

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON SIXTY-THREE)

“PUT THE OLD MAN OFF” (PART 2)

EPHESIANS 4:17-24

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

In recent Lessons, we have stated that in verse 17-19, Paul presents the “old man.” He shows to us the persons we were **before** we were saved.

In verses **20-32**, he presents the “**new man**,” the persons that we are to be, in light of the fact that we have experienced the saving power of God.

Accordingly, Paul writes in verse **22**, “*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.*”

The **New English Translation**, renders the verse as follows: “*You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires.*”

To what is the Apostle Paul referring when he uses the expression “**the old man**?” I believe that he is referring to the unsaved person, totally dominated and controlled by the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature, or, “**the flesh**.” The **old man** is synonymous with the old, unsaved self. It is a reference to all that we were prior to our conversion as sons of Adam. All unsaved human beings are referred to as being “in Adam” (see **1Corinthians 15:22, Romans 5:12-19**). Every human being is either “in Adam” (unsaved persons), or “in Christ” (saved persons).

In the context of **Ephesians 4:22**, the **old man** is the unsaved person that formerly was in Adam and was spiritually dead. The **old man** was continually being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit. The corruption occurred as a result of our giving in to deceitful, evil cravings which were pleasant and appeared to be satisfying, but which were repulsive and unfulfilling in reality!

The **New English Translation** renders **Romans 6:6-7**, in the following way:

6 We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

7 (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.)

The phrase, “*our old man*” in verse **6**, refers to the person that the believer was before he or she was saved, totally depraved, unregenerate, alienated from the life of God. Paul is arguing that the **old man**, the person that we were before we were saved, was crucified with Christ, in order that our physical body, which at that time was dominated and controlled by the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature, might no longer be so dominated and controlled, because in creating us anew “in Christ,” God broke the power of indwelling sin in the life of the believer. In light of this, we are no longer obligated to render the habitual obedience of a slave to the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature.

The expression, “*our old man*,” refers therefore, to the old unsaved self, or the person which we were before salvation did its wonderfully transformative work in our inner being. At that time we were human beings entirely dominated and controlled by the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature, having a heart darkened by sin, totally depraved in our entire being.

We may say that the **old man** was “*in the flesh*” (**Romans 8:8**); while the **new man** is “*in the Spirit*” (**Romans 8:9**). The **old man**, manifested “*the works of the flesh*” (**Galatians 5:19-21**). The **new man**, manifests “*the fruit of the Spirit*” (**Galatians 5:22-23**). The **old man** was “*corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*” (**Ephesians 4:22**); while the **new man** is “*created in righteousness and true holiness*” (**Ephesians 4:24**).

The **old man** is characterized by the fallen, unregenerate nature received from Adam; the **new man** is characterized by the divine nature received from God at the time of the new birth, according to **2 Peter 1:4**:

*“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of **the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”*

The **old man** came about by natural birth; the **new man** came about by the new birth, according to **John 3:3-7**. The **New English Translation**, renders the passage as follows:

3 Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?"

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must all be born from above.'

Paul exhorts us to "put off," or "lay aside," the **old man**. The phrase "put off," or "lay aside," is the translation of a Greek word which means, "to put away (literally or figuratively), to cast off, to lay aside." The word literally means "to put or take something away from its normal location and put it out of the way." It was used literally of runners participating in the Olympic Games, who cast off their clothes and ran nearly naked in the stadium. Figuratively, the word conveys the idea of a person ceasing to do what he or she was previously accustomed to do. The word is in a tense in the Greek which calls for a definite action. In **Ephesians 4:22**, the verb signifies a change of identities, calling us to live like the **One** in Whom we are now positioned.

In our previous Lesson, we noted that it was our opinion that Paul intended for the phrase "put off," or "lay aside," to be interpreted and understood as both **an action completed in the past, on behalf of the believer**, as well as **an action that the believer is to carry out**. The first interpretation emphasizes the bestowal of God's sovereign grace on the believer in salvation, thereby guaranteeing the security of his or her **position** in Christ, while the second interpretation emphasizes the believer's **responsibility** to walk in the light and power of the grace bestowed.

As we noted earlier, according to **Romans 6:6**, the **old man** has already been crucified with Christ. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.*”

The truth that the **old man** has already been crucified with Christ, is an accomplished fact, but it is a truth that believers must continually reckon or count as true. Paul highlights this truth in **Romans 6:11-14**. The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

9 We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he is never going to die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

10 For the death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 So you too consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires,

13 and do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness.

14 For sin will have no mastery over you, because you are not under law but under grace.

Based upon the truth that the **old man** has already been crucified, Paul is exhorting us to make it a practice of “putting off,” or “laying aside,” this already crucified **old man**. It is our responsibility to put off in our daily walk, what has already been put off when we died with Christ.

