

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

(LESSON SIXTY-FOUR)

“PUT THE OLD MAN OFF” (PART 3)

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 **Ephesians** chapter **4** and verse **22**, the Apostle Paul exhorts the believers in Ephesus to put off, or lay aside the **old man**, characterized

by a lifestyle of sin, in order that they might live the righteous, Holy Spirit inspired life, characteristic of those who are the children of God, with the least amount of restriction. He writes, *“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.”*

In our previous Lesson, we stated that the term, *“the **old man**,”* refers to the unsaved person, spiritually dead, totally dominated and controlled by the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature, or the **flesh**. It is a reference to all that we were as sons of Adam prior to our conversion. 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 were in reality, repulsive and unfulfilling.

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.” 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. Prior to salvation, we were accustomed to walking, or living in the manner that all unsaved people walk or live, *“in the vanity of their mind”* (**Ephesians 4:17**).

The Greek word translated, *“put off,”* or *“lay aside,”* is in a tense 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. Since, as believers, we are no longer positioned “in Adam,” we must stop living as if we still were. We must order our lives to reflect the fact that we are now positioned “in Christ.”

We also stated 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. The second interpretation emphasizes the believer’s **responsibility** to walk in the light and power of the grace bestowed by God.

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.*”

Why do we need to put to death what has already been crucified? I believe that we must daily apply in a **practical** way the facts that are true of us **positionally**. We must live out and experience in a practical manner the reality of the **old man** crucified with Christ. The truth that the **old man** has already been crucified with Christ, is an accomplished fact, but it is a truth that we must continually reckon or count to be true. Based on 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.

Last week we attempted to explain why it is that believers still have a lingering, persistent tendency, or predisposition to commit sins, even though our **old man** has been crucified with Christ. We noted that the reason why this is so, is because of the fact that all believers, no matter how long they have been saved, still possess what Scripture refers to as the “**flesh**” or **the fallen unregenerate nature, inherited from Adam, with which we were born**.

The **flesh** is what we are apart from grace. It produces what **J. I. Packer**, the noted theologian, referred to as “**anti-God energy.**” It is opposed to God and incessantly seeks its own ends.

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 adamic nature. 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 explains to us that the **flesh** 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 in his or her life. The fallen nature has a strong desire to suppress the Holy Spirit in this 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.

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, and 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 also from the **presence and possibility** of sin. We will finally and utterly be liberated from the **flesh** and from sin! But until that wonderful day however, every believer is engaged in a constant conflict with the **flesh**.

The Holy Spirit is the divine provision given to the believer to secure his or her victory over **the flesh** and sin. The part the believer 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.”*

The Living Bible translates the verse as follows: *“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.”* The word *“walk”* is the translation of a Greek word which literally means *“to walk about.”* When it is used as it is in the context of this verse, the word refers to the act of conducting one’s self, or ordering one’s manner of life or behaviour. Paul is exhorting the Galatian believers to allow their whole life to be controlled, or regulated, by the indwelling Holy Spirit. They are to depend on the Holy Spirit for guidance and power to live the Christian life. Paul gives them a strong assurance that if they depend upon the Spirit to give them both the desire and the power to do the will of God, they will not bring to fulfillment in action, the evil impulses of the **flesh**.

We must be careful to note 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.

Paul explains it in the following way in **Romans 6:11-14**:

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.

(New Living Translation)

In these verses, Paul deals with an important aspect of the method by which the believer obtains victory over sin. In verses **1-10** of **Romans 6**, Paul had presented two main facts. He stated firstly, that the believer stands in the position of **a permanent relationship of freedom** to the **flesh** or the fallen unregenerate nature, inherited from Adam, and therefore, **he or she does not have to obey it**. Secondly, he explains that the divine nature has been imparted to the believer by which he or she is given both the desire and the power to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Kenneth Wuest, the Evangelical Biblical Greek New Testament scholar of the mid-twentieth century, made the following remarks concerning these two facts: "This is the inner spiritual machinery God has installed whereby the believer lives his Christian life. But, like an automobile

engine, this machinery works best when it is serviced regularly. There is always a change for the good in a new convert's life. But if he does not understand this inner change and adjust himself properly to it, he lives a mediocre Christian life."

