4-7-19

Ephesians 4:22-24

Last week we looked at some of the aspects of the old man, the new man, and being renewed in the spirit of our minds. Recall that when we receive Christ Jesus as Saviour, our old man is crucified and at the same time we become a new creation in Christ; we are a new man. This is justification; it is a one-time occurrence that makes us right with God by the blood of Jesus. The renewing of the spirit of our minds is something that is done to us; this is the process of sanctification. Sanctification is a life-long process in which we are made more and more like Christ.

Let’s look into the part we play in each of these parts of the Christian life. First off, we need to make sure we give credit where credit is due; all credit is due to God by the work of Jesus and through the Holy Spirit. As Paul tells us, we have no room to boast. Our salvation is entirely of God. He made the way for us, He provided the means, He even provides the faith we need to say “yes” to the free gift of salvation.

Now we don’t get to just lounge around; we have work to do, in our own lives, in the church, and in the world. We see things that Paul tells us to do here in our reading and the Bible certainly teaches that we have work. The main thing to keep in mind when we talk about things we do, is to remember that the strength necessary to do them comes from the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the desire to do them comes from the Holy Spirit. Again, we find ourselves with nothing to boast about. And that is good; an important part of the Christian life is taking our eyes off ourselves and putting them on God; being aware that all we do is to be for His glory even when it benefits us.

We see here in our passage that Paul tells us to put off the old man and put on the new man. This is something we are to do. These are things that we are to work toward. This work is constant because even though we are justified once for all, we still live in this fallen world as fallen human-beings. We are still tempted by the evil that rules here. As we mentioned last week, although the old man is crucified, parts of that dead man are still clinging to us and we need to take them off.

Before our conversion to Christ, all of us lived in sin. It doesn’t matter what sin that was, it was something that had a strong hold on us and controlled our lives. I say “was”, because it’s not supposed to be there anymore. All of us have heard wonderful testimonies from people who accepted Jesus and immediately they were cleansed of whatever had them. Perhaps it was drug or alcohol addiction, pornography addition, homosexuality, adultery; any number of things. Upon accepting Christ, those chains fell away and they were freed from bondage to that sin. It doesn’t work that way for most of us. It will be according to the will of God and how we fit into *His* plans.

For most of us, that sin doesn’t just fall away. What does happen, is that we are given the power to overcome that sin; if fact, the power of the sin itself is broken. I know very well that when we are fighting with sin, it does not feel like its power is broken; but take courage, it is. It is important to see here that *we* are being told to put off the old man, to put off the sin. I have been speaking about the sin we were living in before our conversion to Christ, but it also applies to sin we fall into afterward. It is certainly possible for a Christian to fall and begin living in sin. But the Christian must break himself free from this also.

It is a common mistake for Christians to find themselves in sin and to simply pray about it. Notice that Paul doesn’t say to pray about putting off the old man; he says to do it. Certainly, prayer is necessary, but the work is ours, we must go through the hard work and pain to put off the sin. A good example of this is unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is a sin. Jesus taught that forgiveness was not negotiable. In Matthew chapter 18, we read the parable of the steward who was forgiven a large debt and then refused to forgive another a small debt. Consequently, the steward was handed over to torturers. Jesus concludes with verse 35.

“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

Here too we see that Jesus expects us to forgive others ourselves, not pray to forgive. How often do we hear of Christians who say, “I keep praying about it but I just can’t forgive so-and-so”? The answer is to stop praying and do it. To forgive is a decision. To often we look for a feeling; that is really what we are praying for is a feeling that we forgive someone. No, we must decide to do it. Then, our prayer becomes, “Lord, You know what so-and-so did. I forgive them. In obedience to Your command, I forgive them.” At that point the forgiveness has taken place, but the fight is not over. Satan will be happy to remind you of what was done to you. You might feel yourself getting angry again. Then satan will say, “See, you haven’t really forgiven”. Now you feel guilty, too.

Here is where we resist the devil and he will flee from us. First off, we remind ourselves that we really did forgive that person. We have already made a decision, which is what we have control over. We don’t have much control over our feelings, which is why we don’t trust them. So satan is lying; and if we have emotions stirred up, we offer a prayer for that person and remind ourselves that forgiveness has taken place. That word resist is warlike, it’s not an easy path, satan gives no quarter. This is why Paul later talks about armor and weapons in this epistle.

