

Sunday Apr. 18, 2021
Lesson 7: Clothed With The New Person
Scripture: Ephesians 4: 21-32

Context:

As the church continues in the season of Easter, we celebrate how we have been given new life and a new way of being. Today's lesson comes from the book of Ephesians, a letter written to the church in Ephesus. We will focus on how we need to identify ways we need to change our former way of life so we may live a life of holiness in God's new creation.

While it may be easy to read these passages through the lens of moral imperatives given down, it is important to note the time and place the letter was written. Many of the early churches were still basing life on what they knew before becoming Christians. They knew the pagan outlook and practices well and thus lived into those lifestyles.¹ The writer wants them to understand the new practices to come with a life in Christ.

As a result of their change to the Christian lifestyle, they are called to see a new way of being. There is to be an intellectual awakening and moral awareness as part of their lives.² As they live into the network of new social relationships, there are some down-to-earth behavior patterns they are to follow: love of truth, honest purpose in daily work, altruistic concern for those in need, sincere speech, and a recognition we are not our own because of the Spirit's seal upon us.³ These new behaviors may be challenging and yet they are what will help the Christians to be who God has called them to be.

This section contains several admonitions for how to behave properly and respond to the old ways of doing things. For example, the focus on being angry without sinning speaks to how anger is a natural human emotion, but in the Christian lifestyle doing things to appease that anger such as taking revenge or engaging in a physical altercation are not Christian. Furthermore, habits such as stealing are also not Christian and should instead turn into giving what one has to others in need.

In all of this, they are given a new nature. The twin parts of this new nature are righteousness and holiness, both under the rubric of God's Lordship, which both sets the standard and supplies the motive power for attaining that norm in daily and communal living.⁴ Both of these standards of life will help them to live into who God has called them to be and to strive for life-giving behaviors.

The closing words of the letter remind them of the virtues they are to possess: kindness, compassion, and forgiving natures. These are to guide their way of life and give

¹ Ralph P. Martin, "Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 57.

² Ibid., 60.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 61.

them direction. They are to remember the new life they have received in Christ.

Application

Ephesians has always been known as a book of ecclesiology, a book pertaining to how the church is called to be and function. Throughout the letter, there are practical prescriptions for how the church is to function and how the lives of individuals should comport themselves in order to live with others. The people are reminded of how the Holy Spirit works and the tangible fruits to be found in their lives.

Today's scripture lesson focuses on how the lives of the people should be changed by being baptized into the faith. The people are to wear new clothes in their behavior and act differently. These are ongoing clothes they are to wear and live into as they do life with one another.

How might we see ourselves in new clothes, which reveal the better parts of ourselves? Even though many Christians do not come from "pagan" worlds, we do know that at times, the secular forces can teach us certain things which do not reflect a life in Christ. Lying is okay if one is able to get away with something. Being angry is justified if one can get back at someone. Foul words and slandering others has become commonplace as people think it is okay to attack others to get their way. And bitterness is an easy pill to swallow and allows for one to always be a victim.

The behaviors listed in this scripture passage are ones we can honestly admit we may have struggled with from time to time. Even if we are lifelong Christians who have been raised in the church, we can all slip into the behaviors when we are not at our best. Often, we even start doing them without realizing we are doing them.

What I have often discovered happens when we slip into these behaviors comes from how we are not taking care of ourselves spiritually or physically. The more we engage in spiritual disciplines the more we should be able to see the gift that is life and how God is at work to restore us. When we neglect those disciplines, we do not grow in that grace or love. My personal experience has been that those who regularly practice those spiritual disciplines are those who cultivate means of healthily engaging anger, bitterness, and any form of evil to come their way.

Some of these behaviors listed though also appear when we are not taking care of ourselves physically. How easy is it to criticize others, lose our tempers, slander, or shout when we are overstressed and overfunctioning? Whenever we are at our worst, it is usually because we have not slowed down to pay attention to our bodies or what is going on inside of us. Thus, it becomes easier to regress to negative behaviors in order to not deal with what our mind and body is calling us to do.

Part of the Christian life is about that act of slowing down so that we can appreciate life and not slip into this list of negative behaviors, which display us at our worst. The consequences, as we have all seen can be dire as we are separated from those around us when we lie, slander, or lose our tempers. As a result, there is a break in our Christians witness and we lose an opportunity to glorify God with our lives.

Today's lesson reminds us to slow down and to pay attention to those clothes, which show off our better qualities. We are to learn how to be loving, kind, forgiving, and encouraging. As we do, we become our best selves and we reflect how we are a new creation in Christ.

How do you see these behaviors come out when you are stressed or

overwhelmed? What are the spiritual or physical practices you take to help you engage when you notice these behaviors? Why do you think Christ calls us to clothe ourselves as kind, compassionate, and forgiving?

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