Hebrews says this: *Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

What does *constant use* mean? Constant use means you're continually involved. In what? It doesn't say here in this passage in what, but if we go to the previous chapter in Hebrews 4 it tells us what. In Hebrews 4:12 it says, *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

The Bible has the ability to come into our lives and separate the nice non-Christian thinking from the biblical Christianity. We need God's word to think rightly about ourselves and to think rightly about our life.

Let's go back to Ephesians 4:18, the passage where we are today. Notice what causes someone to be darkened in their understanding or ignorance. Do you see what it says there? What causes it? It says, *due to the hardening of their hearts.* And it results in *having lost all sensitivity.* That's what it says in verse 18.

The word *hardening* there is the word *porosis*. The Greek word *porosis* is where we get our word 'osteoporosis,' which means the hardening of the bones. That's what we're talking about here; the hardening of their hearts.

The person who has a hard heart is a person who loses sensitivity to sin. They're not as sensitive to sin anymore because they're a nice person and they can kind of describe in a way intentions or something else. Or they've lost the ability to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to them.

That's an experiential thing, the Holy Spirit speaking to you. The Bible is a concrete thing, an objective thing. Both of those are important, listening to the Holy Spirit and studying God's word, in order to determine what God has for us. When we start trying to make decisions about God's will or what He has for us, if we don't have a mind that's equipped with God's word and understanding it then we get ourselves off track. We think that we're doing the right thing, but we don't realize that we're really not thinking according to the way that God would have us. Just being a Christian doesn't mean that you think correctly. Biblical Christianity is different from being a nice non-Christian type thinking.

I like the illustration in the dentist office. "Ignore your teeth and they'll go away." It's true, but the same thing is true about God's word. You ignore the Bible and your sensitivity to sin decreases. You ignore the Holy Spirit's voice and you don't hear that voice as often. So it's very important for us not to ignore the Bible or God's word so that we can have this sensitivity.

Notice verse 19. It says, *Having lost all sensitivity.* They've hardened their hearts and that causes a loss of sensitivity. It's like a callous that builds up on the heart that makes it not so easy to feel anymore. You don't have the message. You're not getting it. We don't want to have those kind of hard hearts, but what happens when we harden our hearts is that we lose all sensitivity.

They have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. Eventually what happens to the person who stops studying the Bible, who stops listening to God's word, starts the callous on their heart, becomes hard hearted is they start moving further and further down the path so that they end up with all kinds of sensuality and greed.

Two things. You might say, "Well, I'm not there." But where are you on the path? Because if you're not studying God's word, you're not listening to the Lord then you're starting to move down that path. You may not be there yet, but you're going in the wrong direction. We must be working on these things because otherwise our hearts will become hardened. If you harden your heart then you'll develop a passion for other things. God designed us to be passionate people. And if we don't have a passion for God then we will develop a passion for something else.

Let's go on to verse 20. *That, however, is not the way of life you learned.* Now we're going to talk about not the wrong thing to do, we're going to talk about the right way to respond; how we should respond with God's ideas of biblical Christianity, how are we going to get to where we need to be.

Verse 20: *That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*

In order to go in the right direction we're going to have to do these things in verses 22-24. There are three of them. See if you can pick them out as I read the verses and then we'll talk about them. But this is God's plan for moving forward. So wherever you are in your life, you want these three things. This is part of the plan.

Verse 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; 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.*

Before I get into the plan, I want you to look at verse 22 again. Notice it says that our old self is being *corrupted by deceitful desires*. Do you see that there? It's important to understand that because you don't realize that you're thinking over here as a nice non-Christian. You just think you're doing the right thing, but you lost some biblical foundation because it's deceitful desires that get us there.

You have to understand the word *deceitful* there. The idea is that you don't realize what's happening to you and you start thinking by moving further and further away from the path. If you knew, if you look back you would say, "Wow, I really moved a long way," but you may not recognize it as you're moving down that path. So we have to be careful of the deceitful desires.

We have desires in our life. We want this to happen and that to happen and those desires sometimes cause us to move away from a biblical way of thinking. Dangerous. I just want you to see that our old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, is there before we go into the plan.

There's three parts to the plan. It's a three-step plan. Number one: *put off*. Number two: *be made new*. Number three: *put on the new*. So put off and put on with a middle part in there which is be made new. If you were matching clothes it would be take off the dirty clothes; be made new, get in the shower, take a shower; put on, put on some new clothes. Three step plan. Put off, make new, and put on. That's what we're talking about and that's what God wants us to do in this passage.

