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And we are looking at what it means to put on Christ. What do the scriptures tell us? It's a noble goal and it's a worthy calling if you address any believer or any group of believers and say, we need to put off the old and put on the new. We should be conformed to the image of Christ.

You can't get any argument. You can get argument about a lot of things in Christianity and in the interpretation of the Word of God, but the need for us to be transformed and to put on Christ, no believer is going to argue with that. The question is, how does that happen? We know that it's a worthy goal and that it's central to our calling, but how do we do that? I can't just walk out and say, well, here's my robe of righteousness hanging on the rack here.

I'll just stick my arms in the sleeves and walk out and I will have put on Christ. There is a means. God has made provision for this.

So, in looking at the passages that talk about putting on the armor of light, putting on Christ, we begin to see the means. We've already seen that the foundation for this is in our position in Christ, that it's the work of Christ on the cross that makes this possible. To put on Christ is to identify with Him in His faithfulness to the Father, in His dedication to the plan of God, in making that His priority, even unto death.

You look at Christ in Gethsemane and you look at His willingness. He wasn't thrilled to go to the cross, Father, if it be Thy will, let this cup pass from me. That's an indication of His understanding of exactly what He was about to go through and it was not a pleasant, glorious experience.

In the same way that much of our experience here can be less than glorious, it isn't something we look forward to, to watch our bodies deteriorate over time, to go through the stresses and the sufferings that are a part of our relationships and our struggles in this life. A lot of that isn't something that makes for joy and makes for peace and makes for a feeling of prosperity. But when we look at those things, we want to have the attitude that Christ had about the cross.

I don't think personally that Christ was all that thrilled about going through what He went through prior to the cross, about the misunderstanding and the slander and the public resentment and the resentment and the hostility of this Pharisee. Since Christ, nobody likes to be disliked, nobody enjoys being the object of scorn and the object of ridicule and the object of hatred. There were people on many occasions that wanted to kill the Lord Jesus Christ for what He said.

Even when you are perfectly right and even when you know that you are totally justified in what you're doing, if you get disapproval and hatred and vindictiveness from people, you have a bad feeling. Nobody enjoys that. Nobody says, I like being the object of scorn and ridicule, I love being out here on my own where everybody is casting aspersions and throwing stones.

It's not pleasant even when you're right and even when you're perfect. And so we know that to put

on Christ is to have our eyes fixed on the hope. Christ who for the joy that was set before Him endured.

He learned obedience through suffering. And that was His humanity learning. He went through what we go through.

Deity doesn't learn anything. Deity is the source of all truth and the source of all knowledge. But Christ, without losing His identity as the second person of the Trinity, His co-equality and His co-eternality, in His humanity left us an example by operating in the power of the Spirit and the power of the Word of God.

And He learned in His humanity obedience through the things that He suffered. The Scripture tells us that. And that's our calling.

Well, how do we get through that? How do we keep from losing hope? How do we put on Christ in that respect? That's what these passages talk to us about. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 4. We've already seen in Romans 13 that we are to put on Christ, that we are to put on the armor of light in verse 12. We've seen in Romans 6 that we've been baptized and identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

We've seen in 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians chapter 5 the literal result of this in our physical death and resurrection. And we've seen in Romans chapter 8 that this is synonymous with being conformed to the image of Christ, being conformed to the image of His Son. Now in Ephesians chapter 4, look at verse 20.

You have not so learned Christ, and he's just given a list of vices and sins. And he says this isn't this type of thing, this lewdness and working uncleanness with greed and so forth. I guess that's uncleanness, not uncleanness.

That would be an entirely different lesson, wouldn't it? But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him in 421, if you have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus. And this is another affirmation of where the power to do this comes from. It's in the Word.

We hear Him. We're taught by Him. We're taught by what the Scriptures say.

We're taught by what Jesus' example communicates to us. We're taught by the example of the apostles. Paul said, look at my example and follow it, and you won't go astray.

If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus, that you do what? What is the prerequisite to putting on the new creation, putting on Christ, putting on the armor of light? You have to first put off something. We have to first drive the enemies out. You put off concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which

was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.

So there is a turning away from one thing and a turning toward something else. And this begins in our minds. We have to examine our priorities.

