

“Put Off, Put On”

(Ephesians 4:17-5:2)

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Introduction: St. Paul Expressed a Deep Concern About Morality (by Inspiration of the Holy Spirit), which is to say that God did and does express a great concern about morality!

- A. Ephesus was a port city (the water was much closer to the ancient city in the 1st century AD). Why is this important?**
- B. Ships were a major mode of transportation and they facilitated the formation of an extremely diverse community by bringing foreigners to Ephesus who often stayed. With this growing cultural diversity was a resultant religious diversity...more people meant more false gods; more false gods meant more false worship.**
- C. Ephesus was already dedicated to certain more popular gods than others and Artemis was one of them. She – and so much for the notion that ancient cultures were strictly patriarchal, this is patently false as we would have also found female priestesses dedicated to Artemis – was especially believed in for her (supposed) power of fertility (which explains why she is often pictured the way she is; her weird body is meant to convey reproduction).**
- D. I choose Artemis as an example, not for trivia about ancient Ephesus, but more importantly for how people behaved because of the false idolatry she represented.**
- E. Those who followed her believed that because she had the power of fertility meant that she could be excited to help the land by having presented to her acts of immorality conducted in the presence of her statues and temples.**
- F. This reveals an immensely important association:**

Idolatry (wrong worship) produces Immorality (wrong behavior)

- G. When people worship false gods and turn away from the One true God, then it is absolutely inevitable that a wrong life will follow...it must follow...that**

is the only possible outcome (it is like a law of physics or any truism or axiom). That's just the way it is.

H. But all of this presents a sticky wicket.

1. Do we now automatically run over to legalism or moralism? No, Christianity is not moralism, but it produces good morals; Christianity is not legalism, but it produces children of God who consider God's commandments not to be burdensome (1st John 5:3).
2. Secondly, to get into this we have to ask ourselves: "Are we prepared to meet the displeasure of our own culture today which is stunningly similar to ancient Ephesus?" The answer here is even more straight-forward: as the children of God we must follow the LORD and His Word -- regardless of how we are perceived and received (or rejected) -- period. We cannot compromise; we cannot lose our saltiness.

I. And the content of Ephesians could not be more- timely or more needed. We too live in a port region (even more, an air travel region); neighbors to South America; home to a positively international community from all over the world...and like ancient Ephesus, we are a land of many gods...(which is why TV just takes for the most part the position of religious neutrality when it comes to religion per se, but has no problem flooding our living rooms [if we permit it] with the basic result of polytheism which is a bankrupt morality). Like ancient Ephesus, we are a land of fantastic problems in morality but now I am stating the obvious.

Part I: What Isn't So Obvious, However, is what The Word Says about the Situation...and here dear Christian, the LORD is speaking to you:

Ephesians 4:17:

"This I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds."

A. While this Scripture is immensely humbling, it is also extremely helpful. We all want to know how to get the most out of life...we want to live life to the fullest...we want our lives to be as meaningful and as helpful to those around us as possible. So again, this Scripture is very important.

- B. To walk “as the Gentiles do” is an implicit reference to the paganism going on in Ephesus. It meant that one lived worshipping a false god and engaging in the immoral life that followed.**
- C. It is what God says about such a life that is truly sobering: such a life is based on “the futility of their minds.”**
- D. For something to be “futile” means that that thing is aimless; the thoughts lead to no object, no end; nothing productive, nothing lasting, nothing really meaningful...this is the empty life, the wasted life.**
- E. I love the Olympics. Ever since I was little kid, I have watched them (as much as I can), but in-spite of all the Olympic “glory,” those athletes (like you and me) will turn to dust...we are just passing through...the real concern is whether these lives will be meaningful and remembered by God Himself, or will they be wasted in vain glory. Usain Bolt has just won back-to-back 100 meter and 200 meter sprints; and Michael Phelps has now won 22 Olympic medals (18 of them gold)...but who will instantly recall these facts in 20 years? Who will know them in 50 years? Who will care in 100 years?**
- F. To have a mind full of “futile” things is to have a mind full of that which leads to nothing. It is a desperate state of affairs...it is sad and depressing.**
- G. I follow Star Trek to a certain extent and one of the all-time worst enemies of the Federation are the Borg (not a reference to the great tennis player who played against Connors and McEnroe), but this cyborg-ish alien race that is known for saying to those they are about to conquer and assimilate: “resistance is futile”...and this is what the evil one in effects says to everyone in the world, “resistance is futile”...this is just the way it is:**
 - 1. You must accept homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle, because after-all, this is how people are born (this is not a moral issue, but a biological issue...so goes the false argument that denies the impact of original sin upon humanity).**
 - 2. You must accept abortion because the woman’s body is her own, but here again the Word is ignored: our bodies are not our own, we were bought with a price...God made us and God died for us...our bodies belong to God...including the bodies in the womb.**
 - 3. You must accept false religion, and politicians wax eloquent as they defend polytheism one day and then all of a sudden treat America as a “Christian nation” and the Holy Bible as sacred when it suits their campaigning needs...many – not all – but many American politicians have the viewpoint of King Cyrus of Persia: please all of the gods and that way they will all be on your side! Sorry, that doesn’t work out too well!**

4. But all of these moral issues depict what comes from hardness of heart (verse 18): when people refuse the Living God; when people choose to reject the LORD; this is what then ensues: darkness (verse 18); alienation from God (verse 18); callousness (when consciences no longer function properly, verse 19); sensuality (being led by feeling...what we want...obeying our thirst as the commercial says, verse 19); impurity (pursuing that which is against God's holy ways, verse 19). But we don't have to point the fingers at a general cultural condition or easily-targeted politicians, because we can just start with ourselves.

