

Putting On the New Self – Part I – *Ephesians 4:24*

Sermon by Associate Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION

Well, I'd like to tell you a sad story to start our message today. Doesn't that sound fun?! This is a story of a man we'll call Bill. Now our friend Bill lived a pretty ordinary life growing up without Christ. He worked hard and he partied hard and he chased after lots of dreams and pleasures, but whatever he did in his life he always seemed to have an enduring sense of emptiness. He also developed quite a few scars as he went through life and he picked up some really bad habits. And one thing he learned really well was how to get what he wanted even at the expense of others. You could say he was very self-centered and this self-centeredness seriously affected his relationships and caused most of them to be short-lived and shallow. He grew to really dislike most other people and got very skilled at blaming them for his problems and holding resentment and bitterness in his heart. He could never quite see that the way he treated others was a big part of the problem.

Well one day when things were looking particularly bleak and he was feeling overwhelmed with the hopelessness of life, he met a man who seemed to have some hope. This man was an evangelist and had noticed the hopelessness in Bill's eyes and demeanor and had taken the time to ask him how he was doing and if anything was the matter. Bill was at a really low point that day and was ready to talk to anyone who would listen. He shared his heart and his frustrations and his hopelessness with the evangelist and the evangelist pointed him to the hope that is found only in Christ. Bill's eyes were opened to the truth of the gospel of salvation and new life in Christ and he became a new creation that day and finally saw a glimmer of hope in his dark world.

And now you're probably wondering why I said this was a sad story. Well the sad part comes in what happened next. The evangelist had visited a lot with Bill after he accepted Christ and he encouraged him to find a church where he could connect with some other believers and hear the preaching of God's Word. Bill followed his advice and found a Christian church that he soon started attending.

The people seemed nice and the pastor was definitely preaching out of the Bible, so he settled in and became a regular attender at this new church. Each week Bill listened to the preaching of the Word and found that the pastor was really good at showing him where he needed improvements in his Christian life. In fact, every week he left feeling extremely guilty about his life and choices and he would resolve to really work hard on trying to make these needed changes in his life.

Now Bill had some success in cleaning up some of the big noticeable things that were really frowned upon in church circles. He stopped swearing, he gave up smoking, and he stopped getting drunk and partying with his friends. However, some other less noticeable things were much harder to let go...the self-centeredness, the anger, the bitterness, the difficulty he had forgiving other people, his love of money, and on and on.

And sadly he wasn't getting any help from his pastor or any other church members on how he could actually get rid of these things in his life. Instead he just heard over and over again from the pulpit about all the things he needed to clean up in his life...the guilt trip never seemed to end. Over time Bill made a little bit of progress on some of these things through reading the Bible and trying harder, but mostly he just remained stuck in his old self and his old ways of living and thinking and dealing with life. As the years went by, Bill just got used to the routine and settled in being an average Christian who attended church faithfully each Sunday, volunteered here and there, and then went about his business the rest of the week. Sadly, Bill never learned how to put on his new self and experience true freedom from his old ways of living. He grew into a crusty old man who struggled with negativity and bitterness, and he got really good at pointing out the faults of others showing them where they weren't quite measuring up.

Well my goal today and in the weeks to come is to make sure what happened to Bill doesn't happen to any of us. And for any Bills out there today, I'd like to share God's recipe for freedom, because I'm convinced that it's never too late for any of us to start growing young again and finally learn how to put on the new self.

II. BELIEVERS DON'T AUTOMATICALLY PUT THE NEW SELF ON (1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-3)

You see what happened to Bill is a real possibility in the lives of people who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It's possible to experience new life in Christ and then get off track and never move beyond the elementary principles of the faith. It's possible for us to continue walking in the ways of our old self and never learn in a practical way what it means to walk in newness of life. God is always working to bring us into our new self, but we can resist it and allow ourselves to be deceived by Satan into thinking we can never really walk the way the Bible teaches us to walk.

We have a good example in the Bible of a case where this was happening and Paul was very concerned about it. Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verses 1 to 3. Paul, addressing the believers at the church in Corinth, says:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

Here we see Paul addressing people who have definitely experienced new birth in Christ. Clearly they are true believers: Paul identifies them as infants in Christ. They've been born. And yet they seem to be stuck in the infant stage. They're not moving on to the point where they can feed themselves and begin to understand the deeper truths of the faith. And how did Paul know this? He knew that they were stuck at the infant stage because there was jealousy and strife among them. And when jealousy and strife exist among believers, we can know that someone involved is still walking in their old self...In their flesh. They are walking just like people in the world who don't know Christ.