We have to examine our viewpoint of life. Why am I doing what I'm doing? Why am I prioritizing this task or this endeavor or this area of my life? Is this something that appeals to my old man, or is this something that's a part of the new creation? We have to put off former conduct. We have to put off the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Put on the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, let each of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Now, if I said I want you to speak French to one another, what is the prerequisite to speaking French to one another? You have to learn French. You have to know French to be able to speak it. If we are to put off falsehood and put off subterfuge and put off deceit and the fan dance that is a part of our sinful nature and speak truth to one another, we have to know the truth.

We have to learn the truth. And that's why he introduces this section by saying we have to hear him, be taught by him, because the truth is in Jesus. What gives us the viewpoint that allows us to be honest, to not make excuses for ourselves, to not justify ourselves, to not try to impress others with why we do what we do and so forth? How can we do that? Where does the power and the viewpoint come from? It comes from our recognition of the truth.

We relax in the fact that we know our Heavenly Father is pleased, even if people are not. We have heard the truth. We trust in the truth.

We believe that if God is pleased, that's enough. And the desire to impress people, the desire to be approved by people, the desire to meet some false standard of righteousness diminishes when we decide that God's evaluation and God's standard is more important. And so this new man is created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.

That true righteousness and holiness is the righteousness and holiness that is a part of God's evaluation, not people's. And so we don't try to impress people. We don't deceive them and put on a happy face when we're really sad.

We don't put on a hospitality that is not heartfelt. We don't engage in something with a false enthusiasm or with a false... This is so much a part of our human nature, to act in ways that we don't really feel, to smile and be kind to someone and then turn around once they've left and talk about them to others and point out their flaws and so forth. This happens often, even in Christian environments where it should not.

We don't have the time to do that, to speak the truth, and if we don't have something good to say, not say anything, or find something good to say, to concentrate on those things that are good and noble and pure and lovely and of good report. And this gets back to probably the fundamental issue in our study this morning. If you look at all of the passages that we have seen about putting on Christ, putting on the armor of light, and that contrast between light and darkness, between the night and the day, think about this, Paul makes that contrast of the old and the new, the dark and the light, and he says, live as though you're in the day.

Now there isn't anything intrinsically wrong with darkness, is there? It's not the night that is evil, is it? It's what people do in the night that is evil. It isn't living in the world that makes us sinful, it's what we do in the world that allows us to be sinful. And the idea is that if you choose the darkness, if you choose to be in the darkness, you're creating an opportunity to engage in the works associated with darkness.

If we choose to live in the light, we are choosing to have opportunities to do the works of light. And this may seem like an obscure point, I'm sure it's obscure the way I've just said it, but if you think about this, we a lot of times make choices because we say, well, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with this. There's nothing wrong, you can use a real extreme example, someone who maybe has a problem with drugs or has a problem with alcohol, and they say, well, I'll go to this nightclub or I'll go to this environment, there's nothing wrong with that, I'll just go there and not participate in the works associated with it.

I can go and sit at the bar, I just won't drink, or I can go associate with these people, I just won't participate in their bad habits or these substances that they abuse. And so we say, well, it's okay to be in the environment as long as I don't participate. And what Paul is saying is, we need to switch environments.

Why would anybody want to be in that environment unless there isn't that hidden desire to partake of its associated activities? But we fool ourselves. People do this when they wind up having affairs and wind up being unfaithful to their marriage vows. They say, well, there's nothing, I'm going to go, I'm going to work late and I'll have this person, I enjoy their company, there's nothing wrong with that, this work needs to be done, and our association here is innocent, there's nothing wrong with that.

But what is the motivation? We put ourselves in the darkness. We put ourselves in an environment where those opportunities exist. This isn't going to be a chance, this man and this secretary working late, this isn't a chance to speak the truth to one another in love, this isn't a chance to build up and edify one another in Christian things.

And yet we say, well, there's nothing wrong with this. And we ignore the fact that it is the environment that creates the opportunities. And we are to switch environments.

To leave the darkness and move into the light is to exist in a place where our opportunities are godly, our opportunities are spiritual. And we can't say, well, there's nothing wrong with this. So, you know, it's such a strange thing.

It has come up in some recent things that some of us have encountered where you look at someone who has made the choice to live in an environment and then they wonder why the results are so bad. You say, you know, I just feel more at home in this environment, I'm comfortable around these people. And then you wonder why these people stab you in the back and these people do you wrong and these people hurt you and inflict pain.

