

# Put Off The Old Man – Part 2

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)

We left off in our study of these words last week by saying that, in our salvation, God truly does desire and expect much more from us than we at first realize, that so often, as we take those first steps of receiving Christ as our Savior, our thoughts and our concerns are far more focused on His saving us out of the wretched miseries of our circumstances than on the eternal righteousness that He has in mind for us. And yes, He does “pity” us in our circumstances and does desire to save us out of our miseries. He loves us and He is compassionate towards us. And He especially does not desire that any of us should perish in our sins.

But may we understand above all else, that God’s compassion is not so limited as our small minds might conceive. His desires and plans are far greater than simply saving a piteous group of people out of their wretched miseries. He wants to give us the grace-filled gift of eternal life, and as part of that gift, He wants to adopt us into His family as beloved sons and daughters.

And then even beyond that, His plans also include an intimate marriage relationship between us and His Only Begotten Son, the Lord Jesus, a marriage in which we become the Beloved Bride of Christ. And folks all of that is no small matter. For us to receive it, much is required, both of God and of you and me.

I don’t know how your imagination receives all of these thoughts and concepts, but my mind imagines all sorts of possibilities. In our salvation, you and I not only get to become, we already are family members in the most “Royal” of all of the families on the face of the earth, the “Royal Family” of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But, unfortunately, as I observe myself and most all the other members of God's special family, I do fear that most of us fail to fully grasp all that we have become in our salvation, all the new-found privileges and provisions that are ours in Christ.

In Him, we have been adopted into a family that is so far above anything we have been accustomed to that we don't even begin to step up to the real honor of our new estate.

Listen to these words in 1 Peter 2 . . .

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles (the unbelieving world) honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:9-12 (ESV))

While it is not at all an adequate comparison, my mind goes quickly to the portrayals that we see on television of the royal families of past centuries in countries like England. In those programs, the Lords and Ladies in those royal courts seemingly had few responsibilities other than to regale themselves in their fineries and busy themselves with social gatherings and feasts and other gala events.

And as we are able to see from reported history, those nobles were often not very noble in their conduct, the subtle corruptions of sin, when left unattended, crept into the noblest of intentions and had devastating effects.

But sin is always that way! As God tells us in the Book of James, it only takes a small "spark" of temptation, and desire will begin to ignite within the recesses of our imagination, and then suddenly, without much warning, a raging fire will begin to spread and engulf a person's life.

14 . . . each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

Though sin may often begin in a very small way, if left unattended, it can do untold damage within a person's life. And it is never content to remain only there, it also then reaches on out into a whole kingdom of people, especially within the kingdom and family of believers.

And yes, sin is also prevalent within the unbelieving people of “low estate”, with all the alcohol, drugs, immoral behavior, and on and on. But may I say that sin is far more egregious and shameful in those of us who have been brought into and adopted into the “high estate” of the family of God. We have so much, much more at stake, so much, much more that is ours in our salvation. And as these scriptures tell us, we really are without excuse for our behavior.

As the example of sin given to us here in the Book of James implies, sin is patience within us, willing to wait as temptation does its slow and arduous work within us, fomenting and stirring; and then when the time is really, really wrong for us, roiling its way up to the surface with full force.

And as we read in the words in our scripture text for today, we can see that the tempter knows exactly where to begin his temptations and his attempts at re-entry back into our souls.

The tempter remembers us well from those former days, before our salvation. And He remembers those things that then “struck our fancy” and the influences he once used. And he will simply employ those same exact tactics to reach into our souls to tempt us into falling. Those words in verse 22

22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, (Ephesians 4:22)

Let’s take a moment and remind ourselves of the condition from which we are coming! Before you and I received Christ as our Savior, sin and our sinful nature fully controlled our being, our mind, our heart, our soul, our flesh. The tentacles of sin reach down deep and spread throughout every part of our being, holding every part of us in bondage.

And unfortunately, that old nature, though its power has been completely “killed out” in our salvation, still does have access to our flesh. And it still remembers all the “good times” it had doing all those wrong things. And much like a drug addict wants to return to his drugs, or, as we read in Proverbs 26,

11. . . as a dog returns to his own vomit, So a fool repeats his folly.  
(Proverbs 26:11)

Sin is clever and as we are told in Genesis 4:7, it desires to have us, to control us. But here, God is telling us to “put off that “old man”, that “old self”.

