

THE OFF AND ON OF HOLINESS

Ephesians 4:22-27

Part 2

Intro: It has been a couple of weeks since we have directed our attention to Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. We have had three very delightful days in the first chapter of Peter under the ministry of Professor Paul Felix as from that chapter he emphasized with us four words: *hope*, *holiness*, *fear* (the fear of God), and *love*. And his emphasis was that we as the people of God, born of God, are to be involved in a transformation of life which is produced by a transformation of character. Christians, true Christians, are to be different. But it is not just an external change that the Bible emphasizes, but an inner change, a permanent change, which has a tremendous effect upon our behavior. The Apostle Peter spoke of this change in the last chapter of his second epistle as a growth in grace, a growth in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As we return to the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians we find him making the same emphasis that Peter made. In our study of Ephesians and Colossians especially we have seen that it was typical of the Apostle Paul to lay a doctrinal foundation in his writings, and then to follow that up with a practical emphasis where he would show how the doctrine should affect our lives. If your doctrine is faulty, so will your practice be. That is one reason why it is absolutely necessary to have a good understanding of the doctrines, the teachings, of the Bible.

Now most of you know, but let me point out for those who may not be familiar with Paul's writings, that in chapter 4 the Apostle Paul has moved into the practical part of this epistle. That does not mean that there is nothing practical in the first three chapters, because there is! Nor does it mean that there is no doctrine in the practical part of Ephesians, because there is! But it does mean that the main emphasis in chapters 1 through 3 we have doctrine primarily, and in the last three chapters he was concerned with the application of the doctrine. And this is very apparent in chapter 4, verse 1, where we read,

- 1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
- 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
- 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

There is a strong practical emphasis in those words.

But then as we go down through the chapter we learn that if we are going to live a life that is pleasing to God, we can't live like we have been living. And so in verse 14 and 15 he told the Ephesians (and the same applies to us), that we must not stay in a state of spiritual infancy, but we need to "grow up into . . . Christ." And he became even more specific in verses 17, 18, and 19. (Read.) And then notice what he said in verses 20 and 21. (Read.) What was he saying here? He was saying that we need to "learn Christ." We need to be "taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus."

Now it is possible for any Christian by reading the Bible, or by hearing it taught, to do a lot of learning. But there is a lot of learning among Christians that does not result in changed lives. It is possible for any of us to gather a lot of knowledge about the Bible, and yet to go on living the same way we have always lived. The way we can know that we are learning the way we need to learn, is that our lives will be undergoing changes, changes for the good, changes that result (if I may skip down to the end of verse 24) "in righteousness and true holiness." This is the way we need to go! And then from verse 25 on to the end of chapter 4 Paul spoke in detail about how we are going to get where we need to be going spiritually. But before we go to those verses we need to read and to understand verses 22, 23, and 24. Here we come to:

I. THREE VERY IMPORTANT COMMANDS (Eph. 4:22-24).

Notice what they are:

- 1) "Put off" in verse 22.
- 2) "Put on" in verse 24.
- 3) And in between them in verse 23, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

And if you look ahead to verse 25 where the Apostle began to be specific about what he meant, he said, "Wherefore putting away lying . . . ," is one thing that the believers in Ephesus needed to "put off." Then, as he went on he said, "speak every man truth . . ." That is what they needed to "put on." And as you read down through the rest of the chapter you will see what they needed to "put off" and to "put on" in place of what you have "put off."

You see, the picture we get is of a person who has been clothed in one

way, but he, or she, needs to put off the way he has been living, and live a completely different kind of life. It may sound simple and easy, but when you try to change, you will find that you cannot do it by yourself. The Lord has to help all of us, and this is what He wants to do. The commands are directed to us, but the desire and the ability to change has to come from the Lord.

Let me give you a couple of verses from Philippians which will explain what I mean. Paul was telling the believers at Philippi how they should live, just as he was telling the Ephesians in the verses we are considering this morning. But here is what he told the Philippians, and it sums up what he was telling the Ephesian Christians. Listen as I read to you Philippians 2:12-13:

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

It is God Who saves us, right? And salvation has to do with God's work in our hearts. So we are to work out what God has worked in us. This means that we are to show outwardly what God has done for us and to us inwardly. But this is an impossible task if we are left to ourselves to do it. But we aren't left to ourselves. God works in us to make us willing to do His will, and then He enables us to do what He has made us willing to do. We do it, but God gets all of the glory because we do it by His grace and power.

Now let us consider verse 24.