And you say, well, I don't understand why this is happening to me. Well, what choice of people did you make? What choice of environment did you make? That's what's associated with that environment. And so God goes right to the heart of this in his communication to us.

And he says you have to decide, are you going to live in the light and cultivate opportunities for those things or are you going to live in the darkness? Our doctrine of separation, you know, we talk about there's a time when believers have to put distance between one another. How do we know when to do that? When is it a time to bear with the weaker brother and be a source of comfort and encouragement to get in the right way? If we disassociated every time we saw something wrong, we'd all be islands unto ourselves. But when is it time to separate? Well, when does that association constitute an environment of darkness instead of an environment of light? When is it that that association creates opportunities for sin instead of opportunities for good? That's how we know when it's time to separate.

If our association with a believer consistently opens up opportunities for jealousy or bitterness or strife or vindictiveness or anger and a lot of vile and sinful things to well up in their soul and in our soul, that's an environment of darkness and that's time to step out of the darkness and into the light. That's what separation does. When we associate with someone, and yes there are problems and yes there are difficulties and there may be sins here and there, but the association is an environment of light and it's an opportunity for edification, to build up, to concentrate together on things that are good and lovely and noble and of value.

That's an environment of light and that's an association that should continue. We're going to see in Romans chapter 14, bear with the weaker brother who doesn't understand some things about the Word of God, but not so that you can argue, not so that you can have strife. There ought to be an environment of light in which we dwell and into which we welcome fellow believers, but we don't let them bring the darkness into the light.

We don't go off with them into the darkness. We choose an environment and that's where our opportunities are. That's what it means to put on the armor of light, to put on Christ.

It's not so much to choose the works, well I'm now going to choose ministry and I'm going to

choose benefit and I'm going to choose, it means I am going to exist in a place where my opportunities are in God's plan, where I can bear spiritual fruit. That's where I'm going to spend my time. If I have the choice in a three hour block of time to watch a TV movie that's full of violence and half clothed people and so forth, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with watching television, but what kind of an environment is that? What opportunities is that going to open up in my soul? Or do I have the opportunity to sit and meditate on some of the things that I've learned, see how much I can recall of the last Bible study I went to or the last verse of Scripture that I read.

What kind of opportunities does that open up in my soul? That's an environment of light. We're moving out of the darkness and living as though we're in the day. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with the darkness, it's the opportunities in the darkness that we fall for.

And we fool ourselves when we say, well it's okay to be in the darkness because inevitably if you choose the darkness you're going to end up in its associated activities. So here in Ephesians chapter 4, when he says, put off concerning your former conduct the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, it doesn't say the sinful actions, it's the desires of the old man. When we exist in that realm and we don't move away from the desires, those desires, what does the Scripture say in the old King James, when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.

And when you look at the different kinds of death in Scripture, that is operational death. That is death in the sense of a dead branch, fruitless, unproductive, no value, no production for the one who cultivated it. And when desire conceives, if we live in the realm of those desires, if we don't separate from that area of darkness, that desire is going to conceive.

We all know how conception takes place. It is association with something, and you conceive, a new thing springs out of it. When lust is conceived it brings forth sin.

And if you dwell in the realm of darkness, lust is going to conceive and sin is going to be brought forth, and that's going to result in death, fruitlessness. So we put that off and be renewed, in verse 23, in the spirit of our minds. This battle is unseen, it's on the inside.

We don't just switch actions, we don't switch habits. We have to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Then we can put away deception and the desire to deceive.

Why would we want to put up a false front? Why would we want to deceive fellow believers and say something that's really not so? Because there's something wrong on the inside. We can't relax and have a natural love and a natural hospitality and a natural affection and a natural patience and a natural long-suffering. If that's our nature, we don't have to be deceptive.

It's when it's not really our nature, but we know it should be, that we deceive. So when we're

renewed in the spirit of our minds, we can put away lying and speak truth with our neighbor, recognizing that we're members of one another. We can be angry without sinning.

We can recognize sin in one another and be unhappy and upset about that sin without sinning against our brother, recognizing that this is an occasion for patience, it's an occasion for forbearance, it's an occasion for recognizing that God puts up with us every day, and through His love and through His love in us, we can put up with one another. And he says, nor give place to the devil. What does it mean to give place to the devil? If you give him a place, it means he's there ready to seize an opportunity.