In **Romans 11-13**, Paul speaks about the adjustment that **Wuest** refers to. In these verses he tells us what the believer must do if he or she expects the best results from this inner change which God has brought about in his or her inner heart life.

Paul says that the believer is to do two things. He or she must firstly consider himself or herself, "**dead to sin.**" The word "*consider*" is the translation of a Greek word which means "to reckon, consider, count, compute, to take into account." Paul is exhorting believers that as they endeavour to live a life in accordance with the Word of God, they should take into account the fact that they are dead to sin; they should consider themselves disengaged from the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature; they should reckon or count that it has no power over them anymore, and that as a result, they can say a point blank **NO** to it.

Secondly, the believer is to consider himself or herself, "**alive to God.**" He or she is to take into account the fact that the divine nature has been imparted, giving him or her both the desire and the power to regulate their lives in accordance with the Word of God.

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand that it is not our consideration of **ourselves** as being dead to sin and alive to God that makes us so in reality. The truth is that we were made, or constituted dead to sin and alive to God the moment He saved us. We are **in fact** dead to sin and alive to God! But it is our considering of ourselves so; it is our taking into account that it is so; it is our reckoning or counting these facts to be true, that causes this inner spiritual machinery to operate optimally, thus guaranteeing the most beneficial results.

Kenneth Wuest gave the following example to illustrate this truth. He tells of a scenario in which a blindfolded person is brought into a room,

and made to stand on a board which rests on some books on the floor. Two young men lift the board about a foot, and warn the young man not to bump his head against the ceiling. Thinking that he is near the ceiling, he bends over, loses his balance and falls off. He lost his balance and fell because he considered or reckoned himself to be where he was not. In the same manner, observes **Wuest**, a believer who fails to count upon the fact that the power of the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature has been broken in his or her life, and that he or she is “*dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus,*” will fail to experience consistent victory over sin, and will therefore live a mediocre Christian life. He or she is considering or reckoning himself or herself to be where he or she is not in reality.

Another young man is blindfolded and made to stand on the same board. He however, unlike the first young man, has played the game before and is aware of what will happen next. When the board is lifted and he is warned not to bump his head against the ceiling, he remains perfectly straight and maintains his equilibrium, because he considers or reckons himself to be where he is in reality. He knows that his head is not even close to the roof and so he does not panic and lose his equilibrium. He maintains his balance. And so it is with believers who take into account the fact that the power of the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature has been broken in their lives, and that they are “*dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” They know that they do not have to obey it, and that they have the power to say **NO** to it, and they have turned their backs on it and are doing what is right.

The believer who does not reckon or count upon the fact that the divine nature is implanted in his or her inner being, goes on living his or her Christian life more or less in the energy of his or her own strength, with the result that he or she enjoys an unsatisfactory, unfulfilled Christian experience. But the believer who reckons or counts upon the fact that he or she is a possessor of the divine nature, stops attempting to live his or her Christian life in his or her own strength, and avails himself or herself of the life of God supplied in the divine nature. So the first adjustment

the Christian should make is that of reckoning or counting upon the fact that the power of the indwelling fallen, unregenerate adamic nature is broken and the divine nature imparted, and order his or her life on that principle.

When believers reckon or count upon the fact that the power of the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature over them has been broken, they will be better able to obey the exhortation of Paul in verse **12**, *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body.”* The word *“reign,”* is the translation of a Greek word which means “to exercise kingly power, to reign as king.” The verb is in a construction in the Greek which forbids the continuance of an action already going on. Paul says, “Stop allowing the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature to reign as king in your mortal body.” The fallen, unregenerate adamic nature is a dethroned monarch. The believer has the responsibility of keeping it from ascending to the throne of his or heart, the place which only the Lord Jesus should occupy. The believer is well able to do this. His or her will is free. He or she has the divine nature and the Holy Spirit to urge him or her on, and give him or her the desire and the power to refuse the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature and obey the Word.

