

Putting Off Our Dead Clothes Ephesians 4:20-24

This morning, as we move forward in our study in Ephesians let's read a section of Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:20-24, “ That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

In the rest of this chapter of Ephesians and into the 5th chapter, Paul is going to be dealing with a number of behaviors that are not fitting of someone who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. As we pointed out last week, Christ is our measuring stick. The amount of Christ-likeness we attain in this life is the measuring stick that God measures us by, and the one who we are to measure ourselves by.

First, Paul says that when you heard about Christ you were taught about the truth that is in Jesus. I have to wonder how much truth that each of us has been taught?

Back in verse 14 we read, “...we are no longer to be infants (in our faith and understanding of Christ's work), tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in the deceitful scheming.”

There is no end of material, studies and books out there about Jesus and our new life with Him that one can pick up. Some of them are good and some are not. But if you don't know the truth then the truth cannot set you free.

And that is what we want isn't it? To be set free. I know this is what Jesus wants for your life. He said you can know the truth and truth will set you free.

Listen to the truth of what happened when you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior. You came to Him with a blackened heart of sin. Through no fault of your own you were born into sin because of the choice of Adam. The sin nature was instilled in your flesh and it is something that you will be dealing until you get to heaven.

But when you asked for forgiveness of you sin and asked for Jesus to take up residence in your heart then you were washed with the blood of Jesus, you were made pure and holy on the inside, as pure as God Himself. And then God poured His Spirit, that is holy, inside of you.

Now where Christians find themselves is in the battle between the old sin nature and the Holy Spirit that lies within them and this is where we get into the passage, **Ephesians 4:22, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires..."**

You were taught, to put off of your old self and it is for good reason.

First of all Paul says that

1. Your old self is being corrupted by its deceitful desires

You can talk with any parent and you come to the truth that each child has to be taught not to handle themselves in certain ways. For example, in the verses following our passage Paul tells us that we are to put off behaviors like lying, allowing our anger to get the best of us, stealing and letting unwholesome words come out of our mouth.

Isn't it true that most children do not need to be taught how to lie, how to throw a fit or steal? The truth is they are being faithful to the nature they are born with. A nature that is selfish and looking out for number one.

We teach our children that these behaviors are not proper. Most times they get it and we see them growing up and putting off these behaviors. But those behaviors are with them constantly and they have to make a choice whether to follow them or do what they have been taught is right.

That is what Paul is saying. There are certain behaviors, attitudes that when we come to Christ, these behaviors are of our old nature, they are not Christ-like and we are to put them off.

On the inside a Christian is pure and holy but on the outside they have issues. Paul is saying that we have heard and been taught the truth and that is that we are to put off these old ways of life and begin living a new way with Christ.

Our old life wants to raise up and be heard, be heeded but we have learned this old life is not to be trusted. It is deceitful and will lie to us. It says certain things will fulfill and make our life better. But isn't it true, that after we have experienced the new house, the new car, the new whatever, we come to the understanding that our old nature duped us. We are not any happier than before, we just have a larger debt and then that depresses us even more.

The old nature lusts for more, always more and until we come to understand that our nature is a liar, just like Satan is a liar, then we will become trapped in our old life even though we have a new, powerful life, the life of Christ inside us.

Now there is a second reason that I believe we want to put off the old life.

Have you ever come across something out in the country or a hike that is dead and has been dead for a while? Stinks pretty bad doesn't it? Dead things are foul, they will make you choke up if you get too big a whiff of them. Flesh does not do well once the life has been taken out of it.

Most of you know the story of Jesus' friend Lazarus. Jesus was out teaching and preaching and the news came to Him that His friend Lazarus was sick and nearing death. Jesus didn't immediately respond and by the time Jesus arrived Lazarus had died. But Jesus knew this wasn't a permanent death.

This is where we pick up the story. Jesus comes to Bethany and He asks where they have laid the body of Lazarus. The family had placed the body of Lazarus in a rock tomb and covered it with a stone.

And Jesus tasks them in **John 11:39-44**, **“³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”**

Four days Lazarus had been dead and even though I am sure they had anointed his body with flowers and spices, a dead body does what a dead body does. It began to decompose.

