

Sermon: Putting off and Putting On Ephesians 4:22-24

Greetings Christ Church of Wiesbaden! And welcome to our online worship service.

It's been a big week in the life of our church and a lot is happening regarding the new building.

We have a lot of work to do as a congregation— physical work.

And this is good for a change. For many years, we've not had to ask much of our people regarding physical help. Yet now, we have a big task list ahead of us and in the weeks ahead, we will be sharing those tasks with you and asking for your service.

Before we move to the sermon, I want to point your attention to the worship order that is located in the downloads section.

It's best for us to worship God through all the elements of worship and not just the hearing of the word alone.

Now, as we turn our attention to the sermon, today we are dealing with the most practical concern of the Christian life and that is, our sanctification.

What is sanctification?

Sanctification is the process of becoming holy.

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul wrote:

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

God made us to be Christlike and sanctification is the process of becoming more and more like Christ.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sanctification in this way:

A. 35 Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

And so Sanctification is where the rubber meets the road in the Christian life.

It's where we, by God's power, work out in our daily lives the saving work of Christ.

I heard a great illustration on sanctification this week.

It comes from a seminary professor and he likened sanctification to process of preparing a garden for planting.

The first thing you do when you prepare a garden is remove the largest stones.

The ones that are really obvious and in the way- those are the first ones you go after.

And when a person becomes a Christian, this is the sort of thing that happens to them.

They examine their lives and deal first with those most obvious sins- the ones that really stand out.

But just like in gardening, the big sins or the big stones are often the easiest ones the deal with.

It's the smaller stones, the sins you can more easily hide, that keep you busy for the rest of your life.

We've planted a garden in our back yard and I am amazed at how perfectly our soil represents the Christian life in my experience.

After we removed the big obvious boulders that stick out, I noticed a seemingly endless supply of small to medium size rocks in the soil.

In addition to that, we occasionally find large rocks, just beneath the surface that we somehow missed before.

And de-rocking this patch of land sometimes feels like a losing battle

Yet this is the Christian life.

You never really arrive at perfect holiness in this life, yet with Christ honoring work and effort, the soil does get better.

Christian growth is possible because he is at work in us.

In Philippians 2:12, Paul Writes:

Philippians 2:12 ...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **13** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The process of sanctification requires us to work, but it is not simply us at work.

God is also working in us to make us more like Jesus.

So, let's study what Paul has to say about sanctification in Ephesians 4:22-24.

Our reading will begin at verse 17 to provide context.

Ephesians 4:17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **20** But that is not the way you learned Christ!— **21** assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, **22** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Thus ends the reading of God's holy and perfect word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Pray.

What is the goal of the Christian life?

Well the answer to that is simple.

The goal of the Christian life is to glorify God by becoming like Jesus Christ.

It's easy to state the goal of the Christian life.

Yet process of becoming like Christ is incredibly difficult.

It's costs us everything.

The process of sanctification is hard.

And one of the reasons sanctification is so difficult is because two deadly enemies lie on either side of the path we are to walk.

On the one side we have legalism.

Now the legalist in us says: Sure you may trust in Christ. But that is not enough.

You have got to do a bunch of additional things to clean up your life.

And if you don't, then you are probably not really a Christian.

The legalist in us tells us that our salvation is dependent upon our progress in sanctification.

And this is error.

Now, on the other side we have antinomianism.

Now that's a big word but it just means: Against Law.

The antinomian in us says: "Jesus died for me and took all my sins away. And now I can live a life free of serious spiritual effort because I am not saved by being holy.

Jesus has paid it all and there is nothing left for me to do."

This also is an error.

And it is amazing how easily we drift off the path into these errors.

And Paul knows this. That is why in Ephesians 4:22-24, he ground our sanctification in our identity.

He speaks about our Christian lives in terms of putting off certain clothing and putting on new clothing.

He's not telling us to achieve anything or to maintain anything.

Instead he is telling us to live consistently with who we already are in Christ.

You have a sermon outline and the first point there is...

I. Put Off Your Old Self

In verse 22, Paul gives us a direct command like a serious and wise father:
He couldn't be any more clear: Put off your old self.

Now he could have just said: Stop sinning.
And no doubt- that would have been easier to understand.
But it would not have done justice to the truth of the Gospel.

And so, instead of simply telling us to stop sinning, he uses the metaphor of changing clothes.
And in this case he views the old self as an old set of clothes that are no longer suitable for us.