When Christ died on the cross, we died with Him **positionally**. When He was raised from the dead, we were also raised up with Him **positionally**. We are to reckon or count these facts to be true in our daily **practice**, so that we will not yield to sin.

Why do we need to put to death what has already been crucified? I believe that we must daily apply, **practically** and **experientially** the facts that are true of us **positionally**. We must live out and experience in a practical way the reality of the **old man** crucified with Christ. As **Roy Gingrich** notes, "The believer at his conversion positionally put off the old man and his deeds. Now in his daily life, he should make true in his experience what is true in his position."

Regarding the "putting off," or "laying aside" of the **old man**, **Ruth Paxson** made the following comments:

"God always takes the initiative in salvation. Before He asks or expects man to act, He has acted. The work of Christ in salvation is a completely finished work. So in regard to "the **old man**" God has already done His part, which is plainly recorded in Scripture as an accomplished historical fact. **Romans 6:6**: *"Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin."*

By the sovereign act of God that "old man" was crucified with Christ. In God's reckoning he died on the Cross as truly as Christ died. In that death God put an end to the old creation in Adam that He might replace it by the new creation in Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). He put "the old man" out of employment, as it were, by depriving him of his dominion over the believer in Christ.

In God's reckoning the crucifixion of "the old man" was a final, once-for-all act. From that moment God sees him only on the Cross. In God's purpose all the old, filthy, sin-infected garments in which "the old man" was clad went into the discard also as utterly unbecoming the life of

the new sphere into which the believer was translated. What God has made true for us **positionally**, He longs to make real in us

experimentally (experientially). This requires our intelligent, wholehearted co-operation in willing consent and in active choice as the imperative "that ye put off" clearly shows. There is a part for us to play if the crucifixion as historical fact is to be made an experimental reality in our lives. Therefore we should know what our responsibility is, and then fulfill it."

Warren Wiersbe, the former general director for the **Back to the Bible** radio broadcast, made the following remarks in his commentary on **Ephesians 4:22**:

"The simplest illustration of this great truth is given in **John 11**, the resurrection of Lazarus. Our Lord's friend, Lazarus, had been in the grave four days when Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethany, and even Martha admitted that, by now, the decaying body would smell (**John 11:39**). But Jesus spoke the word and Lazarus came forth alive.... Notice our Lord's next words, "*Loose him, and let him go*" (**John 11:44**). Take off the grave clothes! Lazarus no longer belonged to the old dominion of death, for he was now alive. Why go about wearing grave clothes? Take off the old and put on the new!"

Brothers and sisters, the person we were before we believed in Jesus Christ and were saved, is no more. The tyranny of **Sin** is neutralized. Our nature is transformed. **2 Corinthians 5:17**, makes it very clear that we are new creations, not merely old creatures rehabilitated. We do not merely have "a new side" to our personalities; we have a new heart, not the old one repaired, but a new and different one. This is, after all, what God promised that He would do for those whom He elected and called to be partakers and beneficiaries of the **New Covenant**. The **New English Translation** translates **Ezekiel 36:24-27** in the following way:

24 “I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries; then I will bring you to your land.

25 I will sprinkle you with pure water, and you will be clean from all your impurities. I will purify you from all your idols.

26 I will give you a **new heart**, and I will put a **new spirit** within you. I will remove the **heart of stone** from your body and give you a **heart of flesh**.

27 I will put my Spirit within you; **I will take the initiative, and you will obey my statutes and carefully observe my regulations.**

The “*heart of stone*” that God promises to remove from the members of the New Covenant, is a heart that symbolizes a will that is stubborn and unresponsive. The “*heart of flesh*” that He will transplant into them is a heart that symbolizes a will that is responsive and obedient to God, a heart that delights to do His will.

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand and appreciate that we are only able to carry out the supernatural activity of “putting off,” or “laying aside” the **old man** because of the fact that God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, now indwells the believer, giving him or her both the motivation or desire to carry out this divine activity, as well as the energy or power to do so! God has taken the initiative, putting within us a “new heart” and a “new spirit” in order to superintend our obedience. Paul informs us of this in **Philippians 2:12-13**. The **New English Translation** furnishes the following translation of the verses:

12 *So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence,*

13 *for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God.*

Ruth Bryan made the following observation: "The new man needs neither patching nor painting, for it is '*created in righteousness and true holiness*' (**Ephesians 4:24**). What is '*born of the flesh is flesh*'-and will act after its nature. What is '*born of the Spirit is spirit*'-and will aspire to its source!"

Regeneration is not merely a change of actions or of feelings as distinct from the understanding, but **a change of the whole person!** Such a radical change cannot fail to show itself in a holy life. This is what Paul insists on here. To the believer who knows that the **old man** is crucified with Christ, the view that grace leads to loose living is contradictory and absurd.

