

Ephesians 4:17-24 *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. ²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² 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; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Be all that you can be

1. Understand who you are now
2. Put off the old man
3. Put on the new man

For over twenty years beginning around 1980, the Army recruiting slogan was “Be all that you can be.” Since 2006, the slogan around recruiting offices and in those snazzy commercials has been “Army Strong,” and before that, it was the epic fail that was “Army of One.” Many are suggesting today that the Army should bring back the successful slogan, “Be all that you can be.” That was successful because it implied a challenge and a promise. The challenge is that you are not reaching your full potential. Do you have what it takes to reach that potential? The promise is that the Army will help you be all that you can be.

Can you picture yourself as a soldier? Many of you have and many of you served. We thank you for your service to our country, whether in the Army or another branch of the military. The Apostle Paul is not urging military service here nor is he advocating that we approach Christian life like a battle – that will come in a few weeks. What he is wanting us to do is reach our potential as Christians, to be all that you can be in Christ.

Paul puts our life in the context of what Jesus did for us. He wrote, *That, however, is not the way of life you learned²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.* Paul does not use the human name of our Savior very often. When he does, he always has in mind the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through that death and resurrection, Jesus has redeemed us from sin, death and hell.

That redemption becomes our own through baptism. Paul told us to *put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* Where does that new self come from? It was given to you at your baptism. Jesus called it being born again. We were dead in sin, now we have been given a new life, like we were born anew. In his letter to the Romans, Paul put it this way: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6:3,4)

In baptism, God gave us a new life that Paul describes as *true righteousness and holiness.* Do you love God? Do you love God’s Word? Do you love to worship God? Do you love to do his will? That is the new man created in you by the Holy Spirit. Thank God for that new man of faith. For the new man is a gift of God. For most of us the new man was born in us in baptism when we were babies. Before we could even know that we needed faith, God worked faith in our hearts and created the new man in us. No longer are we old, now we are new, children of God and heirs of heaven.

When you are just hanging out around the house or working in the yard, you certainly don’t wear your best clothes. Your best clothes are reserved for better places. You wear your best clothes when you go out to eat or to a party, or maybe when you have to meet a client. You wear your best clothes when you want to make a good impression on others. We do the same thing with our behavior. When we want to make a good impression, we are polite and we practice good etiquette. Paul encourages us here to put on our good clothes. To be who we are in Christ. He wants us to put off the old and put on the new.

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. Mankind has accomplished great things in the last

couple centuries. Cars, airplanes, spaceflight. We put a man on the moon! The advances in technology are staggering. The advances in medical care amazing. Many people think that given enough time mankind will be able to solve all the problems that this world faces. But the Apostle Paul says that their thinking is futile, that is, they don't have a clue. Mankind can't make proper judgements about God, about what is right or wrong, or how to reach eternal life. Their minds are darkened, rooted in ignorance. By nature, mankind is blind, stupid, dull and unreceptive to spiritual things.

What a world Paul lived in! What a world we live in! Our society is really no different from the First Century Roman Empire. We may have more technology than those people did, but we have more ways of seeing and reading immorality than they did. Our country today has lost its sensitivity to what is moral and what is immoral. In fact, we live in society that tells us what is immoral is really moral and vice versa. Our country today seeks to indulge in every kind impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Someone recently pointed out that sex has been politicized. Everything that is going on today is about having sex with anyone anytime and with no consequences. That's what's behind the LGBTQ movement and the abortion industry. It's becoming accepted in public education that to criticize the morality of these things is the most immoral thing you can do. Christians are being marginalized on purpose. That's the society we live in. That's the society in which many of the Ephesian Christians once lived.

So, what did Paul tell them to do? What does he tell us to do? *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.* In baptism we were given a new man. But the old man still clings to us. In baptism, he was forced to surrender his evil dominion over us, but he has not given up his vile influence on us. Like a leech, he clings to our hearts in the hope of regaining one day the ground that was lost. We feel that old man clinging to our hearts, don't we? The lust, the selfishness, the self-righteousness, the impatience with the faults of others – all these show the old man is active in our lives. And to make matters worse, the old man of sin cannot be converted or reformed or improved. He is completely corrupt and totally depraved. We need to realize this so that we are in a position to take correct and effective action against him.

Paul says to take off that old man. He used the picture of changing clothes. When your clothes get dirty, you take them off. But what Paul is telling us here is by no means a quiet, gentle activity. It involves mortal combat, fight to the death. We can't pussyfoot around with the old man. He is not a pet to be kept nearby to play with. He is your worst enemy. He causes us more trouble, more pain and more danger to our eternal future than anything else in this world. So, put him off. Kill him. Crucify him.

How? By daily contrition and repentance. Take that old man with his evil desires and throw him to the ground in disgust. Stomp on him. Despise him. Hate him and trust Jesus to forgive the sins he has caused.

We need to remember who we are. If someone pulled you out of a burning building, would you run back in? In Jesus, through baptism, God has given us new life. He has rescued us from the body of death. Why would we want to run back into the flames of sins that was our old life under the old man? No, we are new. Let's be who we are in Christ. Let's be all that we can be.

Paul tells us to *be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* You are a Christian now and that means that there is something inside of you that's just dying to come out. It's a person who is pure, who has very high moral standards. It's a person who is repulsed by all the sin you see in the entertainment industry. It's a person who wants to serve God with all of his or her life. It's a person who is spiritual, not materialistic. That's the new person inside of you. He knows who Jesus is and wants to know him better. He wants to be like him in every aspect of his life. He wants to be righteous and holy every day.

That's the new person inside of you, created in your heart at your baptism, patterned after Christ and filled with the joy of the forgiveness of sins. Can you feel that person inside of you, just wanting to come out? He has the power to be all that you can be, a new self who says, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13) You are not stuck in your sin; you are not clamped to your culture; you are not helpless or hopeless. You can be all that you can be in Christ.

So, let us pray as we sang before:

"Jesus, your boundless love to me
No thought can reach, no tongue declare.
Dwell in my heart eternally,
And reign without a rival there.
To you alone, dear Lord, I live;
Myself to you, dear Lord, I give." (CW 479:1)