

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	A New Year Message		Pastor/Teacher
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Text:	Ephesians 4:20-24		
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Brand New

People have always been fascinated with what's fashionable, perhaps more so today than ever. It would not be an exaggeration to say that we have become obsessively clothes conscious as a culture. Image, so we are repeatedly told, is everything. The ultimate faux pas in many circles in our society is to be out of style.¹ My remarks are not restricted simply to high fashion such as comes out of Paris or London. Fashion statements dominate Generation X, and people years removed from their youth adopt the dress and look of our youth culture. Of course a lot of this is the result of never-ending sales-pitch that confronts us every waking hour of the day. "The promise from the fashion world to men and women" writes Hughes, "is sartorial regeneration – new birth through clothing – and it sells and sells and sells! The problem is, not only does clothing not make the man or woman – it covers up the real you. Clothing can polish the image but not the soul."²

The language that Paul has used in this section deals with the imagery of a wardrobe. In 4:17-19 the way of the Gentile world was laid out in order to contrast it with the Christian life. Having described the dominant features of the *old self* (a phrase that appears in 4:22), the Apostle turns his attention to the *new self*. Which we are instructed to put on like a new set of clothes.

I. THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE (20-21)

"But you did not so learn Christ" – the "you" is in the emphatic position in the Greek text – "if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught in Him." The NIV translation is to be preferred here. This "if" clause in the Greek text does not imply doubt, but gives emphasis. Thus "surely" is much better. Three specific things are now stated about believers' experience.

A. Its Manner: The way of the Gentiles is set off against the way of Christ, "But ye did not so learn Christ." The word "learn" is EMATHETE, literally to learn, the idea of schooling is involved, "students of Christ" because the word is related to the word MATHĒTĒS, disciple, pupil, follower. Calvin speaks of this as "teaching received in Christ's school."³ The lesson is completely different.

B. Its Beginning: "Ye have heard him," that is, Christ was the subject and content of the message they heard, and in hearing the response of faith (cf. Romans 10:14).

C. Its Basis: "and have been taught in Him," the main thought is that of UNION with Christ. It was in fellowship with Christ that they were instructed, "...even as truth is in Jesus." He is truth (John 14:6). This phrase "tells the kind of teaching which they had enjoyed, and the next verse contains its substance."⁴ It was not some Gnostic-type Christ, but "Jesus" Christ who died and rose again in a physical body. He died to redeem His people *from* sin, not to continue *in* sin. "The principle here involved is, that knowledge of God is inconsistent with a life of sin, because knowledge implies love, and God is holy."⁵

II. THE RESULT OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE (22-24)

v. 21b "...the truth that is in Jesus" is parenthetical. Paul now continues the thought of "teaching." They were taught:

A. The Putting off of the Old Self:⁶ APOTHESTHAI – literally to remove clothes or garments. The form is an aorist infinitive. The infinitive is used to denote the substance of what they were taught and is used to express a result. In other words this is *not* an exhortation per se but a declaration, "...so that you have put off..." What are they said to have put off? "The former manner of life" – TON PALAION ANTHRŌPON, literally the old man, "...which is corrupt" – PHTHEIROMENON, literally that which is going from bad to worse in its corruption; it is rotten, putrid, stinking and good for nothing, "...according to the deceitful lusts" – APATĒS, deceit, the expression is a subjective genitive, "the lusts which deceit uses or which are its instruments. This word "deceit" is set off against "truth" (v. 21).

B. The Renewal to the New Self: Having stated the negative, Paul now states the positive, "...and be renewed..." – ANANEOUSTHAI, literally renew, make new; it is not "renew yourselves"; "The verb expresses a spiritual change, a transformation from old to new."⁷ This renewal has taken place "in the spirit of your mind." It seems best to understand "spirit" as a reference to the human and not the Holy Spirit (compare Romans 12:1 and Colossians 3:10). "...and that ye put on the new man" – ENDUSASTHAI, to put, used in the sense of putting on a garment, the positive side of what was stated negatively in v. 22. The putting on of the new man (v. 24), the new man created after God is the new creation mentioned in Ephesians 2:10, created in true righteousness and holiness. The word translates "holiness" is HOSIOTĒS – piety, holiness. It indicates fulfilling the divine demands which God places upon men, unlike the word HAGIAZO, holy, sacred, consecrated, literally to be set apart; this word stresses piety.

CONCLUSION: The Bible presents us with a very vivid picture of human depravity. People are sinners by nature and choice. Before people can ever be accepted by God, not only must the guilt of sin be dealt with but also its power and defilement; there must be in the lives of those who claim the name of Christ a radical breach with sin. This can only be accomplished by Jesus Christ Himself, not moral reformation, but a supernatural re-birth. A birth born out of death, for all who are truly "born again" have died to sin (NOT "dead to sin"! They have died with Christ. They are risen with Christ. Only by union with Him is there life. The person who has died to sin no longer inhabits this world of sin; it is no longer the world of his thought, affections, will and behavior. If we continue to live in sin we have not died to sin, and if we have not died to sin, then we have not "learned" of Christ.

ENDNOTES

¹ Os Guinness has observed, "How has America's mania for style and image affected thinking and discussion? The potential

² R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of The Body of Christ* (Crossways, 1990), p. 139.

³ *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1973), p. 422.

⁴ J. Eadie, *A Commentary On The Greek Text of The Epistle of Paul To the Ephesians* (T & T Clark, 1883), p. 217.

⁵ C. Hodge, *Commentary On The Epistle To The Ephesians* (rpt. Revell, 1980), p. 257.

⁶ What is meant by the expressions *old man* and *new man* (as in the KJV) or *old self* and *new self* (as in the NIV)? It is commonly said to refer to the old nature and new nature in the believer; the believer is both. When he sins it is the old man, when he does righteousness it is the new man. This is *not* the position of the Apostle Paul, who declared that "our old man has been crucified" (Rom. 6:6), which is parallel to "we died to sin" and "we have been planted together in the likeness of his death" and "we died with Christ" (Rom. 6:2, 5, 8). The "old man" is the unregenerate man, and new man is the regenerate man; if you are one, you cannot be the other. The Apostle is not urging believers to stop being unregenerate but to desist from the characteristic behavior of the "old man" – behave like the new creation that you really are! Furthermore, the description Paul gives of the "old man" is diametrically opposed to the believer. Paul knew all too well that Christians are not perfect and that they must still contend with indwelling sin, but not man has a right to call himself a "follower" of Christ who fits the description of vv. 17-19. It is best therefore not to confuse the expression "old man" with "the sin principle" or

“indwelling sin.” They are not the same. For an extended discussion on this cf. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Eerdmans, 1981), p. pp. 202-228.

⁷ S.D.F. Salmond, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* III (rpt. Eerdmans, 1970), p. 342.