This is just one example, but it applies to all sinfulness. We must be aware of our particular weakness and fight to overcome it. If pornography is a problem, then we must avoid the isle in the store that has the magazine rack; we may have to get rid of our computer. If alcohol is a problem, don’t go into restaurants that serve it. If there is a person who is a bad influence on you, it is time to break off that relationship; stay away from them. We are called to live holy lives.

This is a lot of hard work, putting off this old man; but there is more. We are also called to put on the new man. We can’t just take off the old man and stand there with nothing on. Again, these things both happen when we accept Christ, but we continue with the lifelong struggle to put them into effect. Our new man is all things Christ. It is to live a life under the influence of, and dependent on, Jesus. To put on the new man, we must consciously do what Jesus has told us to do.

John 14:15

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

This is not easy either. To focus on Jesus is to take the focus off of ourselves; this is contrary to our selfish nature. Our new man worships Jesus. We happily make him King of our lives. Our new man seeks to do what is pleasing to the Father; not because we have to, but because we want to. Remember 1 John 5:3.

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

Our new man is forgiving, kind, patient, merciful; in other words, our new man is like Jesus. So often, when we think of following commandments, we think of legalism. Indeed, we must be careful to avoid legalism; therefore, it is important to understand what it is. Legalism follows rules either for the sake of following rules, or worse yet, it follows rules trying to establish its own righteousness. This is what we see with the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. They meticulously followed rules in order to establish their own righteousness. Jesus pointed out that this doesn’t work.

So, we as Christians, when we put on the new man follow some rules, but we follow them out of love for our Saviour, knowing full well that our only righteousness comes from Him. It takes effort to do these things; satan, the world, and our own flesh are against us.

Putting off the old man and putting on the new are equally important; both must be balanced and done simultaneously. Paul makes it very clear in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 that those things which separate the believer from the non-believer, or the old man from the new, cannot exist together.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

“I will dwell in them and walk among them;
And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.
“Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord.
“And do not touch what is unclean;
And I will welcome you.
“And I will be a father to you,
And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,”
Says the Lord Almighty.

Sandwiched between what we are to do in today’s reading is something God does by the Holy Spirit. “and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind”. He says “be renewed”, it is done to us. Although it is done to us, we must make sure that we do not hinder the work that is being done. We must not resist the Holy Spirit. This calls for submission to God; part of taking off the old man who rebels while putting on the new man who accepts Christ as King.

The spirit of our mind controls how we look at things, what our ultimate focus is. In short, our focus is either God or evil. The spirit of a Christian’s mind is quicker to desire the things of God. It is more likely to have concern for another person, even if that concern leads to sacrifice. It operates out of selflessness rather than selfishness. When the Holy Spirit renews the spirit of our mind, we produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit uses the things we go through in life to renew our minds. Consider Romans 8:28.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

Often times, we go through something bad and never see some tangible good come from it. But it will work toward renewing our mind and making it more like Christ’s. The struggle we go through to remove the old man and the struggle we go through to put on the new man are used to renew our minds. Certainly, there are positive things that help make us to have the mind of Christ: prayer, the Bible, Christian fellowship, worship of Almighty God.

Our Saviour worked and suffered; we, His followers are called to do the same. In return, we receive a deep-seated peace and joy while here on this earth; and look forward to eternal life that will make our struggles here seem as nothing.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, keep us from slipping into the belief that this life should be easy and free from toil. Remind us of the life of Jesus. Remind us that when we follow in His footsteps, we should expect the same treatment. But lest we become discouraged, remind us that we are fellow heirs with Him of Your riches.

Lord, we thank You for the strength to resist evil and the strength to do what is pleasing to You. Give us the fortitude of mind and determination to call upon that strength day to day; living a life pleasing to You. When we fail, we praise You that You are always there to take us by the hand and put us back into the fight.

Thank You, Father, for renewing the spirit of our minds. It is our desire to be like Christ; that our focus is on obedience to You and our dependence is on the Holy Spirit.

In dependence on Your grace and on Jesus Christ

Amen