

PUT OFF, PUT ON

Ephesians 4:22-27

Intro: I have not been as faithful as I should be about reminding you to make some time in your schedule each week to read Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. Sunday by Sunday we are working our way through this important epistle, but it is good to keep the whole message of the epistle before us as we consider its various parts. Each part will mean more to us if we look at it in the place that it has in the whole letter.

This morning I want to bring two words which Bible teachers in the past have used, but you don't hear much about these words, if anything, in most Bible teaching today. These are two words that apply to Ephesians. In fact, they apply to all teaching regarding the lives of those of us who know the Lord, whether we are reading and/or studying the OT or the NT. The words are *standing* and *state*. Both of these words have to do with our relationship to God, but they can be very different.

All people have some standing before God. It is either bad, or it is good. The legal standing of people before the Lord who do not know the Lord is that they are under divine condemnation. They face the prospect of eternal judgment because of their sin. This sentence has been passed by God upon all people regardless of how much or how great are their sins. We do not have to do anything to be condemned; by birth we are "condemned already." The whole human race by birth is under condemnation and faced with the certain judgment of God.

The preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's way, the only way, that that *standing* can be changed. The Gospel, the good news regarding salvation, is that God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, became a Man, a perfect Man, to die for sinners that they might be forgiven of their sins and have an entirely new *standing* before God. That standing is called *justification*. This means that the sinner who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is forgiven of his sins and cleared of all charges against him in the court of heaven. It is a gracious work of God because we did nothing to deserve it. In fact, all we have done as human beings has only demonstrated how deserving we are of judgment. When I say that it is a gracious work of God I mean that God, in saving us through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, has not given us what we deserve, but he has given us a gift which we could never deserve. It can't be earned by anything that we do. It cannot be purchased with money. It is given by God to all who take

refuge in Christ.

Now this justification is perfect, and by that I mean that what Christ has done in offering Himself for our sins, does not require anything else to give us this perfect standing with God. And another wonderful thing about this standing, is that it is eternal! Once you realize that the penalty for your sins, which is death, eternal death, has been satisfied before God by the death of Christ, you have perfect, eternal, and I might add, immediate justification.

Now there are no degrees in this justification. That is, I am not more justified than you are. Neither are you more justified than I am. The worst sinner on earth and the child who has not sinned as much or as greatly as others, both enjoy, and both need, the same justification. You can't be ten percent justified, or fifty percent justified, or ninety-nine percent justified. Every person whose faith is in Christ for this salvation, is one hundred percent justified. You are not more justified if you are baptized. You are not more justified if you join a church. You are not more justified if you become a pastor or a missionary. I repeat: all who trust in Christ are justified before God graciously, justified perfectly, and justified permanently. In Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes in the OT, he had this to say about what God does. You will find these words in Ecclesiastes 3:14 which comes in the Bible after the OT book of Proverbs:

14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

Justification is by grace, so it has nothing to do with whether you deserve it or not. You don't deserve it. You can't deserve it, so there is no use to talk about justification on the basis of what or how much we can, or need, to do. When Paul was preaching in Athens many years ago, telling those Greeks about Jesus Christ and His death on the Cross, he had this to tell them about justification:

38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39).

What Paul was saying was the equivalent of saying that you are justified through the sacrifice of Christ, declared righteous concerning all your sins "from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." We have to

be saved by grace because we can't be justified by any works that we do.

So I hope it is clear to everyone here. We are saved, we are justified before God, and we all have the same degree of justification. It is gracious, perfect, and eternal. There is not one thing that we can add to, or need to add to, what Christ did when He died for us on the Cross. That is *good news*, isn't it? That is the Gospel, and the Gospel is good news.

So, while there is no difference between us as far as our justification is concerned, *there are lots of differences between us as far as the lives we live are concerned!* And this is what Paul was dealing with when he indicated that he was talking about our *walk*, as he did beginning with chapter 4, verse 1. Before a person becomes a Christian, he has a certain lifestyle, a sinful lifestyle. After he becomes a Christian, his daily life is to be very different. This new way of living is dependent upon how we learn the truth about what God has given us in the Bible. When God saves us, He begins a work in our lives which He will continue as long as we live. His purpose in saving us is to enable us to take on the characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we will never be totally like God, but we are to be God-like, and Christ-like. When Paul told the Ephesian Christians at the beginning of this fourth chapter in Ephesians that we are to walk . . . with all lowliness, and meekness, and longsuffering, forbearing one another in love," he was telling us that pride needs to be rooted out of our lives, and we need to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. There has never been a greater example of humility than the Lord Jesus Christ was. Sin has made us proud, and pride makes us feel like we are better than anyone else, or at least just as good. Pride is the root sin, and our pride leads us into all other kinds of sin.

And then in the verses we considered last Sunday morning, we learned from Ephesians 4:17 that those of us who know the Lord as our Savior are "henceforth (not to) walk as other Gentiles walk." We are not to live like the people all around us in this world live, "in the vanity of their mind." God has changed us inwardly. Now we need to bring out, by God's grace, what God has done in our hearts.

