

Put On The New Man – Part 3

Ephesians 4:24-28

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. (Ephesians 4:24-28)

This week, we continue with God's instructions to us about how we are to "put on" the "new man" we have become, now that we have received Christ as our Savior. Recall the words in Ezekiel 36 that we have studied about so often,

25 . . . I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

In cleansing us from all our sins and in putting a new heart and a new spirit within us, God has prepared us to be able to be all that He planned for His beloved children when He first created us back there in the Garden of Eden.

And as we read in these words, in putting His Spirit back into us, God has fully restored us to the blessed condition that we were created to enjoy. Now in Christ, we are a whole "new creature", the old has passed away, and everything has become "new". And With the power and the presence of His Holy Spirit abiding within us we have everything we need for daily life and godliness. 2 Peter 1,

3 . . . His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Now that you and I have all of this provision within us, His cleansing, a new heart, a new spirit, His Holy Spirit abiding within our spirit, along with all the "precious promises" spoken about here, we are left without excuse. We truly do have everything we need for life and godliness.

The only thing remaining for you and me to do is simply to “get on about it”, to do as we are being told here to “begin putting on the new man”. And we must, else as we learned from Jesus’ word describing the man who had been cleansed from his sin and his demons, but did nothing further, those old demons will gladly return to fill the empty void left behind; and we will be ever-so much worse than we were before.

And that is our instruction in these words, our “unction” from God’s Holy Spirit, to begin being and doing the things of our “new nature”, and to keep on being and doing them until our old nature, our old habits, our old conduct and behavior has changed into the “nature and righteousness of Christ”.

Turn with me again to the words of our text . . . when we began our study of these words two week ago, we saw in verse 26 where God was telling us that we must immediately put away our “predisposition”, our “bent” towards lying. And we said that curiously, God ranks our telling of lies right up at the top of the most loathsome of sins that we involve ourselves in. And we saw in Revelation 21 the eventual end of those who continue with their lying ways. There we read

8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

God ranks lying right in with the very “worst of the worst” sins that we can involve ourselves in and there will surely be the “worst of the worst” punishments coming to those who refuse to “put off” their old lying ways.

And then last week, from verses 26 and 27, we saw how God is warning us to turn away from the sin of “anger”, that there is a “predisposition” within each of us, some more than others, but within us all, a “predisposition” that keeps anger at the forefront of our responses to life. And regardless of whether we hold that anger inside and have a “seething”, “broiling” kind of anger, or we burst out into rages, it is all wrong and all sinful and we must “put it off”, “put it far away” from this “new creature” that we have become in Christ.

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 again, we saw here in verse 27 that satan and his demons are waiting eagerly for any opportunity that we allow to develop. These words give us a stern warning to not “give place to the devil”. He will surely, in an instant, at our weakest moment, step in and retake some of the old ground he once controlled.

And now, here today, we find another of those old ways, old habits that God tells us that we must “put off”. 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)

These words have within them a dramatic “reversal” of both our value systems and our behavior, to go from a thief to a provider, from a taker to a giver. Folks, this is surely one of those changes within a person that can take place in no other way than by way of a whole new birth, a whole new character, a whole new disposition.

Thievery can, under certain conditions, be thought to be reasonably necessary, to feed your family, or some other such circumstance. But folks, we must understand, stealing is never really right and is never approved of by God. Why would that be so, especially if a person seems to have no other options available to them? It is because God, our faithful provider is not out yonder somewhere, at a distance, not knowing what is taking place. But He is always right here within us and among us and around us. He is our ever-present loving Father, and He knows our every circumstance and need. And He has in His hands everything that we can possibly need, whether it be food or clothing or money or healthcare or anything else.

But unfortunately, in times of difficulty, when we look around us at the “winds and the waves” of daily life circumstances, we get anxious. And as Peter did when he walked on the water or all the disciples did when they were being tossed about by the storms, we panic; and we quickly resort to wrong choices, wrong behaviors, wrong answers to our dilemmas, and stealing is one of those immediately available options. We shop-lift some food or clothing, or steal an unattended purse out of shopping cart, or write a check from an empty bank account.

And unfortunately, just as with telling lies, satan and his demons are very involved in this sort of circumstance also. I have no doubt that he provides all those wrong answers and wrong choices into our thoughts. We know he can do that because here in these scriptures we see that he put thoughts and words into Peter’s mind and mouth. And he put thoughts and words into Job’s wife’s mind and mouth. And he will do the same for any anxious person as they look at their circumstances and are unable to think of any right and honest path to pursue.

