

Put Off Old Self... Be Made New!
Ephesians 4:17-24

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Dear friends in Christ, I must speak to you plainly - in fact, as your pastor, I must testify in the Lord. You must no longer live as those who are unbelievers, giving in to every temptation of their flesh. Unbelievers are deluded and blinded by their understanding of things in the world. They are in no way, shape, or form, connected to the life of God.

This is all true because they have been guided by the desires of their flesh. In fact, the desires of their flesh have so consumed them that they all believe that they can “have it their way.” They can have their understanding of God, their own understanding of morality, their very own code of ethics, their own understanding of what happens when someone dies, their understanding of when life begins, and what constitutes a good death. They justify that these things are true because they feel it is right in their hearts.

Know this! They have lost all truth. They are deluded and have given themselves over to satisfy the desires arise in their heart, and they grow in their desire for more of the same. Their hearts and feelings tell them what is right and acceptable, why shouldn't they do what they want.

You on the other hand, you didn't come to know Christ so that you might act in a similar manner. You know the truth that is Christ Jesus. You know what Christ says about such things. You know that you are to deny your fleshly desires that are in direct contradiction to the will and law of God. You are not to be corrupted by the deceitful desires of your heart. You are not to give in to the lusts of your flesh and your “feelings” of right and wrong.

Yeah, I know, it sounds a little harsh, but in case you did not catch it, what I just said, was simply my own paraphrase of a portion of your text from Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. Let me read to you what he wrote:

So I tell you this, testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness heart. They have become callous and have given themselves over to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (vv. 17-22)

This text is so very true. You and I are no longer to be constrained by the desires of our flesh, we are to have thrown off the old flesh. Some preachers appear to say just that, “if you have not stopped sinning, you are not a Christian.”

In fact, at first glance, this text appears to be saying exactly that. It appears that it is our task to live a holy and righteous life, and the next step is to begin to think that we will be justified before God by *how* we live our lives.

And yet, I must insist that you be Lutherans. Let Scripture interpret Scripture! In this case, let Paul's own words earlier in this letter to the Ephesians, inform us about his words to them in our text. In the second chapter, he wrote, *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* (Ephes. 2:8-9 KJV)

How can faith, a gift of God, save us by His grace if we're supposed to put off our old self and be made new? Either it is all gift or it is by our works. That, dear friends is exactly the conundrum.

Look at yourselves! I mean, seriously look at yourselves in light of God's Word! If we are honest, I have to admit, as do you, that we are sinners, through and through. We have not put away the sinful flesh. In fact, we wallow in our sinful desires, we relish them. To top it off, we try to excuse what we what have done and what we desire in our hearts, as if somehow excusing it makes it right.

But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

In other words, you have been taught to live according to the miracle of your Baptism. Your Baptism is nothing more than the putting off of the old self and being made new. This is part of the nuts and bolts of the faith, the most simple things which you have been taught from the Small Catechism:

The question was, *What does such baptizing with water indicate?* Answer: It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Is it possible that Luther wrote these words, having first heard them from St. Paul in today's Epistle? You were taught to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, and to be made new, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

This isn't your work, it is the work of God in you. You are made new, not from yourselves, but created to be like God – created by God in Christ Jesus.

Your Baptism is more than the connection you have with Jesus, more than the forgiveness that is now yours because of His death and resurrection. Your Baptism is your connection to God, that you might have true righteousness and holiness. This one Baptism joins us all together, in one body, and as you heard from today's Epistle, that body is "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Yes, our sins stare at us bleakly. Paul's text comes to us to make us aware of our sins, and our desire to fall into them, again and again. I want you to be well aware of your sins. I want you to be aware of your utter helplessness to save yourself.

Now, utterly despairing about your condition if left on your own, you are ready to hear the Gospel. The Gospel is more precious to you than anything else. St. Paul wants you to know, ***I want you to know***, that you are truly righteous, even though you may feel right now anything but righteous. You are righteous because Jesus is righteous. Through baptism, you are in Christ Jesus. Jesus has, in your Baptism, drowned your sins. He has utterly and completely destroyed them with His blood. Baptized into Christ, you have been submerged in His righteousness, which is now yours. You have been made new in Christ Jesus.

Even though you feel ashamed of the filth you see inside yourself, you are indeed holy and righteous. Stop looking at the filth that is rooted in "your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires," because Jesus crucified your old self when He suffered and died for your forgiveness. You have been made new. Look only at the priceless new self that Christ has earned for you and given to you in your Baptism.

Christ has put away your old self, He has washed away your sin. All your sin is forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In that forgiveness of sin, Christ has made you new, given you a new life. You have put on the new self, created on the cross to be like God. You live in true righteousness and holiness – you live in the forgiveness of your sins. As we heard two weeks ago in our Epistle, earlier in this chapter, "just as you were called to one hope when you were called-one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Earlier in this letter to Ephesus, God proclaims through Paul's pen: *In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.* (Ephesians 2:13-14, 16).

I must speak to you plainly – in fact, as your pastor, I must testify upon it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Put off your old self – repent of your sinfulness – hear the Word of Christ, know you are forgiven and redeemed.

Be made new, put on the new self; eat of the flesh of the Son of God, drink of His holy precious blood. Be made new again, and again. Receive those gifts which recreate you again in true righteousness and holiness. Amen.