And these are the cloths that we are to put off.
Paul describes the "Old self" or old clothes in verses 17-19. They are:

Futile in mind, darkened in understanding, alienated from the life of God, spiritually ignorant, hard of heart, callous, sensual, and greedy to practice impurity.

This is the description of who we once were.
Yet now in Christ, that is not who we are.
If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.¹
Peter tells us that because we are in Christ, we have become partakers of the divine nature.²
John describes this change as a new birth.

And all of these descriptions point to a new identity and a new self.
And because we are a new person in Christ, we have to put on new clothes that fit our identity.

We need to dress the part.
We need to act like the people who we now are.

And in order to spiritually dress like who we already are, we need to first take off the old clothes of who we were.

In verse 22, Paul describes the Old Man as our "former manner of life" which is "corrupt through deceitful desires"

To be corrupt means to be ruined or broken.
And Paul describes our former manner of life as ruined through deceitful desires.

And this really points to our foundational problem outside of Christ.
By nature, we followed deceitful desires.

Another word for desires here is lusts.
Lusts are our natural animal urges.

And this can refer to our lusts for power, for sex or even for violent retribution.
One of my friends who is a father of black children said that, this week, after the George Floyd incident, he sat down with his son and had the talk...again.
And that talk was not about the birds and the bees.
It was about being careful to not upset police officers because you never know what the reaction will be when you are black.

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:17

² 2 Peter 1:4

And as I thought about his statement of having “the talk” with his children, I realized that I have never even thought of having that same talk with my own boys.

And then as I put myself in his shoes, as a father of black sons, my anger started to grow at the threats they could possibly face.

And then I thought of George Floyd, begging to be allowed to breathe, and yet having his cries go unheard by the police.

And I asked myself: “What would I do if that was my son who was being held down there?”

And feelings of violent retribution were the first emotions to well up inside of me.

Anger. Rage. And the hunger, not for justice but rather violent retribution.

And these are exactly the types of deceitful desires that Paul says belong to the old man.

Think of the blood feuds that persist around the world.

The animosities, the vendettas, the hatred, the inability and unwillingness to forgive.

The fires of conflict just continue to burn, generation after generation.

These are prime examples of the deceitful lusts of the old man

Paul wrote in Titus 3:3:

Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, **hated** by others and **hating** one another.

Often when we think of lusts, we think merely of the sexual.

But a lust is any fleshly desire that is unchecked by the Holy Spirit.

And the lust for retribution and domination has ruined the lives of untold millions of people.

To lust is to be driven by your appetite, and to put all of your human powers into service in order to feed that appetite.

Lust is what motivated David with Bathsheba.

It's what motivated Cain to murder Abel.

Lust was behind the Pharisees and Scribes wanting to do away with Jesus.

And lust was the basic reason Eve chose to listen to the serpent.

The serpent was crafty.

He was deceitful.

He promised big things but it was all a lie.

And any time we follow a lust, we are actually following the path of Satan- the path of deception.

Satan is a liar and the father of lies.

2 Corinthians 11:14 ...[he] disguises himself as an **angel of light**.

Satan works primarily through deception.

And in Ephesians 4:22, Paul tells us that our old self was corrupted through deceitful desires.

Deceitful lust is at the root of every sin:

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is **deceitful** above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Romans 7:11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, **deceived** me and through it killed me.

Satan and Sin deceitfully promise big rewards and big pleasures but in the end they only deliver death.

And this is the ultimate corruption.

And so when Paul commands us to:

22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

He's telling us to no longer live as though we were listening to the evil one.

Because we were once under his sway.³
But now we have been made alive together with Christ and we are aware of his schemes.
Our whole identity has been changed.
And therefore we are to put off the tattered clothes of the old man.

We are to exchange them for royal garments.

So do you view your sin in such stark terms?
Do you view your sin as really just listening to the lies of the devil?
... as essentially driven by selfish lust?

And most importantly, do you view your sin as the actions of a person whom you no longer are, now that you are in Christ?

The Lord wants us to see Satan's lies for what they are- and this can only happen when we are renewed in the spirits of our minds.

And this leads us to our next point:

II. Be Renewed in the Spirit of Your Minds

Paul doesn't simply tell us to put off the old man.
His command to us is not simply: Don't sin.
Instead his command to be sanctified really has 4 stages:
First, believe in Christ as your Lord and savior. That is becoming a Christian.
Second, Put off the old man. We just studied that.
Third, be renewed in the spirit of your mind
And forth, Put on the new man.

