

Put Off The Old Man – Part 1

Ephesians 4:17-24

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Last week, as we spoke about the “perfect man”, we said that it is often steadfastly contended by many that “no one is perfect and neither can they be while they remain in flesh. It is only as we leave the mortal flesh of this life and enter into heaven that we will finally become truly perfect”. And that is true!

But we also asked the question that “Though such perfection is not wholly possible while in this life, what about verse 13? What are we supposed to do with these words?

13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
(Ephesians 4:13)

Here in today’s text, and also perhaps as we study on through more of these following verses, we will begin to at least capture a glimpse of how God intends for us to actually fulfill this command, to become . . . a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

As we begin our study, may we lay down one basic rule of understanding that underlies all such efforts and hopes and desires, and that is that though we be saved and sanctified, set apart for the purposes and plans of God, we can do nothing of righteousness without the express involvement of God’s Holy Spirit within us. There are many proofs of that truth in these scriptures. One of the clearest is in 1 Corinthians 2.

14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

And God really does want you and me, His beloved sons and daughters, to move on into a deeper relationship with Him. And there is much that we can and that we must do! We must not think that the changes and the transformation into His image will take place on its own, without our very serious participation within the transition.

The whole consideration seems to be a kind of “paradox”, an “oxymoron”. “We can’t, but we must”! It is impossible, but possible! No wonder the unbelieving world thinks Christianity is foolishness. Those words in 1 Corinthians 1 . . .

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

And the “power” spoken about here is a very, very special kind of power, a power that will be the source and the well-spring of all that will take place as we move on forward, to become this “perfect man” that God is calling us to be.

13 . . . to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

And now here in today’s passage, we are being given some of the steps in our part of God’s simple, but ever-so difficult plan of reaching toward that “perfection”. Here we read again . . .

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:17-24)

It is the sincere hope and desire of every new believer that from the first moment we are saved we be completely and totally cleansed from all our sins. And that is a sweet and wonderful and powerful truth. And we can joyously sing, “Washed in the Blood” and “Whiter than Snow”.

But unfortunately, though it be true that in that one glorious moment God really did wash us completely clean and free from all our sins, the battle for our soul was not and is not ever really over; simply because there yet remains a next moment, and a next and a next.

If we were able to be taken immediately into heaven, all things would remain perfect . . . but that seldom happens. The reality is, we remain here, in our mortal flesh, and in amongst all of the same corruption and struggles that were here before we were saved. That is the essence of Jesus' "Parable of the Weeds".

And our old enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil still remain. And ever-present at their side is that great predator of our soul, "sin", and it remains ever vigilant, ever stalking, ever preying upon our souls, seeking to reclaim the ground that was lost in our salvation.

Folks, though there be many enemies around us who seek to steal, to kill and to destroy us, ultimately it is "sin" that becomes our greatest adversary. Sin is so very clever, able to hide its real meaning and its presence and its impact from us. And because it is so clever, we leave openings unguarded and available to its incursion.

Sin is not the simple matter that our minds try to make it out to be. It has meanings and subtle facets built into its disposition that catch us off-guard. That is why it remains the favorite weapon of satan.

May I quickly remind us of two of those subtle facets of sin? We can find them spoken about in Psalm 32. There we read . . .

1 . . . Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. 2
Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit. (Psalm 32:1-2)

Here, we read the words translated to be "transgression", and "sin" and "iniquity", and "deceit". They all seem interchangeable, but they are not!

The words "transgression" and "sin" have to do with actual sinful conduct, offenses against God and against the people around us. The words "iniquity" and "deceit" have to do with the "nature" within us, out of which that conduct and those offenses flow, our "sin nature".

So then, yes, the moment that we are saved our slate is immediately wiped clean. All our sins past, present and future are forgiven. And on beyond that, the nature within us, our "sin nature" is "killed out" to the extent that it no longer has any control over us. We read those words clearly and plainly in Romans 6.

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

But even though our sin nature is no longer able to control us, it still does have access to our flesh, our soul, to tempt us to continue on with the same behavior that we lived in all the days before we were saved.

In that very first moment that the thief on the cross spoke those repenting words to Jesus, all his past sins were immediately wiped away. And because he quickly breathed his last, he had very little time for his old nature to rear its ugly head and tempt him to more sin. In him, we can see all of the words of that hymn, “Washed in the Blood of the Lamb” becoming completely effectual.

