

Sermon – 19/10/2008 am

Put Off, Put On

Study Text: Ephesians 4:22-24

Born in an Indian village, a girl we know was destined to a life of poverty. She would wear a sari and eat spicy vegetarian food. She would not go to school but would be married at the age of 13 or 14. She would work in the fields sowing and harvesting, and bear many children. But this girl actually has a very different life. She wears dresses and jeans not saris, she does not like spicy food and she goes to school. She speaks English not Hindi. She was adopted and raised in England. We are continually amazed at how different this girl's life is to that of what it would have been in India. She looks Indian but does not speak like an Indian, dress like an Indian or eat what Indians eat. She is no longer an Indian.

Has your life changed since you were adopted by Jesus? Can people tell that you belong to Christ? Do you still speak the same, act the same and go to the same places as you did before you believed. In what way are you a new creation in Christ Jesus? How different are you from your unbelieving neighbours? You look like them but do you live like them?

Paul lays it on the line in these few verses. He does not anticipate, nor allow, you to go on living as you once did and he explains why. There is no middle way. You are either in Christ or you are not. You have put off the old man or you have not.

Put Off

Paul writes this letter to the saints and faithful ones in Christ. He explains to the believers what happened to them when they heard the gospel. It was no small thing. It was a change of cosmic proportions and eternal significance. They were dead in sin and were made alive in Christ. By grace they were saved through faith. They were made right with God through the Cross of Jesus.

What are the consequences of this great change for the life of the believer? You were washed in the blood of Christ, you were justified before God and you were made holy. How does this total and complete change of heart affect the life of the believer? What does it mean to become a new person in Jesus Christ? Whilst we are not saved by good works, we are saved unto good works. While nothing we do can save us, having been saved we will do what pleases God.

Paul urged these believers to walk worthy of their calling in Christ and not to walk in the futility of their mind. He now turns to another picture to teach the same truth, a picture of dressing rather than walking. He pictures them putting off one garment, an old filthy garment, and putting on a brand new garment. This putting off and putting on takes place in the heart or mind, the control centre of our being. This change in thinking, this change in desires is reflected in changed behaviour.

What is it that we are to put off – or more correctly **have** put off? The tense in the Greek is aorist, meaning an action completed in the past but with ongoing effect. This decisive act of putting off the old man is spoken as the old man being crucified with Christ in Romans 6:6.

The old nature is our nature at birth. We were born children of Adam, we were born in sin and as slaves to sin. We were young and full of vigour but our nature or inner man was old.

This old man was characterised by lusts. I once saw a bumper sticker summing up someone's attitude to life. It read 'lust not love'. That is the old man speaking. That is what Darwinian evolution and Freudian psychology teach because both philosophies reject God. Man is just an animal they say. He is controlled by animal instincts. For Darwin it was greed and survival. For Freud it was sex. According to him sex drives all human behaviour. In one sense these men were right. These instincts are there in the old man. They drive men to live by lust, by selfish desires and by greed.

Living by lusts is living by deceit. It is the great deception of Satan to tell us that such a life is wonderful and happy. Satan deceived Eve into thinking the fruit was good for her though God had said not to eat it. What happened – her life fell apart. She went about hiding from God, fighting with her husband, and bearing children in pain. The fruit that looked so good and promised so much according to Satan turn out to be very sour.

Adam and Eve lived a long time ago but her folly lives on in every generation. Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son who took all his inheritance and went off to have a good time. He lived to satisfy his lusts. But he was deceived. He ended up in the gutter. Thankfully he came to his senses before he perished.

Many continue in the steps of Adam and Eve today. The lust for money, otherwise called greed, has led many a gambler and investor to ruin, destroyed many a family and indeed today is bringing nations into turmoil. Those who cried 'let the good times roll' are now rolling around in shock and grief. They were deceived by the lust of the eyes.

The lust of the flesh also belongs to the old man – sexual immorality, uncleanness, passion, evil desires and covetousness (Colossians 3:5). Those who give themselves up to such lusts receive the due penalty for their sin (Romans 1:27). Paul also condemned those whose god is their belly. If their belly is not their god, if they are not getting drunk or stuffing themselves with rich food, then their body has become their god as they rush to the beauty parlour and cosmetic surgeon. Was your old life marked by some of these lusts? What about you new life?

Put On

The old man grows corrupt because of their deceitful lusts (4:22). Corrupt means rotten and decaying. This old man is actually a slave to sin, a slave to the devil. The old man is helpless and hopeless. This corruption grows in its depth of depravity. This is the way of sin. Little lies grow into big lies. Little thefts grow into big thefts. Little bets grow into big bets. Little glances at pornography grow into prolonged gazing. Corruption grows. The rot of the old man spreads to taken over every aspect of life.

In some societies corruption has become endemic. Cheating and lying become a way of life. Corruption brings poverty to individuals and a nation. In India we had to test the milk for adulteration with water and eggs had to be floated in water to check they were not rotten. A man came to our house one-day selling honey. He had bee stings all over him and dead bees in the honey in an effort to show that it was pure and not a adulterated.

The old man is ruled by lusts and evil desires. These lead to corrupt conduct, to bitterness, malice, anger, blasphemy, filthy language and lies (4:31, Colossians 3:8). You put off these things when you believed –remember! Beware lest they come back into the room that was swept clean but was not filled with the truth of Jesus. You must put off these things and put on other things as Paul goes on to say.

This is where mere morality and law fail. These tell us what to put off, what not to do, but do not give us what is needed to stand firm in the truth. The law does not change the heart. This putting off must occur in the heart and in the mind – and that is what happened by the power of the Holy Spirit when you believed. You were crucified with Christ. You were given a new heart, a heart enlightened by the Spirit of God. Your conduct changed and will change by the renewing of your mind.

Put on the new man (4:24). What is this new man? It was *created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.* This new man is none other than Christ. We are to put on Christ (13:14). *Reckon yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 6:11). We are to have the mind of Christ. Again the tense is aorist. We have put on the new man so do not let sin reign in your body and do not obey its lusts.

What Paul is emphasising in these verses is who we are in Christ and the sort of life we should live as a consequence of who we are. We have been justified and made right with God. We have been clothed in the righteous of Christ. All this is spiritual. God is a spirit and we come before him as spiritual beings. But we live on this earth as physical beings and God has made us this way. But we are not two beings, we are one. The renewal of the mind makes us new people, people who have put off the old man and put on the new.

This new man was created by God. God has taken over the control centre of our life. We have a cleansed and spirit illuminated conscience (Hebrews 9:14). We are no longer slaves to sin and Satan, no longer driven by the lusts of eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. We are made new in the righteousness and holiness of God.

Christ Jesus has put us right with God; he has restored the relationship severed at Eden. And being in right relationship with God we have been made new in Him. We have put on truth, we have put on love, we have put *kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering and forgiveness* (Colossians 3:12). In Christ we have put off lust and put on love.

John Murray writes in summary of these verses ‘The believer is a new man, a new creation, but he is a new man not yet made perfect. Sin dwells in him still, and he stills commit sin. He is necessarily the subject of progressive renewal ... but this *progressive* renewal is not represented by the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new ... it means the mortification of the deeds of the flesh and of all sin in heart and life. But it is the renewal of the new man unto the attainment of that glory for which he is destined, conformity to the image of God’s Son’.

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