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

What an incredible miracle. Before Jesus came to Bethany, before He raised Lazarus from the dead He said He was glad that He was not there before Lazarus died. He was glad that the people and family around Lazarus and His disciples were not there to heal him because Jesus wanted them to see the power of God resurrect the dead.

The power of God raising Lazarus from the dead might have been an example of what was going to occur after Jesus died. I don't think the disciples made the connection but they could have.

But something else interesting happened in this miracle. After Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus come out, out of the tomb Lazarus came.

This passage says the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped in strips of linen and a cloth around his face. I would think that it wasn't just his hands and feet that were covered but his whole body. Can you imagine the shape those strips of linen were in?

All of Lazarus fluids were seeping out his body and the linens were absorbing them. I am sure the fluids were pretty bad when they first came out but they had been saturating the linen over a four day period. No wonder Martha said there was a stench.

Jesus goes on and tells those around Lazarus to remove the grave clothes and let him go free.

I wanted to tell you this morning that this is the same message Jesus has for you today. You have been raised to a new life in Christ and you can take off the old smelly grave clothes of your former life and you can learn to live free in the new life you have with Him.

Now here is the thing about the grave clothes of your former life. Not only are the grave clothes the sin nature you were born with deceitful but that sin nature is also dead and because it is dead it is rotten, smelly, it has a terrible stench.

When you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior I hope and pray that you did not just accept Him as your Savior for when this life is over. But I hope that you accepted Him as your Savior from your old life and that He is now Lord of your life.

There is more than salvation in eternity that happened for us in this life when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

2. We have been **crucified** with Christ

Romans 6:3, 6, “...or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death....knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin for he who has died is free from sin.”

Since we have identified ourselves with Christ’s crucifixion we are freed from the power and deceitfulness of sin and the sin nature in our lives. Not only this but we are freed from the penalty of sin.

1 Peter 2:24, “And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

Romans 6:10, “For the death that he died, He died to sin once for all...”

3. Jesus took the **penalty** for your sin

When you accepted Jesus Christ, then He took the penalty for your sin. This means all the sins you have committed and all the sins you will commit are forgiven.

I know this is an incredible truth but it is just that, truth. Your sins of yesterday, today and tomorrow are already forgiven.

Now we are to confess our sins, not so we can obtain forgiveness, that has already been taken care of. But so we make sure there is no blockage in the flow of our relationship with God and to help us from going down the path of a sin-filled life.

One of the deceitfulness of sin is if we stay engaged in it, it will take us further and deeper than we ever intended to go. God wants to protect you from that so He asks that you come to Him, take ownership of your sin and ask for forgiveness.

Remember that 1 Peter 2:24, “And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness...”

Christ died so we can be delivered from our sinful nature and so we can live a pure and holy life.

Galatians 5:24, “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh, with its passions and desires.”

We get to enter into the process of holy living by daily putting to death our flesh with its deceitful passions and desires.

Now in the passages we are going to be looking at next week, it gets into specific behaviors as I mentioned before. Behaviors like lying, anger, stealing and speaking words that are unwholesome.

I don't really think I need to spend a lot of time with these because...and this is my main point this morning.

If Christ has died for your sins, past, present and future. And if you have been crucified with Christ and the old person has been put to death, then why would you want to put back on your old sin nature which is also dead, rotten, smelly, putting off a terrible stench thing?

As people we know better than to mess with something that is dead. Beyond the stench there is infectious diseases that a person could catch.

Well, the same is true with your old sin nature. You can choose to live in the deadness of life but why would you?

Even a sin that you are tempted to commit, it has already been taken care of by the blood of Jesus making it dead as well. If you choose to go ahead and knowingly sin then it is like taking up your old dead clothes, stench and all, and putting them back on.

This is not the life Christ died for you. Jesus says to you this morning, "Take off your grave clothes, be free of them and learn what it means to live in your new life which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness.

O people of God, this is where we want to live isn't?

Once again I say, **Take off your grave clothes and do not put them back on. They are dead, smelly and not of you anymore.**

Amen?