

# DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

*Verses & Notes January 23, 2008*

*Ephesians 4: 22- 24*

22: Put off your old nature  
which belongs to your former manner of life  
and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,

23: and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

24: and put on the new nature,  
created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

**Introduction:** In today's text from Ephesians, St. Paul commands us to put off our old nature, be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new nature. Have you done this? Many of us point back to the moment in our lives when we were baptized and confirmed or when we made a public profession of faith as the event in our lives when this happened, and then essentially rest our case: at that moment we arrived, or to phrase it differently, we were saved. Others of us know that this was only the beginning of our walk with Christ, and yet we wonder why it seems like we've progressed so little. This is what we'll be discussing today on Deep in Scripture.

## **Discussion:**

- Website, phone nos, book special: "Life-Giving Love," by Kimberly Hahn
- Last week, we ended our program in a rush, due to time, with a quick discussion of a puzzling but loaded verse, Ephesians 4:20-21,
  - 20: *You did not so learn Christ! --*
  - 21: *assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.*
- **There are several ways to understand this passage:**
  - **First, in verse, 20, he is reminding them that it was not through the works / actions of their previous life that they came to discover the truth about Jesus:**
    - He has been enumerating the ungodly way they used to live, and he is reminding them that lost in that lifestyle, on their own, no matter how smart or informed they were, they would not have come to understand Jesus on their own;
    - As He said earlier in chapter 2:8-9, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast.*" We didn't hear and believe in Christ on our own, in our darkness, but grace entered into our hearts and minds, changing us, helping us hear, and we responded with belief.
      - This is a reminder that although the study of apologetics, philosophy, theology, history, etc. are crucial to being able to "give a reason for the hope that is within [us]" (1 Peter 3:15), yet conversion does not come from these primarily but rather from the work of grace in the heart / mind/ soul;
        - Grace knocks at the door and then responding by grace we open.
  - **Then it's in verse 21 where we encounter the puzzle:**
    - *Why does he add, "assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus" ?*

- Last week, we suggested that this was possibly just a rhetorical question:
  - Earlier, in 1:15, he stated that he has heard of their faith and love;
  - So, he may have been prodding them to recognize within themselves that they did not learn of Christ on their own, but “heard about him and were taught in him” by grace and through the Church.
- But there is another possible hidden reason for this aside, which involves the two audiences to whom we believe St. Paul was speaking:
  - We believe that, in this letter, St. Paul--in chains, in prison, separated from his friends and fellow leaders in Ephesus--was dictating a homily that one of his fellow leaders / bishops would read in the liturgy on a Sunday to the newly baptized Gentile believers.
    - St. Paul has never met these newly baptized believers--he has only heard of their faith and love.
    - But he does know of the faith of his friends: he was instrumental in their conversion, in their formation, in their selection as elders / bishops; in fact, we presume that there is nothing in any of his letters that he hasn't already told them in person...
  - The question is: how effectively, how completely did they pass this along to these new Gentile converts?
    - Good catechesis has always been a problem in the Church! Even when there were carefully structured programs in place, there have always been believers who were baptized, confirmed, and now full members of the Body, yet who did not & do not know their faith very well...
  - This is precisely why St. Paul is dictating this homily to be preached to the newly baptized! He assumes they have heard all of this, but have they?!
    - In this statement, he is giving his fellow leaders, maybe especially whichever one will be reading it from the pulpit, an elbow in the ribs! I can envision the reader pausing as he reads this line aloud, maybe even getting softer as he wonders whether he should read it!
    - I think we have a lot of religious leaders today who should pause when they read this statement from the pulpit: because there are far too many baptized Christians out there who do not know their faith very well.
    - St. Paul could NOT assume today that all baptized Christians “have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.”

**If we return to verse 17, we notice how St. Paul changes his tone and urgency as he warns them NOT to return to their former way of life:**

*17: Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do...*

▪ **Why must he do this?**

- Because as newly baptized “children of God,” they are still mere “babes in the faith,” it is far

- too easy for them to presume too much on their baptism:
- o Yes, all these changes have happened by grace, But this does not mean that immediately after rising from the water, they have different personalities, different drives, different passions, free from all the past bad habits and lusts of their lives!
- o These remain, powered by what has come to be called “concupiscence.”

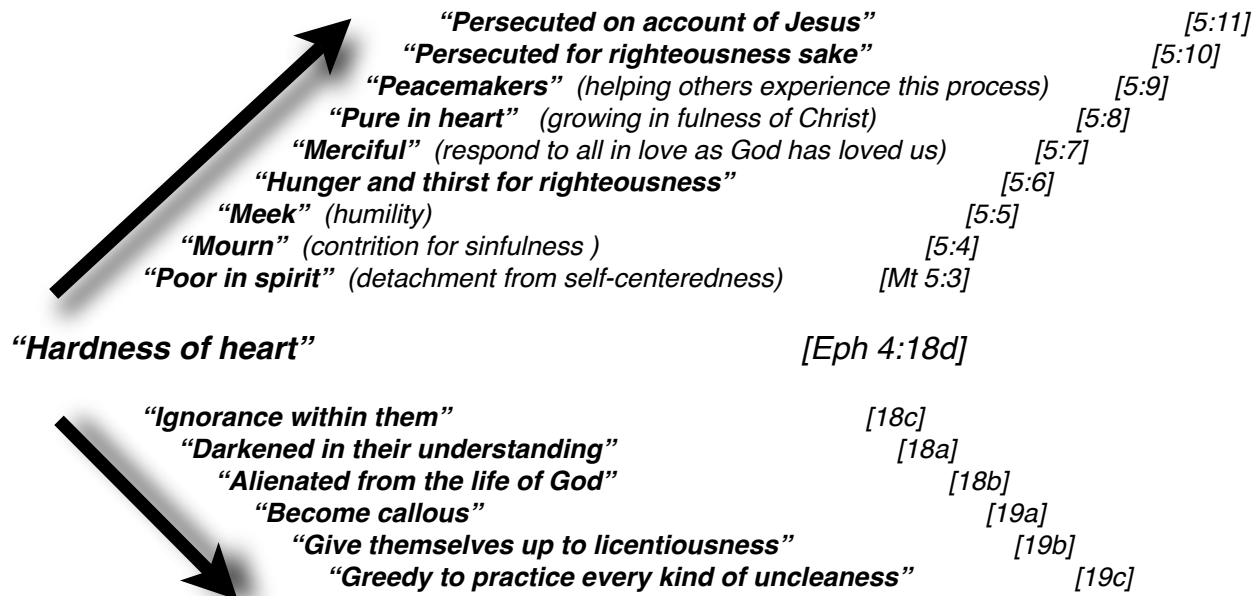
**After baptism, all believers must diligently reject their old life with its passions and habits and actively live the new life they have been given.**