And may I assure us again, as I have exhorted us so often in the past, we truly can now simply “say no” to sin and to its control over us. Sin no longer has any dominion over us. (Romans 6:14)

And, very importantly, you and I are not allowed to bring even one of our old habits and old ways into our relationship with Christ. His holiness cannot, and will not, tolerate any presence of sin to remain to corrupt the relationship we have with Him; because again, when left unattended, sin will surely grow and increase and corrupt everything within us. Jesus spoke about that in His example of how it takes only a small amount of leaven to leaven the whole lump.

And so, God tells us here to “put off”, as with a garment, the “old man”, the “old self”, the “old personality” with all its many imperfections. And thankfully, He does not leave us wondering where to start. He gives us some very specific places to begin our efforts. In verse 17, we read

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, (Ephesians 4:17)

Here, God mentions the “futility of their minds”, the seemingly endless stream of useless and worthless distracting involvements that people can busy themselves with. We need only to look around us to see what God is talking about now in our day, the additive fascinations with cell phones, and digital games, and clothing, and sports, and pickup trucks, and on and on, futility and worthlessness at its uttermost limits.

And in verse 18, we read,

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; (Ephesians 4:18)

The life of an unbeliever is one of total darkness. And because the things of the Spirit can only be discerned by the Holy Spirit within a person, an unbeliever languishes in ignorance and blindness and has no desire to learn of Christ.

And also . . . in verse 19, we read,

19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. (Ephesians 4:19)

Lewdness and uncleanness are a way of life to this world. Vile, filthy, profane sexual thoughts and activities fill the minds of untold millions every day. With pornographic pictures and literature as available as their cell phone, they seem simply to say, “why not”!

And here, God ends the verse with “greediness”. Money and the things money can buy are an incessant preoccupation in the mind of most everyone, re-emphasizing the words in 1 Timothy 6.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1Timothy 6:10)

This list of sinful behaviors certainly does not exhaust the number of sins that are available to the unbelieving world, but the list does give some specific examples of those behaviors that we who have given our lives to Christ in salvation are particularly susceptible to returning to.

So then, may we take these same verses and ask ourselves what we are to do with this instruction from the Lord? First, we are to turn our hearts and minds to God and ask “Lord, search me and make known to me all that I should know about my personal sinfulness, so that I can truly repent and truly “put off” the “old man” in me. Those words in Psalm 139,

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24  
And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.  
(Psalm 139:23-24 (KJV)

And then again, as we read verse 17 of today’s text and apply it to our own heart . . .

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, (Ephesians 4:17)

“Futility of the mind” is also an easy trap for you and me to fall back into. As believers, we are just as susceptible as an unbeliever to all the many useless and worthless distractions of life, keeping us from the “better things” of God. This seems to be an especially effective tool of the “evil one” to simply keep us distracted from doing our part in exercising our “Spiritual Gifts” within the Body of Christ.

And yes, even the most devout of believers have a cell phone and play some video games. So we must ask God to search our hearts and reveal to us if those activities are taking up too great an involvement in our lives.

And here in verse 18, we read,

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; (Ephesians 4:18)

Jesus said that we are to come to Him and learn of Him. And the one thing that a believer seems most to fail at is the reading and the learning of God’s truths. The thing that is most needful in our daily lives is a faithful devotion to the knowing of more and more of these scriptures. In Hebrews 4, we read,

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

As we read and learn and take the word of God into our hearts, the “light” of His word dispels all the darkness that resides within us.

And in verse 19, we read,

19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. (Ephesians 4:19)

I believe that it would be safe to say that this is one of the most prevalent forms of bondage that a believer must overcome! As we come out of our condition of unbelief into our salvation, clean and free from all bondage and entanglements with our former life of lewdness and immoral behavior, there seems immediately to be a fresh set of temptations awaiting us. A statistic that I have quoted to us often warns that even the most devout of believers are drawn to pornography. And such behavior is nothing short of Jesus’ definition of “adultery”.

And then finally in this list is “greediness”. And again, God’s words in 1 Timothy 6 are so very true for us as believers.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1Timothy 6:10)

All of these warnings are for you and me as believers. Here, God is sternly admonishing each of us that just as Joseph had to immediately flee from Potiphar’s wife, so to must we flee from all these forms of sin. They are old familiar and well-liked habits that we remember from our former days as unbelievers. And left to foment within us, they will rise up and bring us ruin.

We are to “put off” our “old man”, our “old self” as we would “put off” a garment, and become that “new creature” that Christ has made us to be in our salvation? And we can!

In our salvation, our “old man” has actually already been defeated. Our “old self” has been crucified with Christ and is now dead. And simply put, if God is confident enough to command you and me to “put off the old man”, then you and I must be confident enough to obey Him and get on about it.

May we close with these words from our text . . .

22 . . . 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)