Let's take each one of those and talk about how we're going to do that. Because you, like me, want to grow in the Lord. We want to be close to the Lord. We want to understand what He has for us. We want to make decisions that are honoring to God. How are we going to do that? We must be working this continually in our lives, this three step plan to put off, be made new, and put on.

Step number one: *put off*. When he says *put off* what are we talking about? Well, in part it's talking about getting rid of any association with sin. If you've got a problem with alcohol you don't keep a bottle in the bottom drawer for special occasions. If you have a problem of pornography then you have some kind of an internet filter or some kind of accountability system built into your computer. If you have a problem with lying then you're making a commitment in advance about how you're going to handle the truth.

Very important. We're putting off certain things. We have to have a plan. Don't try to talk yourself out of sin after you're into it. You want to have a plan of getting rid of it. You're putting off these things. You're getting rid of them. That's the idea here.

There's another way, though, that I think we put off things. Two people I talked to this week made a statement that said that their present ability to live is hindered by their past. In other words, the things of my past have done so many things to me I can't really do this right thing right now. I can't do what God wants me to do because I'm so hindered from my past. That's a problem. It's a problem because God wants us to put off the past. We must somehow break the ties between the past that's affecting us and to come to God who makes everything new.

2 Corinthians 5:17: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* The idea is that God wants to do something new and if your past, whatever it is, is hindering you from moving forward you have a problem. You want to put it off. You want to look for ways to be able to do that.

It reminds me of the one man who said to his friend, "Say, you look depressed. What are you thinking about?"

"My future," he said.

"Well, what makes your future so hopeless?"

"My past," he says.

I think sometimes our past dictates where we're going in the future, but it does not have to be that way. God wants to release, He wants to free us from our past. He wants to do something new inside of us. I don't know what it is that God has for you to put off, but God wants part of our

plan to be putting off things from the past, putting off things that get in our way, getting rid of sin that is hindering us.

This is such a revolutionary concept, this idea of right thinking and these things that God wants us to do, that I think some of us would benefit from getting saved again. I'm not suggesting you have to accept Jesus into your heart again or you lost your salvation. I'm saying this is so revolutionary of an idea when it comes down to the practical living of our lives many of us would benefit from saying, "I need to start all over with the Lord. Lord, do something deep within my heart like salvation did in the beginning." It's a revolutionary idea. I think we're not just talking about something that's happening on the outside, we're talking about a revolution that's taking on in the inside adjusted by God's word.

Whenever I read in the scriptures - and we have this idea of putting off and putting on several times in the Bible - whenever I see that in the Bible I'm reminded of the story of Lazarus. You remember Lazarus. He was the guy who was raised from the dead by Jesus. The story is a very interesting one.

Jesus comes to Mary and Martha and says, "*Remove the stone* from the grave," and Mary and Martha say, "It's been four days. It's really going to smell bad if we do that." That's what they say to Jesus. Jesus says, "Trust me. *Remove the stone.*" The stone gets removed and Jesus speaks into the tomb and he says, *Lazarus, come forth*, and Lazarus comes out of the tomb. We have a dead man that's come back to life. Amazing story.

But the story doesn't stop there. The next thing Jesus says, surprisingly, to them is *take his grave clothes off*. This must have been a really scary thing that happened. What this means is here comes a guy out of the grave with grave clothes on, now he's alive. So he's told *take the grave clothes off*. I think there are a lot of Christians who are saved, but they still walk around with grave clothes on, hindering them from being able to function the way God wants them to function. So Jesus says, "Take those grave clothes off." They took the grave clothes off and Lazarus was alive and moving around.

Sometimes you can take the grave clothes off yourself. Just between you and God it all just happens and the freedom comes within your heart. But sometimes you need some help with that. Somebody comes alongside of you or you work with someone else and the grave clothes come off in order for you to experience the true freedom that God has given you because you're alive in Christ.

If you're a young person here today, you want biblical kind of thinking not just nice kind of thinking. Let's look at the Bible. What does the Bible say? Because if you understand what the Bible says it's going to change your life. That brings us to the second step.

Putting off is one thing. The second step is to *make anew* in the *attitude of your mind*. So we're going to make new in the attitude of our minds. What is that going to mean? How do we do that?