- This is what St. Paul now describes, but in verses 17-19 he begins by discussing their old life, as a warning:

18: *“...that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart;*

19: *they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness.”*

- Notice, that this is not merely a list of bad habits, but essentially a process of growing in darkness, and when combined with the steps of the Beatitudes, illustrates the journeys upwards towards intimacy with God or downward away from Him:



- Notice, both processes begin with “hardness of heart”:
  - o *We either move upwards or downwards, as we respond to grace!*
- Far too many baptized Christians stagnate, stop, or even progress backwards/downwards:
  - o St. Paul was seeing this already happening in his day; it has continued to happen throughout the history of the Church; and it continues all around us, in every church, on every corner; and most of us know people who, though baptised and once active in the church, have drifted away, even deeply into sin. (This is what is described in Hebrews 6:4f.)

**St. Paul then proceeds to summarize what all baptized believers must do to keep from digressing and instead move forward & upward spiritually, and this is a verse that I believe ought to be memorized!**

*22: Put off your old nature*

*which belongs to your former manner of life  
and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,*

*23: and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,*

*24: and put on the new nature,*

*created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

- **This is essentially a summary of all that St. Paul is teaching in Ephesians.**
  - Because they heard, believed, and were baptized (sealed with the Holy Spirit), they are now different people, new creations, the old has gone, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17);
  - They were saved by grace from their old life, their old nature, and they are being saved by grace, and if they remain in grace by faith, they will be saved!
  - So now their task, in obedience to Christ through His Church, is to remain in grace.
  
- **How???**
  - This is what St. Paul explains simply & succinctly in this verse.
  - We could spend a lot of time examining the philosophical, theological, doctrinal, etymological, and historical meanings of the term “nature,” and there are many commentators who do so...
    - But I believe that sometimes when this is done, the process shifts our focus away from the immediate personal implications of the text & lessens its impact in our own lives:
    - It allows us to study the text disengaged & often unaffected;
    - It’s like when we hear a good powerful sermon and think of others whom we wish could have heard it without listening to it ourselves.
  
- In baptism, the old nature/ our old self has already been put off,
  - but now we need to actively, daily, consciously do this by turning from past habits, passions, pleasures, sins,
  - and put on the new nature / the new life in Christ that we have already received in baptism
  - but which we must actively live, by choice,
  - by renewing our minds through prayer, worship, sacraments, fellowship, love, etc..
    - This new nature was “created after the likeness of God,” in other words as man was created before sin entered the world!
    - And now we are to imitate Christ in true righteousness and holiness.
  
- St. Paul taught almost the same thing in his letter to the Colossians, chapter 3:1-17
  - He began by describing what happened to them in baptism, and how they are to respond:

*1: If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

*2: Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

*3: For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

*4: When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*
  - Then he uses the same imagery he used in Ephesians, but let me read it in a slightly condensed form:

*5: Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...(then follows a list of sinful acts & attitudes)*

*9: ... seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices*

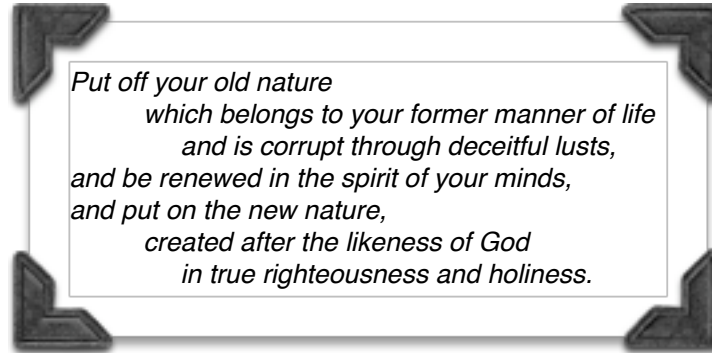
*10: and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*

*12: Put on then ... (and then follows a list of aspects of righteousness and holiness)*

- In other words, as in Ephesians, he is calling believers to live out the new life of their baptism.

**What is St. Paul calling us to do? What difference should this make in our lives?**

- Memorize this verse!! Know it! Hear it as a direct command from God to you:



- When you find yourself being tempted to fall back into your old life / old nature,
  - Recite it to yourself, ask God for the grace / strength to obey,
  - And then turn around into His direction.