So let this be a warning to us today. It is a real possibility for us to remain in our old self, never growing young again in our minds, and never truly learning to put on and walk in the new self that God has created for each true believer.

And we can know this is happening in our own lives when we see strife and jealousy and bitterness and anger and selfish ambition and any of the other ways of our old self taking root or operating inside us. When we see those things in our own life, let it be a wake-up call that drives us to our knees in repentance and a desperate seeking of God. Only He can enable us to finally let go of our old self and its ways. And believe me, He wants to do just that and will take us there when we're finally ready to cooperate with Him and let Him get to work on us.

Now as we start examining how to put on the new self today, let's read our central passage again in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 20 to 24:

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.

Clearly Paul believes that taking off the old self, being renewed in our minds, and putting on the new self is something that each believer can and must do. We've already looked extensively over the last few weeks at taking off the old self and at being renewed in our minds, so now our task in the next few weeks will be to find out how we can go about putting on our new self.

III. THERE'S A BATTLE GOING ON BETWEEN THE NEW AND OLD SELF (ROMANS 7:14-25)

The first thing we need to understand as we begin is that there's a raging battle going on inside each of us: the battle between our old self and our new self. There's probably no better picture of this battle in Scripture than in Romans chapter 7 verses 14 to 25. Turn there in your Bibles if you would and we'll read about the battle that was going on even within the apostle Paul, who we would probably each view as pretty much having it all together and definitely as someone who was a great example of what it means to walk worthy. So let's read Romans chapter 7, verses 14 to 25. Remember, Paul is describing himself in this passage. He says:

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind and serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Now there's a lot to this passage and we could probably spend several weeks trying to glean all the stuff we could learn from it, but today I hope you noticed that intense battle that is going on within every believer between our old self and our new self. And this battle was even raging within the apostle Paul. When we come to Christ our new self is created and we suddenly have a desire to do what is right and follow God's way. However, our old self and its sinful ways is still very much active in our bodies and is ready to fight tooth and nail against any changes that God wants to bring about. Fortunately our new self wants to do what is right and hates it when we do things we know are wrong. So at least the desire to change is there.

And interestingly, this desire is actually one of the evidences that we've truly come to new life in Christ; when we move from knowing we SHOULD be good to actually wanting to be good and feeling intense turmoil when we see ourselves not being good.

Also, I want you to notice that Paul considers his new self to be the real him. His identity is now found in being a new creation, loved and accepted by God. That is who he now is. This allows him to take comfort in the fact that when he makes

mistakes and allows the old self to rise up again, it's not the real him. Paul says: ***"But if I'm doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me."*** He is secure in his new identity in Christ and when sin tries to rise up in him, he recognizes it as his old self and puts it to death again by the power of the Spirit. The fact that this battle is even going on is more evidence that he's a true child of God.

So the wanting to be good is there because of our new self, but how can we break free from that old self that still wants to run our life? How can we win this battle and consistently be putting on the new self and choosing it's ways instead of the ways of our old self. That is the question I hope to answer this week and in the weeks to come. And as we begin this study, Paul give us the key ingredient for success when he says toward the end of the Romans passage:

***Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***

He reminds us that we can only escape from our old self through the power of God Himself and the new life He has given us through Jesus Christ. So as we begin, make sure your focus remains not on your own strength and willpower, but on Jesus Christ and the power of His Holy Spirit.

IV. IF YOU ARE IN CHRIST, YOU HAVE A NEW SELF THAT HAS BEEN CREATED IN HIM AND IS READY FOR YOU (EPHESIANS 4:24; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17)

Well the good news for each of us here today who have put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is that our new self has already been created and is ready to be put on like clothes. According to Ephesians chapter 4 verse 24 this new self has been created...past tense. At the moment of salvation you and I were born again, just as Jesus had tried to get Nicodemus to understand in the book of John. Something new and amazing was created inside us at that moment and it has quite literally changed everything and opened up a whole new world of possibilities. Welcome to the new you, created in the likeness of God and ready for you to put on like a new set of expensive clothes that you would otherwise never be able to afford.

2nd Corinthians chapter 5 verses 16 and 17 speak of this inner transformation that took place at the moment we placed our faith in Jesus Christ. Paul says:

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

When we placed our faith in Christ we became united with Him. Our old self was crucified with Him on the cross and the penalty we deserved was forever taken up by Christ. And not only that, but we were also raised to life in Christ...Our new self was created as we moved from death to life, having been resurrected with Christ.