But again, unfortunately, it is not the same for you and me! We did not breathe our last the next moment after we were saved. We had, and still do have, future moments in which the remnants of our old sin nature can rear its ugly head and try to regain the life of sin it once had within us. And that will be a lifelong struggle for us.

And so then here, as we read that we are being called to be “a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13)

We understand that God is calling us to a lifelong commitment in this struggle. And He is assuring us that as we do commit ourselves to the battle that He is ever and always our source and our strength; and may I add, not just to hang-on and endure, live in a “survival-mode” all our lives, but rather to live victoriously, as “more than conquerors”.

Here in today’s passage, our old life in the flesh, before we were saved, is described as being the “old man”. In those former days, we lived lives in which we could do nothing really good or really righteous, even if we sincerely wanted to. We were completely and utterly controlled by our sinful flesh. Romans 8 . . .

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. (Romans 8:5-7)

These are indeed painful words for the person who thinks he can intellectually navigate his way through life and godliness. These words are simple. An unbelieving, unsaved soul can only do the things of the carnal flesh. It cannot do the things of the Spirit even if it wants too.

But not so you and me! You and I who have received Christ as our Savior have everything that we need for life and godliness. And because we have God’s Holy Spirit living within us, we have all the strength and the power that we need to do really righteous and Godly things, things that we would not otherwise be able to do.

And by all that we read both within these words and in so many, many other words in these scriptures, it truly will be a lifelong struggle against the forces of evil, that old nature, that old man that wants to reassume his old sinful works within us.

And our part in this struggle is so very, very important. Even though God's Holy Spirit is abiding within us, giving us His personal "gifts" and sharing His personal "fruits" within us, our part is needful and is intricately innerwoven into God's special plan for us, and we need to get on about it! Here in our text, we are told about some of our part.

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Here, we have the conditions that we are coming out from, described as being our "old man". The Apostle words it similarly in 2 Corinthians 5. There he says . . .

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Within these words is a simple fact. From that first moment that we received Christ as our Savior, we really did become a whole new person, a "new man" a "new woman". May I try to say these words as convincingly as I can to you and to me? Every word in these scriptures is as true as every other word. If therefore John 3:16 be true, so also must these words be true!

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

We are not that "old man" anymore! We are "new men and women" in Christ! We absolutely are! We have been set free from the bondage of our old sins and our old self, because "when the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed!" (John 8:36) And in today's text, God is simply exhorting us to treat these words as if they were the truth that they are. I am not that "old man", you and not that "old man" that we once were before we were saved. And we should no longer live as if we were, in those old ways, with those old habits and behaviors and conducts. We are each a whole new creation. Our old sinful self is really dead within us and the new life with God's Spirit is in control.

But with that being said, these words of our text are reminding us that there is still much to do. The "old man" within us still wants to do the same things that it used to do. And

our “old man” is powered and motivated by satan. We are told later on, in verse 27, to not “give place to the devil.”

Those words clearly imply that we do have a choice. We can “give place to the devil” or we can refuse to give place to the devil. We now have choices, choices that we did not have while in our old flesh, our “old man”, but now we do.

And here, we are told

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. (Ephesians 4:17-19)

As I read these words, I understand God to be saying, “It’s hard for you to look inside yourself and see the corruption that lives there. So then, look around you at the way the rest of the world is living and realize that that once was you, the way you lived and behaved. You once were just as corrupt to the core as they are. But now, beginning with that first moment of your salvation, you truly have become different, a “new creature”, a “new man”, and you will have to begin to deal with those old ways that continually want to rear their heads.

Folks, if our old self was filled with anger, we must allow God’s peace to calm it. If our old self was lewd and vulgar, we must put that away from us. If our old self loved strong drink, we must stay far from it, and on and on and on. With God’s Spirit abiding within us, we can now do all these things, and we must!

Unfortunately, I will need to pause here until next week, because there is so much, much more to be said about our “putting off of our old man, our old self”, and our time today is short.

I’ll close with this thought . . . we truly have been set free from the control of our sinful nature and its unrighteousness. And we have to do our part to put all that “old self” behind us, where it belongs and begin to live our new life in Christ. It is a far, far better life, a sweet loving relationship with our Lord. Verse 23,

23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God,