We get out of that environment of darkness. We move out of the night and into the day. And therefore, look at chapter 5, verse 1, be imitators of God as dear children.

This is another synonym for putting on the armor of light, putting on Christ, putting off the old and putting on the new, to be an imitator of God. We can't imitate God. In what way can we imitate God? Can we imitate Him in His omniscience or His omnipotence or His omnipresence, His immutability, His unchangeableness, His absolute presence everywhere in the universe, His absolute knowledge of everything? We can't be an imitator of God in those ways, can we? But the fullness of God is expressed in the person of Jesus Christ, and we can be imitators of Christ.

And He has shown us how to be an imitator of God. And when we do that, look at verse 2, we will walk in love as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God. Very seldom are we called to die for one another.

We're far more often called to be patient with one another, to be forgiving of one another. And that's a whole lot easier than dying for one another, isn't it? But the attitude, the mind that was in Christ Jesus, He says, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. He was looking at our interests ahead of His own.

And that's the mind that we ought to have toward one another. But to do that, we have to live in the light. We have to be transformed in the inner man.

And just a quick reminder, look at verse 5 of chapter 5 of Ephesians, this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, covetous man who is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. It's another reminder that inheriting in the kingdom is not a synonym for salvation. Many of us as believers are fornicators, unclean persons, covetous.

And many of us will not have an inheritance in the kingdom. It doesn't mean we've lost our salvation. It means we've lost our opportunity to reflect the glory of God in that way in the eternal future.

That we, by not choosing to live in the light, have lost that privilege of approval. That inheritance is a sign and a symbol of God's approval. And that's really what we live for in this age.

Look at Colossians chapter 3. We've been told to put on Christ, to put on the armor of light, to be conformed to His image, to put on the new nature in Ephesians 4.24. Look at Colossians chapter 3, verse 5. He says in verse 4, when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore, in verse 5, put to death your members which are on the earth, fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry. Sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it? Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience.

We saw recently that a good translation of this is the wrath of God is coming on the disobedient sons. This is what you yourselves once walked in when you lived in them. But now, you yourselves are to put off all of these, put off the old man, put off the works of darkness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with his deeds. Paul always says that putting off of the old man has to come first. And you have put on the new man in verse 10.

How is he put on? How is he renewed? How is our man made new? Renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, put on kindness, put on humility, put on meekness, put on long-suffering, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.

If anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection, the bond of completion. We've seen that idea of completion and perfection a lot here recently, haven't we? When we are able to love from the heart, that's the bond, that's the seal that tells us that God has perfected us.

It doesn't mean we're sinless, but it means that we're prepared now. We are thoroughly furnished unto all good works because God has been able to create that love in our souls. And we need to focus on the development of that inner growth, that inner transformation, so that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 8. Once again, in chapter 5, Paul says in chapter 5 verse 2, you know perfectly that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night, and he talks about the night, and people are saying peace and safety and destruction comes upon them. Verse 4, you brethren are not in darkness so that this day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day.

We are not of the night nor of the darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith. Notice that putting on, this is the armor of light. This is putting on Christ, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is our calling, this is our designation. God has not designated believers in this age for wrath.

It doesn't mean that we won't experience it, and most of us as believers unfortunately will experience the displeasure of God. We do now, and we will at the judgment seat, because there is a relative minority of us that wake up, and that recognize what our calling and what our opportunities are for transformation in the inner man. Let us put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

How do we put on the breastplate of faith? Breastplate is a defensive weapon, isn't it? It's what keeps us from being destroyed, keeps us from being neutralized. Faith is trusting what God says, trusting that the view of life that God presents to us in the scripture is accurate, that if we seek first the kingdom of God, He will supply our needs, that if we have His approval we don't have to worry about what people think. That's faith.

So to put on the breastplate of faith means we're going to decide to do that, and when an issue comes up where the opinion of people is involved or the perception of people is involved, we say, I have not so learned Christ. What's important is whether my Heavenly Father is pleased, and if people misunderstand, that's unfortunate, but that's not as important to me as God's approval, and I'm not going to change the way I act because of what people think. I'm not going to compromise my obedience and my desire to please God to somehow keep people happy or vindicate myself in the eyes of people or to cater to my insecurities or to cater to my desire to be approved.

