

Put On The New Man – Part 5

Ephesians 4:24-32

24 . . . put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. 26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:24-32)

As we again press forward with our understanding of our role in our becoming the “new man” that God has called us to be in Christ, our attention cannot help but be drawn to the manner in which God has chosen to present the response that He expects from you and me. And this morning, I would like for us to take a deeper look into these words. As we begin, may I also offer a caution as we study the manner in which God presents these words, because in them, we will detect another of those areas of sincere difference in biblical doctrine that takes place between very earnest and dedicated Christian believers! Here, in these words, that difference is expressed in one single word, the word “let”.

So, as I read these words again for us, note the use of the word “let” as it is interposed all through these verses! Verse 24,

24 . . . put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. 26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:24-32)

The use of this word “let”, as with all of the other words of scripture, is very intentional on the part of God. And because of that it is significant to our understanding as we learn about this concept of “putting off the old man” and “putting on the new”; and as if to accentuate this word “let”, the Greek word that is being used here for “let” is translated exactly the same in all of the major translations, the KJV, ESV, NASV and NKJV.

Look with me at the context of this word “let”, and note first that the word “let” gives us the clear understanding that there is a choice that is able to be made in our handling of all these very serious matters; and further, that it is our responsibility to make the right choice.

And though it is unspoken in these words, the word “let” implies that you and I can also “let” something very different take place, our decision being wholly dependent upon our personal response to these matters.

One of the misconceptions that surrounds the word “let” involves the very common Christian doctrine of “let go and let God”, an expression that I very much identify with and agree with, but not to the limits that some understand the words to imply.

In my understanding of the concept, we are to give up on our always needing to have absolute control over our circumstances and we are to instead, let God have the opportunity and the leeway to exercise His “Will” in the circumstances of our lives, even and especially when our circumstances are uncertain and perhaps frightening. That is when, we are to “let go” of the reins, and “let God” take control.

Where the misconception seems most often to go wrong is in the understanding of when our own efforts are supposed to join with God’s Holy Spirit in the steps that we are to take. If we believe that we must take our hands completely off all the effort of “putting off” the “old man” and instead “let God” take care of all of that, then we miss out completely on the importance of these words we have been studying. In contrast, if we think that we must have full control over all our efforts, there also, we will go wrong, and often thwart His plans and his efforts.

There truly is a “balance” that is required, and that “balance” must always be honored and not exceeded in either direction. We must not, hold back and expect God to do all of the work within us, but so also, we must not “over-do” our part and run ahead of Him. As we are told in Philippians 2,

12 . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Note those words carefully! We are to “work out” this salvation that Christ has worked into our souls, but with the fully surrendered acceptance that it is God who works within us both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Here, it is clear that God’s Holy Spirit gives us both the “will” to do His Will, and the strength and the “unction” for the “doing” of it.

And please do understand that the guidance given by the Holy Spirit is very, very “up close” and intimate. And though it is very loving, it is also often very demanding, A few days ago, I saw a video presentation of a policeman training his German Shepherd dog to obey during a tactical practice exercise. In that practice session, the dog walked between the trainer’s legs, literally in “lock-step” with the trainer. The dog’s full attention was kept fixed on his trainer as they went about step by step of the exercise.

And that is the sense that God gives to us about His role, and our role, as we go about “working out our salvation”. Yes, God’s Spirit is loving and kind and gentle. But folks our sanctification is far too important and too holy and too righteous to be trusted to some “mediocre” and liberal form of training. Our eternity and the mission of grace that God has called you and me to be involved in requires our diligent submission to God’s loving training.

And it is without question a form of “lock-step” that we must maintain with God’s Holy Spirit as we go about our part in the efforts.

Another thought concerning this word “let” . . . the word implies that we must give God’s Holy Spirit permission to do His work within us. From these scriptures in our text today and from other scriptures, we know that we are fully able to “resist” and to “grieve” the power and the presence of God’s Spirit within us.

Listen to these words spoken by the disciple Stephen just before he was stoned for his commitment to Christ. He said to the church leaders,

51 "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. (Acts 7:51)

And in verse 30 of our text,

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30)

You and I surely can resist and grieve the Holy Spirit with the way we are, with the things we do, and with the responses we have to His efforts to sanctify our troubled souls.