But we must now deal with a question that I am certain many persons are asking, namely, "**If the "old man" was crucified and is really dead, why do I still have this lingering, persistent tendency, or predisposition to commit sins?**" The answer is that all believers, no matter how long they have been saved, still possess what Scripture refers to as the "**flesh.**"

The word "**flesh**" is a translation of the Greek word **sarx** which is used almost 150 times in the New Testament. Paul uses the word **sarx** mainly to refer to **the fallen unregenerate nature, inherited from Adam, with which we were born.** The **flesh** is opposed to God and incessantly seeks its own ends. The **flesh** is what we are apart from grace. It produces what **J. I. Packer**, the noted theologian, referred to as "**anti-God energy.**"

The term "the **flesh**" describes what remains of the **old man** after a person is saved or redeemed. It is that part of our unredeemed humanness (for lack of a better way to phrase it), which is still present in every believer and will remain with the believer until he or she is glorified.

As believers we still commit sins similar to those we committed when we were "in Adam." We do so, not because the **old man** has not truly

been “*crucified with Christ,*” but because we still have resident in us the **flesh**, or the fallen unregenerate nature, inherited from Adam. It was the **flesh** that motivated and strengthened the **old man**, and now that the **old man** has been crucified, the **flesh** seeks to exert its influence over the **new man** and bring it under its control.

In **Galatians 5:16-17** Paul writes,

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

The Living Bible translates the passage in a very beautiful and clear manner:

16 I advise you to obey only the Holy Spirit’s instructions. He will tell you where to go and what to do, and then you won’t always be doing the wrong things your evil nature wants you to.

17 For we naturally love to do evil things that are just the opposite from the things that the Holy Spirit tells us to do; and the good things we want to do when the Spirit has his way with us are just the opposite of our natural desires. These two forces within us are constantly fighting each other to win control over us, and our wishes are never free from their pressures.

In these verses Paul explains to us that the **flesh** or the fallen unregenerate human nature, has a strong desire to oppose the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer, and the Holy Spirit likewise, has a strong desire to oppose the **flesh**. The work of the Holy Spirit in the believer is two-fold, namely, to put sin out of his or her life, and to produce His own fruit. The fallen nature has a strong desire to suppress the Holy Spirit in His two-fold work. But the Holy Spirit has a strong desire

likewise to suppress the fallen nature in its attempt to cause the believer to obey its instructions. They are contrary to one another. The Holy Spirit and the **flesh** reciprocate the antagonism each has for the other.

The **King James Version** states that the Holy Spirit and the **flesh** are “*contrary the one to the other.*” The word “*contrary,*” speaks of a permanent attitude of opposition toward each other on the part of both the Holy Spirit and the **flesh**. The picture in the Greek word is that of two opposing armies, each digging a system of trenches for the purpose of holding the land they have and conducting a trench warfare. They have dug themselves in for a long drawn-out contest. This contest is going on all the time in the heart of every child of God. It will continue until the believer is glorified. When we are glorified, we will be freed, not merely from the **penalty, power, and pleasure** of sin, but we will also be freed from the **presence and possibility** of sin. We will finally and utterly be liberated from the **flesh** and from sin! Until that wonderful day however every believer is engaged in a constant conflict with the **flesh**.

As we noted, this conflict is going on all the time in the heart of every child of God. The Holy Spirit is the divine provision given to the believer to secure victory over **the flesh** and sin. The part the Christian must play in this trench warfare is found in verse **16**: “*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh,*” or, as **The Living Bible** translates it, “*I advise you to obey only the Holy Spirit’s instructions. He will tell you where to go and what to do, and then you won’t always be doing the wrong things your evil nature wants you to.*” The believer is to “*walk in the Spirit,*” He or she must be diligent to “*obey only the Holy Spirit’s instructions.*”

We must be careful to notice that Paul puts upon the believer, the responsibility of refusing to obey the directives of the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature by conducting himself or herself in the power of the Holy Spirit, and under His control. The will of the believer has been liberated from the enslavement to sin which it experienced

before salvation, and is now **free to choose** the right and refuse the wrong. The Holy Spirit has been given to him or her as the Agent to counteract the fallen depraved nature, but the Spirit does that for the believer when he or she, intentionally and consistently, puts himself or herself under His control, and says a pointblank positive **NO** to sin.

In other words, there must be a cooperation of the believer with the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctifying the life. It is the believer's responsibility to determine his or her every thought, word, and deed by the leading of the Holy Spirit, yielding to Him for the energy to think, speak and act in a manner that glorifies God.

In our next Lesson, we will continue to explore the matter of the "putting off" of the **old man**.