II. THE COMMAND TO "PUT OFF" (Eph. 4:24).

What are we to put off? It has to do with "the former conversation." Now the word "conversation" is an old English word that has completely changed its meaning. It does not mean talk, but it means walk. It has to do with the way we live, or, as it is used here, the way we used to live. And what was responsible for the way we all lived before the Lord saved us. It is what the Bible calls, "the old man." I like the way Charles Simeon described this term. He said it is "old" because it is as old as Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. It is as old as the human family is. We were all born with it. It is because of "the old man" in all of us that we are sinners. We were born in sin, born sinners, under the judgment of

God. This old nature is described in different ways in different Scriptures, but here it is called “corrupt” and that it has “deceitful lusts,” or desires. “Corrupt” means that our old nature makes us worse the longer we live, more proud, more godless, more blinded as to what is going on in our lives – and certainly increasingly blind to the remedy for our deplorable state. And our old nature produces in us deceitful lusts, or desires. I am sure you can think of desires you have had, hoping that they would bring you satisfaction and happiness, only to learn when it has been too late that you have been deceived. But then you try something else, money, pleasure, sex, only to be deceived again and again, and you move farther and farther away from God. Jeremiah said long ago, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).

Before we were saved, the old man was all that we had, and it is only by the mercy of God that we haven’t gotten into more sin than we have.

Now Paul stated this command in verse 22 in such a way as to indicate that we are no longer to let the old man govern and direct our lives. In Romans 6:6 the Apostle Paul wrote these words:

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

And then a few verses later he said:

11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God (Rom. 6:11-13).

You see, a person who has not trusted Christ for salvation, has no real, permanent solution for his sin. But the Lord by His death not only delivered those of us who believe in Him from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin. We still have the old man in us, but he is not in control any longer. This is why we can put off the old man with his deeds. But we need to be constantly on guard because he is going to seek to take control again.

But now let us look at the second command:

III. “BE RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND” (Eph. 4:23).

Now this command is spoken of such a way that this is something that is done for us, and yet we have a responsibility in it. And it is something that has to go on as long as we live. It is a process that is taking place. It seems to me that this speaks of the way the Word of God is being used by God in our minds. We read the Word. We hear it preached and taught. We read books that will help us to understand the Word. The Psalmist said, “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130). “The spirit of your mind” does not refer to the Holy Spirit, but to the inner recesses of our minds where we are learning to think in harmony with the Word of God. And it is through this renewing that our lives will be changed. It is in our minds that we are strengthened to resist the old man, and to put on the new man.

So the whole work of putting off the old man and putting on the new man, is empowered by a growing understanding of the Word of God. Our responsibility is to make sure that we are getting the Word; God is the One Who uses the Word to strengthen us for a life of fellowship with Himself through obedience to the Word. So we need not only, as James tells us, to be hearers of the Word, *but also doers of the Word*.

And now we come to the third of these three commands which the Apostle Paul has tied together for us.

IV. THE COMMAND TO “PUT ON THE NEW MAN” (Eph. 4:24).

What is “the new man”? It speaks of something that is created, so it has to be a work of God. And the word “after God,” or according to God, mean likeness to God. This is what we become by our second birth, when we are born from above. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

The old man is not changed into a new man, but by salvation we become entirely new and different. So we have the old man, and now a new man. And the Christian life is a life in which we are being transformed by the renewal of our minds into people who are characterized by “righteousness and true holiness.” This work of God, which is the work of salvation,

will never be completed in this life. As long as we live, we need to keep learning from the Word. As long as we live we need to be growing, And as we keep putting off the old life and putting on the new life as we continue to be renewed in our minds, day by day we will be becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ. “Righteousness and true holiness” come through obedience to the Word. And obedience is both negative and positive. By Scripture there are sins which need to be put off, and by Scripture there are things of God which need to be put on. So putting on the new man is not glorification, but sanctification.

There has been a lot of discussion among expositors of Scripture as to what Paul meant by “righteousness and true holiness.” Righteousness means conformity to God’s standard, which is expressly stated for us in the Word of God. The word that Paul used here for holiness is a word which speaks of God-likeness. So “righteousness and true holiness,” real holiness means that as we put off the old man, and put on the new man, we are being made by God’s grace into the child of God as he is described in the Word, and made in the very likeness of God and of Christ.

Concl: Now, beginning with verse 25 and going to the end of chapter 4 we have the new man in Christ described. I intend to go through those verses, verse by verse, in the hope that all of us will then have even a clearer idea of what God is doing in our minds and in our lives.

But I believe I am right in also saying that this is all tied in with verse 1 of chapter 4 where we are exhorted to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.” In chapter 1, especially in verses 3 through 14 we have described this glorious salvation which is ours in Christ. And Paul included all from His choice of us in eternity past to our ultimate glorification. But when Paul exhorted all Christians to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, he was indicating that in salvation we were not only chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, but that in time we believed in Christ and came to Christ *because we were called*. Remember that Paul mentioned our calling in chapter 4, verse 4. God has called all of us with one purpose in mind: to make us like Christ. And then we are told in chapter 1, verse 18, that Paul not only taught this, and preached it, and wrote about it, but it was one of his major prayer requests for the people of God.

We are predestined to be like the Lord Jesus, and we will be! But our part in this glorious work is to live our lives, not doing what the world does, but renewing our minds daily through the Word, and putting on all that is ours as God’s new people by grace through faith in Christ.