

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
August 9, 2015  
Ephesians 4:17-24  
Those Old Clothes Do Not Fit Our New Life  
Rev. George Ferch

Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

There are clothes you no longer want to wear, clothes you can no longer wear, and clothes you should no longer wear. I am paraphrasing the Goodwill Store commercial about donating those clothes to them.

Likely all those clothes are old. Those old clothes are neither stylish nor appropriate. They are taking up closet space we need to fill with new clothes. We will wear those new clothes in good conscience as a reflection of whom we are today, not “back in the day.”

The Apostle Paul used the illustration of taking off the garment of our old self, and putting on the garment of the new self. Those garments are seen in our actions. My sinful nature with the futility of its thinking is my old wardrobe. My new nature with righteousness and holiness like God are the new clothes for my new life.

Our theme then is **Those Old Clothes Do Not Fit Our New Life**. The old clothes are our former way of life. Our new life is one of righteousness and holiness in Christ.

Paul was in prison in Rome. He wrote to the Christians in Ephesus and to us, “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” [4:1] We must no longer live as the “Gentiles do.” Paul used the word Gentiles here as a synonym for unbelievers. Christians are entirely different people from what we were before.

Unbelievers live “in the futility of their thinking.” [17] We lived that way, too, before the Holy Spirit came into our hearts through the gospel of Christ. It is futile, that is, empty, useless to believe that I can be happy, at peace, and hopeful without Christ in my thoughts and life. How often don't we hear people say, “My life is so empty.” Or worse, “I have filled my life with sexual immorality, greed, and ambition and I really am happy.”

Where does such “old clothes thinking” come from? The unbeliever's sinful, corrupted nature has made them total strangers to the spiritual life that only God gives through his Word. Whose fault is this? Satan's lies are part of it. Yet Paul places the blame on the person. That person gives themselves over to sin by indulging in it and seeking more of it. Paul uses a word that means “unrestrained living.”

Finally, the unbeliever hardens the heart against the natural knowledge of the law so he lives in ignorance even of that. In the futility of their thinking, the Gentiles believe these insatiable cravings will lead to happiness when in fact they lead only to eternal death apart from God.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians and to us, “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.” [22]

Our old self, our sinful nature, continues to corrupt us. My sinful nature is something I carry as long as I live. I experience daily the constant threat of my Old Adam with his bad reputation and insatiable desire for evil. It deceives me into thinking that just maybe those old clothes will make me cool and popular again. Maybe sin will give me much to enjoy and gain. Old Adam says nothing of sin and the destruction sin brings.

The Ephesian believers and we no longer are Gentiles. Therefore, we are no longer to dress as Gentiles. Unrestrained living with its filthiness and insatiable cravings are old clothes from back

in the day when we weren't in Christ. We no longer want to wear them, can no longer wear them, and should no longer wear them.

But how can we do that? God has done it for us. Our new life is one of righteousness and holiness in Christ. God has brought us to faith. He has "put off the old self" for us. [22] Now, the sins of our Old Adam God no longer charges against us because Jesus took them to be nailed to his cross. Who wants to give the old nature the upper hand in his or her life? No Christian. We want to drown our Old Adam through daily contrition and faith.

It is part of my old nature to deceive me into thinking that God overlooks my sins because I am a believer. The Bible assures me that God does not overlook sin in anyone or for any reason. God has forgiven all my sins for the sake of his Son Jesus' innocent suffering and death on behalf of all sinners. Because of that, I will apply to my daily repentance and confession this advice, "He who wants to keep his garden tidy doesn't reserve a plot for weeds."

Assured of my forgiveness, I look to God's strength that he put off the old and out on the new in my new life. Note that "to be made new in the attitude of your minds...created to be like God," [23, 24] are passive verbs. God is the active agent in these acts. I am the recipient. God has created in me a new self, a new attitude, new clothes of a love for what is right, and an unchanging aversion to sin.

This is the image of God according to the New Man renewed in the Christian through the gospel. My new attitude is what motivates and empowers me. My new self controls thoughts, words and actions. God continues to renew this attitude through his life-giving means of grace.

Paul expresses this same truth to the Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." [2:20]

The constant pursuit of sinful earthly pleasure is the chief attire of the unbeliever for life. While he or she lives in this world, the Christian still possesses that same sinful nature. I must contend with that same deceitful desire in my life. What I will do is put off that old self, not wear it. What I will do is put on my new attire God has given me. I will wear the garments of my salvation with a good conscience reflecting who I am today, a child of God in Christ Jesus. Amen. <SDG>