And that is when the stealing of that unattended purse in that shopping cart or the shoplifting of those groceries become acceptable alternatives. Satan knows our needs

and he knows our weaknesses. And he is ever-so available with his wrong answers to our dilemmas.

A circumstance in my own life comes to mind, one that I shared with you on another occasions, but I will share it again.

I was 21 years old and a single father with very little money. But I did have a job working in a bank, a job that promised to be a good one, if I worked hard and proved myself. Immediately upon beginning my employment there, I was tested in this matter of honesty. Whether by design by the security officials of the bank, or by ordinary happenstance, I found myself staring at a twenty dollar bill in a place where it did not belong, and fully available for me to steal. I was not a Christian in those days, so I cannot claim the blessing of God's presence as I now can. But knowing that God is involved in all the circumstances of life, I am confident that He guided my response. My thoughts quickly were taken to the facts in front of me. If I were to ever hope to be a successful banker, I would need to be able to deal with temptations such as this one, and certainly even greater, so I immediately returned the twenty dollar bill to the place it belonged, and all was well.

Again, I am confident that, even in my unsaved condition, it was God's hand that preserved my character in that moment of testing.

I recognize that my test, when compared to other people's testing, was a gentle one. My daughter and I were not starving and I did have a good job. But as we said a moment ago that is not the circumstance of many other people. Many others have much more difficult circumstances and greater temptations than mine, and they end up making wrong choices, stealing, and robbing and scheming and scamming, and all the many other forms of thievery. And unfortunately, it only takes a few times of giving in to those ways of meeting needs and wrong choices become daily habits. And very often, the more gentle forms of stealing follow on to become very serious forms and behaviors.

As I look around this sanctuary today, I believe that I can safely say that most all of you have reasonable provisions for your daily life, and are not by your circumstances being pushed into the position of becoming a thief. But folks, sometimes, even when we are doing reasonably well, we still find ourselves tempted to make those wrong choices. Satan is still always at work; and just as with the telling of lies, if the opportunity to steal avails itself to us, we sometimes "slide" right into satan's trap. A cashier hands us back too much change, the waitress forgets to charge us for one of the foods we ate, we cheat on our income taxes by not declaring our "side" income, and on and on. It is

curious just how often and how easily we can be tempted into this special kind of sin, the sin of stealing.

The real problem seems to be that we want to face the circumstances and conditions of daily life from a human perspective, as if there is no God in heaven and as if there is no other option and no other hope available to us. And living life in that manner will surely bring us whatever our behavior dictates, sometimes temporary success in our deceitful and illegal activities, but just as often, failure and punishment. And that can be seen in all the many failures in life, from broken relationships to jail time.

When you have time, read about that in Psalm 37, how evil men succeed for a season, but their eventual end is sure and always failure.

Fortunately, there is a God who really does love us and really does want better things for us. And He is willing to provide those “better things” if we are willing to trust in Him and if we are willing to take the difficult steps that He has placed before us. As with these words,

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)

Sometimes, when we have stolen something we can go back and repay the ones we have stolen from. But other times the circumstances are such that we can't do that, and there is no real way to “undo” the stealing that we have done. And God know that we can't! And so, in these words, He gives us an alternative way of “making up” for our misdeeds, first by “ceasing to steal” anymore, and then by getting a job and working and earning money to give to others who are in need. This is much like the steps of repentance that were required within the “laws of God”, as Zacchaeus promised to do, to pay back four-fold the tax money he had stolen from the people.

And note one other benefit in these words.

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)

By giving to those who have need, perhaps your gift might keep them from falling into a lifestyle of stealing.

The real concern of God in this matter of stealing is that we are failing to believe that He really is God, and that He really does love His children, and that He really will meet

every need that we will ever have; and further, that we must never distrust Him so much that we would resort to stealing to meet our needs. He tells us in very plain words, exactly what we should do. He says to us . . .

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:25-33)

Dear friends, God cannot get any plainer or any easier to understand. And we are without excuse. He tells us clearly that if we will pursue after Him and His kingdom and His righteousness, then He is trustworthy to provide for all of our needs. And that is exactly what we should do every moment of every day.

And He gives us simple steps to begin taking as we pursue Him, like this one that we have before us today. Listen, as we close . . .

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)