There are a lot of people and some people are right here in our church who experience tremendous suffering. As I hear some people in our church share the pain that they're going

through, I can't identify. I cannot relate. All I can do is pray for them because of the difficult, difficult situations that they find themselves in. Painful situations.

When that happens I'm often reminded about people who go and are in concentration camps or have been in concentration camps and have gone through tremendous pain. God has preserved them somehow in that and that grace must somehow be available to this person in our church who's suffering greatly.

Victor Frankl was such a man in a concentration camp who said this that rescued him out of there. In his spirit he was able to be preserved through all this experience. In the midst of all of this experience he says this: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way."

Yes, things can be terrible in our lives. But there's a way to think about those things. There's an attitude that we can have that's very important. We must be working in this attitude of our mind trying to understand what that looks like in order to be able to take the next steps every day.

You have to make a decision. What does God want me to do in this? Because sometimes the situations we find ourselves in are so convoluted, they're so mixed up it's like is there a right way in all this? Or is every way wrong? Every time I turn I don't know what to do. Some things get very complicated. How are we going to choose the good will or the perfect will that God has for us?

That's what Romans 12:2 tells us. It says, *Do not conform to the pattern of this world*. Don't be just a nice non-Christian way of thinking, *but be transformed* (by what?) *by the renewing of your mind*. So in your mind you're going to be renewed, something's going to happen inside of you, then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is; His good, pleasing, and perfect will. That's what we're talking about here.

Young people, I want to look at a particular passage this morning that has to do with young people, Psalm 119. In Psalm 119 we have 150 verses of scripture in this one chapter. I just want to point out a few of them.

How can you in your life stay on the right path? How can you do the right thing? Verse 9 gives part of the answer. *How can a young man stay on the path of purity?* We're not just talking about sexual purity here, we're talking about doing the right thing. How can a young person do that? What's the answer? Do you see it there? *By living according to your word*. Not by doing nice things. That's not what it says.

It's great to do nice things and good things and righteous things and to serve other people. All those are good, but how do you stay on the right path by taking heed to God's word? Two verses later it says, *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you*. What is the thing that keeps us from sinning? It is hiding God's word in our heart. That means things like meditating on God's word, memorizing God's word, studying God's word. We hide it in our hearts. It's there to be used and ready for the Holy Spirit to work with.

Another verse in that same chapter, verse 105, says, *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.* What is the lamp? The lamp is the word of God.

All three of those verses have the same thing in common. It has to do with God's word.

It's been said sin will keep you from this book or this book will keep you from sin. The Bible is the standard for life; not what we think to be the greatest good, not what's going to help the most amount of people. If we're going to do this right we want to have God's word embedded in our hearts. We want to think biblically. There's a difference between the nice non-Christian kind of thinking and biblical Christianity. That's what we're talking about here.

Step number three: *put on.* God has a plan for what you're going to put on.

I don't know how many of you are involved with Pinterest, but Pinterest is a social networking platform that has pictures. You can go there and post a bunch of pictures that you like that remind you of your favorite things or whatever you want. You can share pictures with other people from other people's boards and you can follow their boards. Pinterest. Any of you involved in Pinterest? I am.

My son, Josh, and Melissa decided they would create a Pinterest board on my site called Dad's Style. In other words, "Dad, we've got some ideas for how you can dress better." They want to improve how I look and so if anything I do improves how I look it's because of Josh and Melissa who've ganged up on me on Pinterest and they're posting these pictures of clothes they think I should wear. It's public. You can go see what they're telling me to wear! So when I go to the store I'm not just going out and buying new outfits, but the next time I buy an outfit I'm going to take my phone that has my Pinterest account on it and I'll compare those things.

Two weeks ago I went to buy some shoes. When I went to go buy some shoes they had I went to my Pinterest board and it says, "Dad, these are the shoes you should wear. Get rid of those shoes you're wearing now; you want to wear [Josh calls them] boat shoes." So I'm at the shoe store and I take a picture of these shoes, I send it to Josh. "Are these okay?" He says, "Try something else." So I get a second pair. I said, "Are these okay?" He says, "These are better than the first." Then I show him a third pair. He says, "Those are good. Buy those." So I did. These are boat shoes that I'm wearing. I need advice when it comes to what to put on.

I think we all need advice on what to put on when it comes to godliness, spirituality, righteousness. God has good taste too. When we listen to Him and allow Him to dictate what we're going to wear then that's when good things happen. I think we all need advice about what we're going to do. The reality is if you know what you're going to put on, it's easier to put off. If you're having trouble putting off some stuff then you need to work on what you're going to put on because when you have what you're going to put on in place then it's easier to drop off some of those other things that you shouldn't be doing anyway.