It's important that we recognize the importance of all these stages.
Because true holiness is never just a matter of "Don't sin."
There are many people who have the ability to clean up their lives and yet who are not really believers.
They are simply nice and good people.

Typically the nicest and most moral people are also filled with self-righteousness and judgmentalism.
Because they have only cleaned up their outside appearances.
And Jesus warns us of this kind of superficial morality.

In Luke 11:24-27, Jesus says:

Luke 11:24 "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' **25** And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. **26** Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."

This passage teaches us that it is possible to put off the obvious sins of violent living, hating people and sexual exploitation.

Only to have these sins replaced with a deep self-righteousness.

And on the whole, self-righteous people are harder to reach with the gospel than those given to destructive living.

That's why Jesus says that "the last state of that person is worse than the first."

³ **Ephesians 2:1** ...dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience

If we merely put off sin without first trusting in Christ and further being renewed in mind and putting on the new man, we will become the most gospel resistant people on earth.

And this is largely what has happened to the so-called “good people” of post-Christian societies and even the “good people” who go to church.

They’re not violent or excessive. They aren’t racist or xenophobic.

They are “good people” who feel no need for Christ.

They have no felt need for salvation or repentance because they don’t view themselves as really being all that bad.

“the last state of that person is worse than the first.”

Yet when a person becomes a Christian and is renewed in the spirit of their mind, they start to see all of those small and medium sized rocks in their garden.

They see that holiness is not a matter of temperament.

They see that it is entirely possible to exchange obvious sins for acceptable, hidden ones.

And so, to have a renewed mind means not being ultimately concerned with being a good person.

It means primarily being concerned with the Glory of God.

A renewed mind sees God as being worthy of all Glory and loving him for it.

It means appreciating God for creating you and saving you in Jesus Christ.

It means desiring to live for him, and using your minds to think God’s thoughts after him.

A renewed mind means “loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.”

It is a fundamental change in how you think.

So let me ask you: have you experienced this fundamental change in your way of thinking?

Do you see the yourself and the world as existing for God’s glory and do you love him for it?

Can you say with the hymn writer:

This is my father’s world, He shines in all that’s fair.

In the rustling grass I hear him pass. He speaks to me everywhere.

And do you grieve over your own sin and the sins of others.

A fundamental change in the way you think is what it means to be renewed in the spirit of your mind.⁴

Now, after having considered putting off the old man and being renewed in the spirit of the mind, we come finally to the focus of the rest of this letter which is...

III. Put On the New Self

Now I will deal with this point only briefly here because the rest of the letter fleshes this out.

Paul commands us to **“Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

And the first thing I want us to notice is that we are to be **active** in this.

“Put on the new self” is a clearly something we are to do.

We are to exert ourselves in this.

The new self is the type of person that God has saved us to be.

It is a person **“created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

⁴ The entirety of Psalm 8 reflects this renewed spirit of mind.

This means that we finally have the resources available for living holy lives.

It also means that we don't have any excuses for when we sin.

Peter wrote:

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to **life** and **godliness**, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

And so, because of the work of Christ and God's spirit who lives in us, we can now live holy lives.

We don't have to buy the lies of our flesh which tells us that our sins are just part of who we are.

No. We are a new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

It's all about identity.

You know, most people use their clothing and appearance to cover up their inadequacies.

We all have shortcomings **and so we dress, speak or comport ourselves in such a way so as to hide our shortcomings.**

Yet the Christian life is exactly the opposite of that.

Because the reality is that in Christ, we are perfect.

And because we are perfect, we are to put on the clothing of perfection.

In God's eyes, we don't have shortcomings.

In Christ, we are perfectly holy.

And therefore his command to us is this: Be who you already are.

Dress like you're the child of the king because the greatest king in heaven and earth is your Father.

So many of us attach our identities to what people think of us.

We believe we are only as good as our reputation or our achievements or our net worth.

This is innate in us- to attach our identity and self-perception to what others think of us.

And this is not wrong.

We just need to learn to attach our identity to the right person's thoughts.

And when we begin to see ourselves through God's eyes, we will find ourselves becoming what he says we are.

His is the only opinion that really matters, and to Him we are only holy:

created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

So never tire of telling yourself of who you really are.

You're a child of the king.

And then strive with all of God's appointed means of grace to be what you already are.

Don't be what you're not.

Be who you are.

Dress the part.

Because in Christ, you are **created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**

Put on that self.

Amen.