I'm going to set that aside. I'm going to trust that God has these things in His hands, and if He wants people to understand why I'm doing what I'm doing, He'll handle that. So we put on the breastplate of faith.

We put on the breastplate of love. We examine how we think and what we do, and we say, does this really reflect love? If I'm kind to this person when I'm talking to them, is it really a loving thing to point out their faults when I'm talking to someone else, to bring up this juicy tidbit about someone in my conversation? Is that love, or is that a desire to be intriguing to the person I'm talking to? We all are drawn in the area of gossip to be the one to reveal something juicy and to startle someone with an unexpected piece of information about someone, to dwell on someone's faults instead of on their strengths, to think about things that are not helpful and not edifying instead of those things that build up and those things that reflect love. It's not just an academic, spiritualized concept to say, oh, go forth and put on the breastplate of faith and put on the breastplate of love.

This is something that we can implement. It's something we can do, and if we think about it, we know how to do that. We can think about what we're thinking about.

Am I dwelling on this person's faults, or am I dwelling on their strengths? Am I dwelling on things that build up, or am I dwelling on things that tear down? That's a choice that we can make. And when we choose the light and when we choose the day, our opportunities are going to be opportunities for every good work instead of those things that displease God, those things that are a part of the darkness and a part of the night. We choose the environment, and by choosing the environment, that presents us with an array of opportunities.

And we sometimes think, well, my choice is at the point of whether or not I do something or whether or not I think something. Our choice backs up to the point where we pick our environment, we pick what we're going to prioritize and what we're going to think about, what we're going to pursue. That determines the choices that open themselves up to us.

And it's a sad thing to have chosen the darkness and then look around and say, you know, I just don't seem to have any opportunities. I don't seem to have... people seem to constantly be wounding me and backstabbing me and disappointing me, and I don't understand it. Well, we chose that environment.

If we back up and choose the light and choose fellow believers who are walking in the light, our fellowship is edifying and building up, and our opportunities to reflect the light and to be productive in God's plan grow at that point. For our last passage this morning, take a look at 1 Peter 2, verse 21. I love to go to Peter's epistles.

We know so much about him and his life during the time that Christ was on the earth. And when Peter says something, you have a lot of context, a lot of personal context. You know when he says these things, he's saying them from the heart.

1 Peter 2, verse 21, he's been talking about being faithful under pressure, being faithful in suffering. He says, To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. This is putting on Christ, to be an imitator of Christ, to be an imitator of God, to walk in his steps.

Look at verse 22. Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth. What an odd thing to point out about the Lord that he didn't deceive when he spoke.

But you remember the passages we've looked at this morning, where Paul constantly says, don't lie to one another, speak the truth to one another? To speak the truth, you have to be honest, and if you're being honest, you're reflecting what's in your heart. Well, hopefully our heart has already been rehabilitated, so when we speak the truth, it is a good and edifying thing. Christ committed no sin, he didn't deceive.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he committed himself to the Father, to him who judges righteously. He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, so that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed.

So this is our opportunity, this is our calling in this age and in our lifetime to choose the light, to put on Christ, to put on the armor of light, to put on the full armor of God, and there's a practical day-by-day way of doing that. It is to choose the environment of soul that gives us the opportunities to please God and to bear the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of righteousness. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the wonderful opportunities that you give us in this age, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to be freed from the pull of our fallen nature, to be freed from the entangling sin and the entangling temptations that surround us in this life, both internal and external. Because we have died with Christ to sin, we live and have the opportunity to bear the fruits of righteousness. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and perception in these things, that the truth that we've studied this morning will be an active part of our thinking, that the Holy Spirit will use it as his sharp sword to expose the thoughts and intents, the motives and the priorities in our souls, and that as a result we will see clearly the light of the opportunity that we have to dwell in that environment and to seize and exploit the opportunities that that environment gives us, and that we will leave behind the environment of darkness and its opportunities and its pull on our souls.

As a result, we know that we will be branches abiding in the vine, that we will bear fruit that is pleasing in your sight, that we will have the approval that is a part of our calling, that you will be pleased, that you will find us worthy and faithful servants. We know that these things come through your power operative in our souls, and we pray that your Word and your Spirit will have their perfect work in us, and that we will both desire and perform your good pleasure. We thank you for our opportunities.

We thank you for our Savior, Jesus Christ, and we pray all these things in his name. Amen.