Go back with me to the second chapter, and let me read to you verses 8 and 9, which are very familiar verses, but also verse 10 which is not as well known to us as it should be. Verses 8 and 9 have to do with our *standing* before God. Verse 10 has to do with (and now we are going to talk about the other word I mentioned to you at the beginning) – verse 10

has to do with our *state!* Our *state* has to do with our spiritual condition at any given time. God did not save us and then intend for us to continue living after we were saved like we did before. Nor did the work of salvation stop when we were saved. We have been declared to be justified before God. Our standing with God is perfect. We are no longer under judgment. But God still has a lot to do in our lives. And this word having to do with our *state*, our spiritual condition at any given time is called *sanctification*. God is preparing us for heaven. He wants us to live so that others will be able to see that something wonderful has happened to us. We are being *sanctified*. We are being made holy, and being holy means being made like Christ, and like God.

Now you will never find a perfect Christian here on earth. We are all at different *states*, or *stages*, in our spiritual growth. Some are just learning to walk. Others are walking, but none perfectly. Some show real maturity in facing the trials of life. There is a close parallel between growing spiritually and growing physically. And just as we have personal responsibilities as to our physical growth and health, so we have responsibilities for our spiritual growth. And you are contributing to your spiritual growth by being here this morning. You contribute to your spiritual growth when you read your Bible, and when you pray. You are doing the right thing when you ask God to enable you to be obedient to His Word. Reading books written by godly people, is a real aid to our growth.

Our standing before God can be picture by a straight line at the top of a graph. Our state has ups and downs in it, but hopefully the longer we know the Lord the ups will be stronger and more frequent than the downs. That which contributes the most to our sanctification is our knowledge of and our fellowship with the Members of the Godhead: God our Father, God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, the Holy Spirit!

Your *standing* before the Lord this morning, is perfect! It couldn't be better! But what about your *state*? *How have you and the Lord been getting along this week?* Later when the Lord Jesus dictated a letter to the Apostle John for the church at Ephesus which you will find in the second chapter of the book of the Revelation, the Lord commended them for the work that they were doing, and for their patience (apparently under trial), and for their orthodoxy along with their exposure of men who said they were apostles, but in the Ephesian church those men were found out to be liars. You get the idea that things were going really well in the Ephesian church, until you get down to verse 4 of Revelation 2, and then you read

this: “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” In the Weymouth translation you will find it expressed this way, “Yet I have this against you – that you no longer love Me as you did at the first.” What an indictment! What kind of a letter would the Lord write to me? What kind of a letter would He write to you? How does Trinity Bible Church score in our relationship with the Lord? The Lord can always say to us, “I have never changed in my love for you; why have you changed in your love for Me?” The Lord knows when we read our Bibles just to keep up with our schedule, or when we pray just when things are not going right.

If you are reading according to our schedule, you read Mark 12 this morning about the Jewish scribe who came to Jesus and asked Him what was the first commandment in the Law. And the Lord quoted to him from Deuteronomy 6 where Moses told the children of Israel to love the Lord with all of their heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. And that they were to love their neighbors as themselves. And this scribe agreed with the Lord, and he said to the Lord that to keep these commandments “is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Just because we go to church, doesn’t really mean that we love the Lord. Just because we pray before our meals doesn’t mean that we really love the Lord. Just because we give our money to the Lord, doesn’t necessarily mean that we love the Lord. I have told you about the lady in our church in Vancouver, B. C., whose husband would let her come to church, but he would not let her give any money to the church. He gave her a quarter to ride to the church, and then a quarter to ride back home. But do you know what she did? She rode the bus to church, put the second quarter in the offering, and walked home which was several miles away.

In that same twelfth chapter of Mark which I mentioned earlier, it tells the story of “a certain poor widow” who cast into the treasury a coin which was worth a fraction of a penny while other rich people were casting in much more. And the Lord told his disciples that that “poor widow” cast in more than all of the others put together because they put in from their abundance; she put in all that she had.

Now I haven’t gotten to my text this morning, but I hope that the Lord will use what I have been saying as preparation for this text in a couple of weeks when we come back to it. But let me read to you from Ephesians 4 beginning with the verses we had last week and leading up to the wonderful words which follow which are a good test for all of us as to how much

we love the Lord.

(Read Eph. 4:17 through 24 with comments.)

“Put off” and “put on.” These are commands for us to obey. What we “put off” are the things that people see, and what we “put on” are likewise what people see. But more important than that, they are what God sees. And they focus attention upon what we need to be concerned about. It is easy to read it, but not so easy to do it. But it is also easy to forget it. And sadly some of us may forget what we have read, and what we have heard this morning. The different ways in which we respond to the Word of God explain why so often there is such a great difference in our lives.

If we really love the Lord like we would say that we do, we are not going to forget Him in our daily lives. We are not going to forget the guidance we get from the Word of God. But we are going to do what the Lord tells us to do because we know that it is in doing from the heart, with a mind renewed by the Spirit of God using the Word of God in our lives, that we are going to make progress in becoming what God wants us to be, which is to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: It seems to me that we have in Ephesians 4:24 that the Apostle Paul was there speaking of *our standing* and *our state*. This new man, this new person we are in Christ was created by God in justification and in sanctification, in what God has done to make us acceptable to Himself as to our standing with Him, and as to His work in us which is to make us holy like the Lord Jesus. May the Lord have our full surrender to His will and our full cooperation in His Word as day by day, by one degree and then another, that glorious transformation which He is working in our hearts will be more obvious in the way we live today and tomorrow and all the days of our lives. God has made very plain in His Word what we need to “put off” and what we need to “put on.”