

Off With the Old and On With the New
Ephesians 4:17-25

By Dave Urbanski

Sunday's message in Ephesians 4 covered the continuation of the Apostle Paul's appeal to the first-century church — and to us — to walk in the footsteps of our new life in Christ.

As we saw, Gentiles — or nonbelievers in general — walk according to the "futility of their minds. 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. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." (vv. 17-19)

Pastor Don emphasized to us that we are called to walk the opposite path, according to the love and salvation Jesus has given to us. But it's not always easy to do so, is it? Indeed, Pastor Don reminded us that putting off our "old self" (as Paul directs in verse 22) is a continual process. Even though we were forgiven of our sins once and for all the moment we accepted Christ as savior, that doesn't mean the old self just went away forever. Instead it's an ongoing fight, a continual challenge we must be willing to meet head on, day after day — indeed even minute by minute, as we are met by the never-ending onslaught of the world's evil ways.

Pastor Don also told us that if we don't purposely put off the old self, we are liable to head down a dangerous path — one that begins with a hardened heart (verse 18) and then leads to callousness, followed by giving in to "sensuality," and then full-on greediness for "every kind of impurity" (verse 19). It's a steep, slippery slope we must stay away from!

One great way to battle back, Pastor Don said, is to immerse ourselves in God's word and letting Scripture through the Holy Spirit transform us as we place our identity in Christ front and center. That's markedly different from reading the Bible and interpreting it through a human identity that tosses out truths we don't like very much!

Paul defines the "old self" in verse 22 as part of our "former manner of life" which "is corrupt through deceitful desires." Interesting that Paul uses the present tense – "is" – to describe the old self, which makes sense given that we're commanded to do battle with it on a continual basis. In the same way, Pastor Don explained, putting on the "new self" (verse 24) – in concert with being "renewed in the spirit of [our] minds" (verse 24) – also is an ongoing process!

Pastor Don compared this ongoing battle between the old self (part of us from the beginning our lives) to the new self (an eternal gift from Christ alone) to a verse from the Gospel of Matthew. In chapter 9, verse 17, Jesus says, "Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."

Pastor Don added that Paul's letter to the Romans offers another instruction as we take on this always-active spiritual battle: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ..." (12: 1-2)

Why do we hold on to old sins, old habits, old ways of thinking? Pastor Don reminded us of the FACT that the jail doors that previously locked us in and bound us to sin have been opened by Jesus. He freed us! All we have to do is walk through those open jail cell doors and into the freedom the Lord has already provided. So ... how much do you want to be free today?

Again, it isn't easy! If it were easy, maybe the Holy Spirit wouldn't have inspired Paul to write about putting off our old selves and putting on our new selves! No, it's a constant battle. Our only choice, therefore, is choosing whether or not we want to embrace the battle and continually renew our minds in Christ.

Let us choose to fight!