

Put on the New Man Ephesians 4:17-24

¹⁷ So I tell you this and testify to it in the Lord: Do not walk any longer as the Gentiles walk, in their futile way of thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their hearts. ¹⁹ Because they have no sense of shame, they have given themselves over to sensuality, with an ever-increasing desire to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in that way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard of him and were taught in him (since the truth is in Jesus). ²² As far as your former way of life is concerned, you were taught to take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed continually in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness.

Paul did not write this letter to Christians in Ephesus to address any particular error or heresy that had arisen within the church. He wrote to broaden his readers' understanding of God's gracious, eternal plan for them and all people. He hoped to lead his readers to a deeper appreciation of God's high goals for his people. In the early chapters of this letter Paul has reminded the Ephesians that God has an eternal plan for them. Though they were once lost in sin, they are now saved by grace through faith. Thanks be to God!

Paul continues his letter by pointing out that all who know God's grace will demonstrate their knowledge by the way they live. In appreciation for the free gifts of forgiveness and eternal life, they will constantly seek to live a life of thanks to their merciful Savior. To live in any other way would show they no longer consider Jesus' saving work as a most important reality of their lives. And so Paul urges the Ephesians to put off their old way of living and to put on the new.

In the opening verses of chapter four Paul had been urging the Ephesian Christians to preserve the unity by living their faith and with correct teaching. That way they would grow up and become mature Christians not tossed about by wrong teaching. They're unity would help them maintain the truth that sets them free. Now Paul follows with strong warning to put on the new man. Paul writes: *So I tell you this and testify to it in the Lord: Do not walk any longer as the Gentiles walk, in their futile way of thinking. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their hearts.* Paul's tone is more stern. Not only does he speak, he testifies in the Lord as one whom the Lord has made his spokesman. He testifies by commanding his readers not to conduct themselves the way that Gentiles do. We know from this letter that many Gentiles made up the congregation in Ephesus. Both Jewish and Gentile believers were now part of one body. After they were converted their background no longer mattered. Now Gentiles were very different from what they once were. The character of unconverted Gentiles was controlled by the emptiness of their minds. They formerly could only cherish thoughts that led to no good purpose.

Their entire thinking process was darkened so they could not see clearly, nor desire what is right. They had been strangers to the life of God. God is life and the source of spiritual

life. When God gives it, there is a clear understanding of what is good and a desire to do what is right. Gentiles lack this life through their own fault. Their lack of the life of God is due to the callousness of their hearts. We develop calluses when we ignore skin sensitiveness and apply pressure until a hard skin forms. If you say I am calloused, it may not mean that my hands are tough. It may mean that you feel I am insensitive or unfeeling. Gentiles ignored their natural knowledge of God and the law written in their hearts so that their perverse thinking no longer bothered them.

Gentiles felt no pain about the thoughts that ran through their minds. Their calloused thinking also led to immoral living. Paul writes, *“Because they have no sense of shame, they have given themselves over to sensuality, with an ever-increasing desire to practice every kind of impurity.”* Gentiles surrendered themselves to unrestrained lifestyles that were dirty. We still use words like rotten, disgusting and dirty to describe such behavior. Gentiles surrendered themselves to sinful behavior and performed every kind of unclean act.

What a wretched picture Paul draws of the Gentile world. His readers knew he wasn't exaggerating. We know this is still a true picture of our world today. Natural man is that way. If our Lord had not intervened, we would still be that way. What Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians applies to us: *“And some of you were those types of people. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”* (6:11). In our baptism we were washed clean of all sin. We became children of God and heirs of eternal life. As baptized children of God we have new purpose in life. It's not to please our sinful selves. We exist to serve our Savior who came to serve us first. He lived a holy life so that we can appear holy before God wrapped in Christ's righteousness. He gave up his innocent life to die the death we deserved for our sin. Now we are forgiven of every wrong. His return to life on Easter proves that. Knowing what Christ has done for us and made us, why would anyone want to go back to a life of sin? But that just goes to show how resilient sinful flesh is. We drowned him in the waters of our baptism. But sadly, he keeps resurfacing. That's why Paul keeps writing and reminding the Ephesians to take off the old and put on their new self or new man.

Paul wanted Gentile Christians to see how very different they were from their former ways of immoral living. Paul reminds them, *“But you did not learn Christ in that way, if indeed you have heard of him and were taught in him (since the truth is in Jesus).”* Gentile Christians had not only learned about Christ. They learned Christ. By faith they experienced what Christ did for them, what he was doing for them, and what he expected of them. When we learn Jesus, we learn truth. And that truth is valid and stands for all time.

Having learned Christ and the truth that is in Christ, Paul reminds his readers to make a change. *As far as your former way of life is concerned, you were taught to take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires, and to be renewed continually in the spirit*

of your mind, and to put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness. The old self is the sinful nature with which we were born. It remains with us even after a believing nature, the new man, is created in us by the Holy Spirit. The old man's character is seen in the former life of sin. Christ taught us to put away the old man. The old man is being destroyed. Actually, the person giving in to his old man is being destroyed. Deceitful lusts stir up desires in the old man. He doesn't know the whole story. He thinks only of the fun or advantage he will gain. What he doesn't realize is what destruction awaits "*the one who sows for his own sinful flesh*" (Galatians 6:8). It's a destruction that follows upon sinning. It reaches its culmination in eternal doom. That's how the devil operated in Eden.

Believers have been taught to be made new in the attitude of their minds. Their thinking and attitude are to be different from that of the old man. This happens because they have been taught to put on the new man the way a person puts on an outfit. Believers have been made alive together with Christ. They are raised up with him into spiritual activity. Truth is in Jesus. The truth we learn from him produces righteousness and holiness.

Throughout this Scripture Paul speaks of how and why the old self can be put off by each and every Christian. The Christian puts off the old and puts on the new because God has brought us to the knowledge of the truth that is in Jesus. Through that truth a sinner is called to faith. God makes us new creatures who possess spiritual life and the spiritual strength we need to serve, honor, and thank our gracious God for his gift of new life.

We did mention earlier how we can take off the old put on the new. Return to the waters of your baptism. By the washing of rebirth in holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit has brought you new life. Martin Luther, in his small catechism reminds us to use our baptism when dealing with the old man in us. He writes: *Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.* So how do we return to a sacred act that most of us do not even remember. Who of us would even know we were baptized except for faithful parents and sponsors reminding us of that day. One thing we can do is use the word of God that was spoken over us when the minister splashed water on us. It's the same words we use to begin our worship: *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* Begin each day with those words. End the day with those words. Those words were first spoken to you at your baptism. They remind you that you belong to your heavenly Father and an eternal inheritance awaits you in heaven. So return to your baptism daily. Drown your sinful flesh there. Let the new self arise and live your whole life for your Lord. It's something worth repeating.

You'll wear your sinful flesh till the day you die. But remember you are a new creation. Like Gentile Christians in Ephesian no longer lived like Gentile pagans, so live like baptized children of God. Take off the old. Put on the new. Your life will be so blessed.