Part II: The LORD is interested in what you will do based on the True Faith of Christ!

- A. So what about you? What about me?
- B. Sometimes people complain that in their estimation the Bible is not "practical" enough for them. Well, here is one of the most "practical" Scriptures that will ever walk up to you and ask for your autograph.
- C. How do we live the Christian life? How do we avoid having a mind full of futile things that would lead to a wasted life? How do we live a life united with the Living God so that we are remembered for eternity, so that even the good things God works in and through us will be known even in heaven (Revelation 14:13)?
- D. The answer is Jesus of course. The antithesis to "futile" is "truth"...truth does not return void...truth will get you places; truth will fill you with everything real, meaningful and exciting. Truth connects you to Jesus Christ who is "The Truth" (John 14:6); Truth connects you to the forgiveness of sins; Truth leads to eternal life so regardless of your legacy here on earth, your legacy in heaven will be an eternally shining testimony of God's life in and through you while you were here!
- E. But let me get to the practical part that walks up to us and says, "Hello!" There is an experiential way that God creates through the work of His Son – through His life, crucifixion, and resurrection for you – and it is immensely practical and it is immensely "real" in terms of our daily experience. And here it is: it is...

Part III and Conclusion: the Christian life summarized by "put off" and "put on":

- A. I hope you're encouraged! This is easy to remember! The Christian life united to the LORD that leads to a life remembered and anything but futile is "PUT OFF" and "PUT ON". I was looking for a mnemonic device for you and thought of "Wax on" and "Wax off" from the movie "Karate Kid," but decided that that would be confusing, which is why I never should have mentioned this in the first place, but now that I have I am hoping that it will actually serve as a mnemonic device. You remember how repetitive the action was...wax on, wax off, wax on, wax off...and through this very, very simple rhythm, Ralph Macchio's character learned to get it done in Karate. Well, you need to remember to switch the order: Biblically, you need to change the word "wax" to "put" (like putting clothes off and putting clothes on)...and then change the order: So "Put Off," "Put On," // "Put Off," "Put On," // "Put Off," "Put On," // "Put Off," "Put On." And never, ever stop until you find yourself in heaven.
- B. OK, so what are you putting off or taking off like dirty clothes that you need to get out of? Answer: "your old self." What is that? It is everything in you that wants to accept the futile things, the things that are contrary to the truth of Jesus Christ. To borrow the list that continues with verses 25-31:
1. Falsehood.
 2. Anger (that is held onto and vented).
 3. Giving in to the devil's temptations.
 4. Stealing.
 5. Corrupting talk.
 6. Living in bitterness and wrath.
 7. Living in clamor and slander.
 8. Living in malice.
- C. Putting off refers to putting off your old self -- or sinful nature -- that is inclined to all of these things. What is truly humbling is that the Word is teaching that these things are already in you. It is not a matter of whether they will come out. They do come out, because they are already there. The question is what to do about it. God says -- and He empowers by His grace in Christ -- to put these off. Put them off you. And here is the key:

D. By the Word of Christ, and the Holy Sacrament -- Christ with you, Christ in you, Christ around you -- resist the

beginnings! The daily rhythm when it comes to the battle is won or lost in the beginnings...

- 1. Joseph did not stand around staring at Potiphar's wife...she grabbed him and he ran!***
- 2. Jesus did not conduct a research project to consider Satan's temptations in the wilderness...He resisted them instantaneously.***

E. This is the truth, if you are confronted with temptation...any temptation, and if you decide to take the Garden of Eden approach: if you observe it, examine it, dream about it, imagine it...then you are not putting off the old self, but you are wrapping it around your heart and mind and getting all snugly with it...and the battle is over before it begins.

F. Instead, live in the Word:

Ephesians 4:22-24: "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

G. You put off the old self when you confess your sin and turn away from it...not filling your mind with it, but denouncing it...and you put on your new self when in faith you return to Jesus Christ...your only righteousness and your only holiness who died for your sins so that they

would not swallow you and destroy you, making you futile and worthless.

H. And the LORD through St. Paul did not leave the Ephesians to themselves (and the LORD does not leave you to yourself), but finished this section with Christ...and in Christ, this life we are discussing will not be a foreign thing, but a familiar thing:

Ephesians 5:2: "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

I. Christ loves you dear Christian; He gave Himself up for you...and through His victorious sacrifice, He will be your holiness, He will be your strength to put off (every day) the old self and to put on (every day) the new self...the new self united with Christ that leads us to loath that which would make our lives futile; and leads us to love the life of our Savior and LORD...and yes, to know a new morality, one that is of Christ!