Believers who reckon or count upon the fact that the power of the fallen unregenerate adamic nature has been broken in their lives, will not only stop allowing it to reign as king over them, but they will also obey Paul’s exhortation in verse **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.”* The word *“instruments”* is a translation of a Greek word which in classical Greek referred to the weapons of the Greek soldier. Paul is thinking here of the members of the believer’s body as weapons to be used in warfare against evil.

When believers obey the instructions laid down in these verses relative to their adjustment to the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature and the

divine nature, Paul says, “*sin will have no mastery over you.*” And he gives the reason, “*because you are not under law but under grace.*”

The “*Prince of Preachers,*” **C.H. Spurgeon** wrote the following:

“Sin will reign if it can: it cannot be satisfied with any place below the throne of the heart. We sometimes fear that it will conquer us, and then we cry unto the Lord, ‘Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.’ This is His comforting answer: ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you. It may assail you and even wound you, but it shall never establish sovereignty over you.’ If we were under the law, our sin would gather strength and hold us under its power; for it is the punishment of sin that a man comes under the power of sin (**1 Corinthians 15:55-56**). As we are under the covenant of grace, we are secured against departing from the living God by the sure declaration of the covenant. Grace is promised to us by which we are restored from our wanderings, cleansed from our impurities, and set free from the chains of habit. We must lie down in despair and be ‘content to serve the Egyptians’ if we were still as slaves working for eternal life; but since we are the Lord’s free men, we take courage to fight with our corruptions and temptations, being assured that sin shall never bring us under its sway again. God Himself giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Commenting on **Romans 6:14**, **Wayne Barber** made the following remarks:

“When does Sin...have **power** over me? Evidently (from this verse) it has something to do when I am up under law (not “**The Law**” but any kind of law!) In other words, when you start (or someone else does it for you) setting up a set of rules saying you can’t do this or that, etc, etc, you need to remember that there is something ‘latent’ or dormant in your body called the **Flesh** that is going to respond to being **under**

those rules. We need to be aware of what Paul is saying here. We all have this **residual propensity** to commit sins but it is **now a choice** because we have died with Christ to The Sin (its power) of Adam. When we commit sins now, it is because we choose to sin.

Don't excuse it, **refuse it**. But when you do this don't look to a set of rules telling you what you can't do, but instead look to Jesus, getting into His word and surrendering to His Spirit and He will work out **Christ's righteousness** in and through you.

Don't think that only a lost person responds this way to laws. **Flesh is flesh** and it is still present in believers. This body is dying and is the same body that you lived in when you were 'in Adam.' The difference now is that some One has come to live inside of me and has control over this body. We have got to learn to line up under Him not under a set of rules because this is where **legalism** begins to crop up."

In **1 Corinthians 15:56-57**, Paul writes the following:

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

(New Living Translation)

Brothers and sisters, Paul states emphatically here that it is the Law that empowers sin! When we attempt to gain victory over the **flesh** and sin by keeping rules and observing standards, we are actually strengthening sin's power within us! **Victory is not secured by me overcoming my flesh, victory is secured by Jesus overcoming me!** If we are to be victorious over the flesh and sin we must look to Jesus! It is through Him, and only through Him, that God gives us victory!

Are we beginning to understand how important it is for us to apply **Galatians 2:20-21** to our lives! The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

20 I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

21 I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing!

Are we beginning to understand how important it is for us to apply **Philippians 2:12-13** to our lives! The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

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.

Many years ago, a man visited a slave market. He watched for a while, then bid on a slave until no one was able to go any higher. After paying the price, he gave the bill of sale to the slave, and said, "I have purchased you to set you free." Overcome with gratitude, the slave refused to leave him and became his devoted servant for life. Brothers and sisters, Jesus paid an enormous price for our salvation. Are we serving Him out of gratitude?

*My life, my love, I give to Thee,
Thou Lamb of God who died for me;
Oh, may I ever faithful be,
My Savior and my God!*

*I'll live for Him who died for me,
How happy then my life shall be!
I'll live for Him who died for me,
My Savior and my God!*