What happened to us at salvation could be compared to a person on death row with no hope, simply waiting out the time remaining before the electric chair. We went from being in that hopeless condition under the penalty of death, to having an innocent person rise up and take the electric chair for us, removing forever the penalty we deserved and setting us free from prison and bondage and condemnation. Imagine how that would feel!

If you think that's an exaggeration of what Christ did for us and how each of us should feel, listen to Colossians chapter 2 verses 13 to 15 and see if this is not exactly what has happened to each of us:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

We were spiritually dead and under the wrath of God and heading inevitably to that day when we would have to pay the penalty for our sin and our rebellion against God. But Christ stepped in while we were still in that state and made us alive, forgiving all of our sins and canceling out forever the gigantic debt we owed, nailing it to the cross on which He died to pay the debt we owed.

And not only that, He also made a public spectacle of Satan and his demons who were gathered around and looking forward to that day when we would have to suffer with them and live in the utter misery of eternal life without God. So in reality that picture of the person on death row is just a pale, pale comparison with what has been accomplished in each of us who have come to new life in Christ. Our sins have been forgiven forever, our insurmountable debt has been paid, and our new self has been created and is ready to be put on.

And this new self truly is new. The Greek word translated, “new,” here is *kainos*. This word speaks not just of a fresh start, as if we've simply been given a second chance to start over with a clean slate. Instead it speaks of being new in substance... New as in a completely different kind, unprecedented, novel, uncommon or unheard-of. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* describes it as of a different nature from what is contrasted as old...something entirely new and different.

Our new self is a fresh creation of God that is completely different from what we were before. Before we came to Christ it was absolutely impossible for us to please God. No matter how many nice things we tried to do or how many good works we were involved in, God was not impressed or pleased. We remained under His wrath and subject to the penalty we deserved. But now in Christ our new self can please God and the things we do by the power of His Spirit for His glory are actually very pleasing to Him. Before we came to Christ we were spiritually dead and stuck in the ways of our old self, utterly unable to break free and experience true heart change. But now in Christ our new self is spiritually alive and in fellowship with the God of the universe and has the power to break free from sin and leave behind the empty ways of our old self. When we put on our new self we CAN live the way the Bible teaches us to live... There is not a command in Scripture that cannot be lived out when we put on the new self and learn to walk in by the power of the Spirit.

V. YOUR NEW SELF HAS BEEN CREATED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS OF THE TRUTH (EPHESIANS 4:24)

So we've learned so far today and in our past messages that each of us who have placed our faith in Christ have a new self that has been created and is ready to put on. Additionally, Ephesians 4 verse 24 tells us not only that our new self has

been created, but that it has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Now righteousness is defined as that character or quality of being right or just and describes that which is consistent with God's own nature and promises. In discussing the Greek word translated righteousness, *Vine's* says that the righteousness spoken of in the New Testament "is unattainable by obedience to any law, or by any merit of man's own, or any other condition than that of faith in Christ.... The man who trusts in Christ becomes 'the righteousness of God in Him,'" In other words, he "becomes in Christ all that God requires a man to be, all that he could never be in himself." Isn't that a beautiful truth? At salvation each of us becomes in Christ the righteousness of God. Christ's righteousness is credited to us and our identity is now completely wrapped up in Christ and His righteousness.

Don't you long to remain in Christ? In Him we are new and righteous and have become all that God requires us to be. Let that truth sink in for a moment. Are you still working your tail off in your own strength trying to become what God wants you to be? Are you still trying to earn His love and acceptance? If so, it's time to change your perspective and realize that your new self in Christ has already become everything God wants you to be. In Christ you are complete and acceptable to God and you are righteous because of Christ. The challenge for us now is to learn to walk in that new identity and righteousness by putting on our new self and through the Spirit putting to death the ways of our old self.

You see the identity of our new self is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ and His righteousness. Remember that beautiful passage we looked at a few weeks ago in Colossians chapter 3 when we talked about setting our minds on things above. Remember in verse 3 it said: ***For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*** In Christ we have peace with God. In Christ there is no condemnation. In Christ we are out from under the wrath of God. In Christ our old self has been crucified with Christ and has died. Our challenge now is to not let our old self get up off the ground and try to take over our lives again. And in order to keep this from happening we need the power of the Spirit within us because Satan is constantly trying to resurrect our old self and cause it to continue running our lives and leading us away from close fellowship with our God.

The last thing Satan wants is for us to begin walking in the new self, showing the world what God is like and how He can transform even the most desperately wicked person into someone who begins to look like Christ.

