

August 8, 2021
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Ephesians 4:17 – 5:2

OFF WITH THE OLD, ON WITH THE NEW.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the St Paul's epistle letter to the Ephesians, the 4th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

What do you think of when someone says: "*Off with the old and on with the new?*" Maybe you think of old tacky wallpaper; scrape off the old and put on the new. Or perhaps your old, faded, and dreary paint. Cover the old! Put on the new! That old rusty clunker of a car in your garage; ditch the old and get behind the wheel of the new.

Of course, that is not what St Paul is speaking of. New wallpaper and paint will eventually become faded and dreary. Any new car, over time, will become a clunker. These things are temporary and accomplished by your cooperation. In our text, Paul is talking about putting off your old way of living and putting on the *new self* which is *Christ Himself*. It is what God *in Christ* has accomplished for you.

The flesh is flesh – and the spirit is spirit. You can cooperate over things of the flesh, but not of the Spirit. Paul urges you to put off the *old self* which is corrupt through deceitful desires but how can you be renewed in the Spirit of you mind and put on the *new self*? Well, if you were a first grader in Sunday School, you would answer: "*Jesus.*" And you would be right! In his letter to the Ephesian Christians St Paul teaches us the rest of the story.

Your *old self* is sinful and corrupt through original sin. As a descendant from Adam, you are born into sin. Paul writes to the Romans:

"...because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man... ... one trespass led to condemnation for all men... ... by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners..." (Romans 5:17-19)

You and I and all mankind are sinners – and there's nothing we can do about it. You can paint and paper over your old drab walls. With the right skills, you can refurbish your old car and make it look new. But in God's eyes, all your good works and deeds are nothing but filthy rags. (cf: Isaiah 64:6) Unlike buying a new car, you cannot pay off the debt of your transgression. New paper and paint will cleanse your dirty and dingy walls, but you can neither cover nor cleanse your own sin. You are in desperate need of a Savior.

Christ Jesus is the only person ever born without sin. You and me and everyone else is condemned because of Adam's sin. Jesus is the only person who ever lived a perfect life,

keeping ever jot and tittle of the Law and the Prophets. (cf: Matthew 5:18) Apart from Jesus you are dead in your trespasses, and by nature, an enemy of God. You can get plastic surgery and Botox to make you outwardly look like a new person. You can learn make habits and do a better job of hiding your sinfulness – but the **old self** cannot be changed or reformed. It must be put off. It must be put to death and replaced by something new.

At the beginning of Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians, he wrote that God chose you **in Christ** before He laid the foundation of the world. (cf: Ephesians 1:4) God didn't choose you because of your good looks, your talent, or any redeemable value within you. He chose you **in Christ** because of Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death on your behalf.

In Baptism God stripped off your **old self** and drowned him in baptismal waters and united you to Jesus' death and resurrection. (cf: Romans 6:2-11) At the font you were:

"... you were washed... sanctified... [and] justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11)

God adopted you into His family within the Christian Church and sealed you with His Holy Spirit, granting His gifts of forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation. You were born again... born of water and the Spirit. (cf: John 3:3-6) And as Paul writes to the Corinthians:

"... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

You don't need that **old self** any longer because you are a new creation **in Christ**. Last week, at the beginning of Ephesians, chapter four, we heard Paul urging all who are **in Christ** to:

"... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." (Ephesians 4:1)

The Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel. You've been called out of darkness into the marvelous light of Jesus (cf: John 1:9; 1 Peter 2:9) And because you have been called, St Paul urges you to walk in a manner appropriate to your calling as a redeemed child of God. He continues in our text today saying:

"... you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do..." (Ephesians 4:17)

The Gentiles whom Paul speaks of were pagans. When the Bible refers to a **way of walking**, it's not only referring to a person's outward actions and deeds, but it's also referring to the entire life of faith, confession, and obedience to God's Word. Paul is warning against falling back into your old sinful ways which could lead you away from faith **in Christ**. It's the conflict of being simultaneously saint and sinner. St Paul says"

"... I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." (Romans 7:18-19)

You are **in Christ**. That's the **new self**, renewed by the Holy Spirit. You love God want to keep His Law and do good. You want to live a righteous and holy life. But the **old self** is still hanging around, trying to corrupt and deceive. The **old self** wants you to give in to the temptations and desire of the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. And the danger is, if you play around the

slippery slope of sin, you know not when you are going to stumble and slide on down the slope. If you don't put on the new self and cling to Christ who has defeated sin, death, and the devil, you won't be able to stand against the schemes of the evil one. You risk becoming callous and alienated from God. (cf: Ephesians 4:18–19)

Earlier this week someone asked me about what God thinks of Christians who – to use Paul's words in our text:

"... have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." (Ephesians 4:19)

Pick a sin and fill in the blank: gluttony and greed, abortion, anger, and idolatry, lust, adultery, or same sex desires. The world celebrates, and demands that you also celebrate, every sort of impurity, unrighteousness, and dishonorable passion. (cf: Romans 1:22–32) But what does Paul say? He says:

"... 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." (Ephesians 4:20–21)

There is nowhere in Holy Scripture that God or one of the apostle writers suggest that the person who is ***in Christ*** has license to live however they wish according to their flesh. To live as if you are ***not*** baptized and chase after the desires of the flesh, denying God in word and deed, is an insult to the Holy Spirit in whom you are sealed, and you lose Him. (cf: Ephesians 4:30; FC SD II, 69) Paul says that:

"... the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." (Galatians 5:17)

Brothers and sisters ***in Christ***, you cannot pay off the debt of your transgression – but ***Jesus has*** in His sacrificial death on the cross. You cannot hide your own sin – but ***in Baptism*** you are clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covers all your sins. You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified, so St Paul urges you 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." (Ephesians 4:22–24)

It's not something you can do on your own but in Baptism you were:

"... crucified with Christ. It is no longer [you] who live, but Christ who lives in [you]. And the life [you] now live in the flesh [you] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [you] and gave himself for [you]." (Galatians 2:20)

When you awake in the morning, make the sign of the cross and in contrition and repentance drown your ***old self*** in baptismal waters and die with all sins and evil desires so that your ***new self*** might emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. When you slip and don't do the good that you want but sin against God, repent, flee from your sin, and believe the Gospel, trusting in God's Word that:

"⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Put off the ***old self*** and put on the ***new self***, walking in a manner appropriate to your calling as a redeemed child of God All who are ***in Christ*** are called to:

"³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

This not something you do to earn salvation. Earlier in his letter Paul wrote:

"⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8–10)

Forgiving your neighbor and loving them in words, works, and deeds is all part of ***being in Christ***, putting on your ***new self***, created ***in Christ*** Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that you should walk in them. You love others because ***God in Christ*** first loved you. (cf: 1 John 4:19) Your ***old self*** is still hanging around, trying to corrupt and deceive. But you are Baptized and been given new life ***in Christ*** and have been given a new holy life to live. Not in order so that you might gain eternal life – but because ***in Christ***, you already have ternal life and will live with Him in His Kingdom forever.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.