And as we “grieve” Him, we also “quench” the special “Holy fire” that God has put within us. Those words from Luke 3,

16 John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3:16)

And in 1 Thessalonians 5 we read

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit.
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-19)

For reasons that we will never be able to understand this side of heaven, God has given you and me power over the works of His Holy Spirit. I wish that that were not so, but it is. We can resist Him, we can grieve Him and we can quench His “Holy Fire” within us. And it all seems to be wrapped up in this word “let”. Every reading of these words brings me back to the same understanding, and that is that yes, God is in us and is willing to do His precious sanctifying work. But you and I must “let” Him do it or else His Spirit will be “grieved” and “quenched” by our resistance, and our growth will be severely stunted.

Simply put, our “free will” seems to be able, in these specific instances, to “undermine” the work of God’s Holy Spirit. What an awful thought that is to me . . . that I am able resist and grieve and quench the power and the work of God’s loving Spirit.

But thankfully, this thought brings me to a concept that I have often puzzled over for the past year or so, a concept that is preached by one of my favorite preachers, David Jett, of Crossgates Baptist Church in Jackson.

The concept, as expressed by Rev. Jett, is that in some way or another, you and I are able to “bind up” God’s Spirit within us and inhibit His power to do his work. And that, as part of God’s sanctification process, you and I must “release” His power to do His work.

Again, this concept has been a puzzle to me, until perhaps now . . . with these words, and especially with this word “let”.

As we have just read from the scriptures, we are clearly able to “resist”, to “grieve”, and to “quench” God’s Spirit and His sanctifying work within us. And the concept of “releasing” His Spirit to do that work seems to fit exactly with this work “let”. In other words, if God is ever going to be able to work within us to do according to His good pleasure, and to empower us to do these particular things mentioned here in our text, then we will first need to do our part and “let” Him.

Our part is to free Him up to do His work, in His way, to “release” Him from whatever hindrances we have put in His path. Most often for me, that hindrance is my lack of trust in the way and in the timetable that He uses as He goes about doing His work. And that would be especially so as we consider steps such as these. If we will “release” his power to work in us, we will be able to Verse 25 . . .

25 . . . "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. (Ephesians 4:25)

And we can, verse 26 . . .

26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26-27)

And we can, verse 28 . . .

28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. (Ephesians 4:28)

And we can, verse 29 . . .

29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:29)

And we can, verse 31 . . .

31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

May I ask you . . . is this not as simple as it seems to be? If it is, why have I been so puzzled about this concept of “releasing” the power and the presence of God’s Spirit in me to do His work?

I do believe now that it is every bit this simple. Through my reluctance, through my timid-ness, through my lack of faith, I have inhibited the power and the presence and the works of God's Holy Spirit in me, and have kept Him from doing wonderful and mysterious things in my life. How foolish I am!

Now, may I confess, I am still confused about how to do this "releasing" of God's Spirit, but I really do believe that this concept is really true. And I intend to ask God to make it real in my heart and mind and spirit.

. . . Before we close, may we give one more consideration about these words! It is a kind of trap that we can fall into as we deal with the sins that try to reach back into our lives and take back their old ground that they used to occupy in the days of our unbelief. The consideration is that we must not view these instructions from God as being a list of dos and don'ts. It helps very little for us to simply abstain from wrong behavior. Yes, our abstaining is far better than our going ahead and doing wrong things, but simple abstaining does not accomplish or fulfill God's will for our lives. By far, the "best" response for us to have, as we have been saying today, is for us to humbly surrender ourselves into the hands of God's Holy Spirit in all of these matters.

As one of my favorite writers, Oswald Chambers, tells us, "Our real and present battle is against the ideas and philosophies and common sense that fill our hearts and minds each day, all those things that urge us on to make and to have natural responses to the struggles that entangle us."

Folks, our "natural common" sense is seldom, if ever, truly successful; because all of the things that God is telling us here to "let go of" are "Spiritual" matters and not "natural" matters. And the only effectual remedy that will remove them from us is the work of God's Holy Spirit.

And you and I must do exactly as God is commanding us to do. Instead of resisting and grieving and quenching God's Spirit within us, we must immediately "release" His Spirit to do His blessed work. And we must!

So then, may you and I be especially diligent to,

12 . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

And may we "release" the power and the presence of God's Holy Spirit within us so that He can do His work in His way! Praise be to God for His undeserved favor.