Your new self has also been created in holiness. It has been set apart for God and His purposes. Your new self has been designed to be completely different and separated and devoted to the God of the universe. God is holy, holy, holy. He is far above and beyond anything we can even imagine. He is so awesome and astounding and worthy of all praise that there are creatures in heaven who do nothing else day and night but praise Him and give Him glory and honor, declaring: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." If we came face-to-face with God the Father right now, we would be flat on our faces in awe and respect and reverence. And the only way we will ever be able to stand in His presence is through the work of Christ on our behalf and the fact that our identity and our righteousness now comes from Him alone. In Christ we have been made alive and set apart for His purposes. In Christ we are new and finally have peace with God. In Christ our new self has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

VI. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So what does this all mean for us today? What have we learned today about putting on our new self? Well first we learned that just because a person puts their faith in Christ and comes to new life in Him, it doesn't automatically follow that they will effectively learn how to put on the new self and walk in their new identity. There is a real possibility (and I think we've all seen examples) that some Christians will never move far beyond salvation and the basics of the faith and they will continue to allow the ways of their old self to maintain a hold on their lives. And there is a danger for all of us that even if we leave behind most of the ways of our old self, there can still be pockets of ungodliness that still try to rise up and keep us from walking according to God's design.

Take a moment right now if you would to think about yourself and where you're at in this process. Can you identify any areas of your life where the ways of your old self are still hanging on? I'd like you to ask yourself why those parts of your old self are so hard to let go? Why are you allowing those things to have a root in your life and what's it going to take for you to hand them over to God and invite

Him into the depths of your heart to bring healing and allow you to release them to Him? What are you waiting for? Please spend some time now and in the week to come talking to God about these areas in your life and asking Him to show you what needs to happen so you can finally let them go and step into the beautiful new you He has created for you.

There's a really great song by Sara Groves called, "Like A Skin," that talks about leaving our old self behind and putting on the new self, comparing it to what happens with a butterfly and a snake. I'd like to read the lyrics for you now as you think about what God is calling you to today:

The butterfly can just look back
Flap those wings and say, "Oh yeah"
I never have to be a worm again

The snake gets tired of being him
He wriggles from that itchy skin
Leaves it lying where he's been and moves on

I've been longing for something tangible
Some kind of proof that there's been change in me

Feels like I've been waking up
Only to fight with the same old stuff
Change is slow and it fills me with such doubt

Come on, new man, where've you been?
Help me wriggle from this self I'm in
And leave it like a skin upon the ground

What a great picture of what God is calling each of us to do today. To leave behind our dead skin and walk away forever...to leave behind our days as a worm and rise with the beautiful new wings of a butterfly.

We know from what we've studied today that if we are in Christ we do have a new self that has been created and is ready to be put on. We have been transformed from a worm to a butterfly. This new self has been created in righteousness and holiness. It's righteous only because of Christ and not because we've earned it or we've cleaned up our lives to the point where we deserve it. Our new self is a creation of God alone and comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. In Him we've been made complete and have been set apart for His purposes and for His glory.

Let's not waste any more time or energy following the ways of our old self. We've each been bought with a price: the precious blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. We been forgiven of so many things and so many mistakes we've made. Let's not respond to the amazing gift of forgiveness and new life by holding on to the ways of our old self and refusing to step into the beautiful new clothes God has given us. Let's not hold onto bitterness and anger and malice and hardness of heart and self-centeredness and a refusal to forgive. Let's not continue to walk in sin and lust and immorality. What a slap in the face of our blessed Savior when we continue to walk in the ways of our old self and refuse to put on the beautiful new set of clothes that He bought with His own blood... The highest price imaginable.

Think about our friend Bill I told you about at the beginning of the message today. What a sad story. Here's a man who came to new life in Christ and yet never learned to put on the new self. He never learned about the depth of God's love and personal care for him. He never walked into that moment by moment love relationship with Him. He never learned to delight in God and understand how much God delights in him. He never learned to walk by the power of the Spirit. Instead he spent his life feeling guilty and trying to follow a list of do's and don'ts in his own strength, just going through the motions of religion. He never experienced the transforming power of a deep and personal love relationship with Jesus Christ.

Please don't let that be you. It's never too late to let go of your old self and walk into the new you God has created for you. And if you're already on this path, then stay on it and keep pursuing Christ and delighting in Him. Keep allowing your mind to grow young again and be transformed by the power of His Word. Leave your dead skin laying on the ground and move on. Never go back to being a worm again, but instead start using the beautiful new wings you've been given.

We have a lot more to learn about putting on the new self in the weeks to come and I'm looking forward to sharing more about what Scripture teaches us about how we can actually do it in a practical sense.