We really want to emphasize the putting on. A firefighter wears special equipment, not a pair of shorts, when he goes to fight a fire. A soldier wears a flak jacket, not a tuxedo, when he goes into battle. A heart surgeon wears a gown and gloves, not his gardening clothes, going into the

operating room. God has a plan for what we should wear in our lives, appropriate clothes for addressing the challenges we face. We need to have clothes on.

I want to talk about a specific kind of person. You probably know someone like this. This is the person who says, “Everybody knows what I think. I just let it out. I just tell people what I think and they know. So whatever I’m thinking I just let it out.” What they’re doing is they’re evaluating transparency and honesty, two very good qualities. But I sure wish they’d put some clothes on because we don’t want to hear everything they’re thinking and we don’t want to know everything that is their opinion.

There are some people who think nice thinking is “it’s good for me to be honest with everybody, so I just tell. You’ll know what I’m thinking because I’m going to tell you.” We don’t want to know. There are some people, you see them and it’s like they don’t have any clothes on. Please, put some clothes on would you? You don’t want to be looking that way. We’re saying to people, “Put some clothes on, put something on for yourself. Get yourself cleaned up. We don’t want to be just displaying ourselves without something on.” That’s what God is saying. Let’s put on something.

Let me just take one more verse before we end today, verse 25. He gives a practical application to one area, one specific area. He says, *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

He’s taking this idea again and applying it to a specific area. So if you have a problem with exaggeration or telling part of the story or making yourself sound better in the story that you tell, then you’re going to want to think about this particular passage and put on something different than falsehood.

There are a lot of ways that our world tends to talk that are not true, but they’re nice things to say. Here’s a few of them:

The check is in the mail.

I’ll start my diet tomorrow.

We service what we sell.

Give me your number and the doctor will call you right back.

Money cheerfully refunded.

One size fits all.

This offer limited to the first hundred people who call in.

Your luggage isn’t lost, it’s only misplaced.

Leave your resume and we’ll keep it on file.

This hurts me more than it hurts you.

I just need five minutes of your time.

Your table will be ready in a few minutes.

Open wide, it won’t hurt.

Let’s have lunch sometime.

It’s not the money; it’s the principle of the thing.

Those may be nice things to say, but often they're just ways of covering up something different that you intend to do or act or think.

How do we handle the truth? Very important in this passage. It's just taking this whole idea of putting off and putting on and bringing it into one area.

Next week we're going to talk about emotions. How are we going to bring this into our emotional life? A very significant area that we all experience. We're going to talk about that and look at it next week.

The idea is that we need to replace things in our hearts. Replace things in our lives in order to be effective in doing what God would have. He wants us to put off, to make new, and to put on. It starts with a greater understanding of God's word. What does God say about this subject and that subject? If we can embrace those ideas God can do some very powerful things in us. If we're just content to be nice then we're just like the nice non-Christian who eventually finds himself in significant issues. We're talking about being a biblical Christian. It means we need to get into the word, study it, understand what God has to say about certain things.

I trust that as you continue at Calvary Chapel with us God will use our times together on Sunday to do that for you. As you attend a small group that we offer, that's our goal. Men's groups, women's groups that we start are designed to help you think biblically, help you understand what God has to say about life situations. That's part of what it means to follow Christ and to grow spiritually in Him. I trust that that will impact you as it did me this week as well.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, we know that sometimes we find ourselves on a down escalator where if we don't keep moving then we find ourselves drifting away from the truth that you have designed for us. So, Lord, I ask right now that you would be working in each of our hearts to remind us of how, what practical ways we can do to remain biblical in our thinking, to stay true to your word, and to follow you one hundred percent in our lives. We are grateful for all that you've done for us. We're grateful for the salvation that we have. But we know that when we get saved we just become baby Christians and we need to grow up in that and understand what that looks like in practical terms. Lord, I pray especially for the person who's here today who really isn't following you, who isn't a biblical Christian. Lord, I pray you'd do something in their heart first. If there's hardness there, I ask that you'd melt that away. I pray that you would provide the indicators of your grace in each person's life that they can see you personally working in their lives. Bless us each, Lord, as we continue to worship you and ponder these things. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let's continue to worship the Lord together.