

“Put on the New Self”
(Ephesians 4:17-32)

I. Introduction.

A. Review.

1. There are three main blessings that come from union with Christ: justification, adoption and sanctification.
2. Justification happens in God’s court of law: He declares us not guilty.
3. Adoption happens in God’s family: He takes us into His own household and makes us His beloved children.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we’ll want to consider the last blessing: sanctification.
2. It’s wonderful to have our sins forgiven and Christ’s righteousness given to us, but we need to remember that that takes place out there – outside our hearts, outside our personal experience.
3. It’s wonderful to be adopted into God’s family, to be loved by Him as His own Son, as His own children.
4. But apart from this last blessing, we wouldn’t be able to love Him back.
 - a. This evening, we’re going to look at sanctification: the process of becoming in reality what we are in principle – the children of God.
 - b. Children share the same nature as their parents. In this blessing, we actually begin to share the same holy nature as the Father and the Son, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

II. Sermon.

A. I would like to begin here as I have on the last two sermons, by looking at what sanctification is: “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

1. Unlike justification and adoption that happen only once, sanctification is a process.
 - a. You are justified once; that’s all you need: you don’t lose it.
 - b. You are adopted only once: once in God’s family, you are never disinherited.
 - c. But sanctification, personal sanctification, is something that goes up and down, is greater or lesser, is stronger or weaker.
 - (i) There is what’s called positional sanctification: what I am in Christ.
 - (ii) But there is also personal sanctification: what I am in myself.
2. Sanctification is a process of renewal of our whole being into God’s image.
 - a. When Adam sinned, he wiped that image completely away. It was erased.
 - b. But in Christ, that image is restored.
 - c. It’s never perfect in this life, but it is something we should be growing in.

- d. There are setbacks: one step forward, two back; two steps forward, one back.
 - e. But there is progress.
3. As we progress, we are enabled to sin less and obey more.
- a. That's how we know it's going on: When we see sin going out, and obedience coming in.
 - b. That's how we know the Spirit has united us to Christ.
 - c. Paul writes, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6:4-6).
 - d. This doesn't mean there won't be times when we can't see this happening or doubt our salvation. But it does mean that as a general rule, we will obey the Lord.
- B. Let's consider how Paul says this works in our passage.
1. He says before coming to Christ, we were completely dead, uninterested in the things of the Lord.
 - a. "This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness" (Ephesians 4:17-19).
 - b. He speaks to believers, to us, of what we used to be like.
 - (i) Our minds were futile, dark, ignorant.
 - (ii) Our hearts were hard.
 - (iii) Because our hearts were hard they gave themselves to obey sin *with greediness.*"
 - (iv) He says, "Don't you live like those who don't know God."
 2. But when Christ came in, that changed.
 - a. The Holy Spirit began the work of restoring His image in us, of sanctification.
 - b. But, I want you to notice that unlike regeneration, this includes labor on our part. Notice what Paul says in verses 20-24:
 - (i) But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."
 - (ii) Notice: *we* must lay aside the old things; *we* must put on the new.

- (iii) We must do this; the Spirit doesn't do it for us.
- (iv) He works in us to make us want to, but He doesn't do the work: we do.
- (v) Remember, regeneration is monergistic – God does it by Himself.
- (vi) Sanctification is synergistic – we are coworkers with God.

3. Now how does this work itself out in our lives? Paul gives us several practical exhortations, which also prove to be examples of how to apply this principle:
- a. “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one *of you*, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (v. 25).
 - (i) If we were given to lying, we are to stop lying and begin speaking the truth.
 - (ii) This applies to what we say to others, what we write, what we say to ourselves.
 - (iii) Our lives are to be characterized by truth.
 - b. “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity” (vv. 26-27).
 - (i) If we had a problem with getting angry about the wrong things, we can still get angry, but now only about the right things.
 - (ii) But not for very long so that it doesn't become bitterness.
 - (a) Anger is supposed to be temporary, to help us overcome a problem.
 - (b) It's not meant to be permanent.
 - (iii) We must learn to forgive one another the wrongs we commit against each other, or we give the devil the opportunity to hurt people through us.
 - c. “Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have *something* to share with him who has need” (v. 28).
 - (i) If we had a problem with stealing, we are no longer to take what doesn't belong to us.
 - (ii) Instead we are to work to give to those who don't have what they need.
 - d. If we were accustomed to tearing people down with our words, we need to begin focusing on building them up:
 - (i) “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, that it may give grace to those who hear” (v. 29).
 - (ii) Sometimes it seems as though we don't care what the Lord says. But He cares. He wants His will to be carried out.
 - (iii) And there are blessings for doing so, and discipline for not.
 - e. In short we are no longer to allow ourselves to sin and grieve God's Spirit.
 - (i) “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (v. 30).

- (ii) The more we sin, the more we grieve Him, and the more we grieve Him, the more we will sin, because He's the only One who is able to keep us from sinning in the first place. It's a vicious circle.
 - (iii) The more we have of the Spirit, the more He makes the invisible things of God real to us.
 - (iv) But the less we have of Him, the more unreal they seem.
 - (v) Since they are real, it's obviously better to have more of the Spirit to show us they are, instead of having our minds clouded with unbelief.
- f. We are to purge our hearts of everything that creates division: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (v. 31).
- g. And we are to cultivate the things that create unity: "And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (v. 32).
- h. Do you want to please God, really please Him? Then listen to His Word:
- (i) Put off your sins, the things that tear down, the things that divide.
 - (ii) And put on Christ, His love, His mercy, the things that build up and unify.
 - (iii) Jesus tells us, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9).
 - (iv) Pursue that righteousness and holiness without which no man will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14) by His grace, and you will please God and grow in His likeness. Amen.