

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: October 25, 2009

## Living Consistent With A New Identity: Putting Off the Old

by Dan Trygg

"...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..."

Ephesians 4:22-24

Last week I referred to four steps that Paul delineates to help us bring the reality of Jesus into our lives:

(1.) The first of these was to **choose to see yourself as a new person**, based upon what Jesus has done on your behalf. Paul repeatedly stated the fact of our union with Christ in a variety of different applications or examples (Rom. 5:12-19; 6:3-11; 7:1-6; I Cor. 15:20-23,42-49; II Cor. 5:14-17; Gal. 2:20; 5:24,25; Col. 2:8-15; 3:11), so that the reality would begin to sink home in our thinking. Somehow we were incorporated into Him, so that when He died, we died; and when He was raised, we too received resurrection life, the basis for the born-again, "new person". The death of our old self was so real and complete that, in effect, the apostle says, "Take it to the bank." In his own words, "Consider (add-it-up; having-looked-at-all-the-facts,-now-draw-the-conclusion) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus". We are commanded to see ourselves in light of the truth-claims Paul explains to us. ***This is a choice. It may not feel like we are different, but we are to choose to think of ourselves as a new, clean person. More than just forgiven and cleansed, we are an entirely new creature*** (II Cor. 5:17).

(2.) The second step was "to **put away from you according to your previous life-patterns the old/former person...**" (Eph. 4:22). The way to "put away", or "put distance from", the old self is by not giving in to old behavior patterns. ***You really are no longer that old person anymore, so stop doing what you used to do.***

The verb here is an example of a Greek middle voice. The voice of the verb communicates the direction of the action. In English, our verbs have either an active voice, where the subject is acting upon another object (e.g., "John hit the ball.") or passive, where the subject is the recipient of the action (e.g., "John was hit by the ball."). The ancient Greeks had a third option, referred to as the middle voice, where the subject is doing the action, but the action in some way also affects him or her. The subject is either intensely involved in the action, has a self-interest in the act, or the action somehow directly limits or impinges upon his or her life. To attempt to communicate this idea, grammarians translate this nuance by the phrase "for him/herself". Following our example, a middle voice verb would be translated as "John (for himself) hit the ball." This would then mean that John was intensely involved in hitting the ball. This was not just another turn at bat. He was really putting himself into this. Or, to use another example, in Hebrews 8:10, where God says, "This is the covenant that I will make...", the word translated as "make" is in the middle voice. It could legitimately be translated, "...I will (for Myself) make...". This means that God is saying that either He is intensely involved in making this covenant, or that He has a self-interest in the outcome, or that *He is voluntarily binding Himself* by its terms (i.e., making the covenant will limit, bind, and restrict Him in some way). Now, in Greek you could use either format, active or middle voice, depending on whether or not you wanted to communicate an insight into the personal involvement of the subject in the action. In our example from Hebrews, in the previous verse (8:9), the description of making a covenant is in the active voice, focusing on only the outside action. By using the middle voice in vs. 10, the writer reveals something of God's inner awareness of His choice.

The way this all relates to Eph. 4:22 is that Paul is really saying, "to (*for yourselves*) put-away/put-distant the old person according to the former habitual-behavior". By using the middle voice here, Paul recognizes that:

(a.) ***This is a voluntary action on our part.*** God does not see this command in terms of behavior only. He expresses it in terms that acknowledge our inner process. He desires that we do this with our eyes open.

(b.) ***Moreover, God wants us to choose to put aside these behaviors willingly, "for ourselves".*** Some teachers emphasize the death to self so much that they totally miss that *there is always an element of self-interest to be found in obeying God.* God has designed things so that, at least at some level, ***there will be a reward for righteousness.*** He is never shy about appealing to that as a motivation for trust and obedience. He does not just bribe us, or manipulate us, but He does assure us that *His way is the better way.* He desires us to choose to do what we do from willing hearts. How can we do that if we do not believe that it is the best thing for us to do?

(c.) ***Our choices will limit and affect us in some way.*** We usually do *not* stop doing habitual, familiar behaviors without a sense of loss, without a struggle to no longer continue in old patterns, or without an uncomfortable

sense of disorientation because we are not accustomed to living life differently. We have to overcome inertia of the soul, the tendency to keep moving through life in the same direction we have in the past.

**(d.) This will require *intense involvement on our part*.** This is not a simple decision about something "out there", i.e., something outside of ourselves, remote, distant, or disconnected. This choice goes against everything we are familiar with, everything we have learned that has become our inner road-map. If we relax, if we go back into "default mode", we will probably drift right back into "old-person-behavior". To turn the tide, to redirect the flow, to change directions will generally require some intense concentration, effort and vigilance on our part.

There is another important aspect of the word choice that Paul was guided to use here. The kind of action described is a point-of-time, single decision. This means that **we make this decision *in-the-moment, at-the-moment*** it comes to our awareness, ***for-the-moment***. Paul is describing an episode, an incident which we face, where we must choose to "put away" the old behavior. **It is important also to note what the verb form is *not* implying.**

**(a.) It is *not* saying that we are to *continually* "put away" the old person.** Even if we *could* maintain an ever-present, habitual mindset of putting off the old person, it would be the wrong focus. The important conscious awareness to cultivate is to abide in Jesus. We cannot do that *and* be thinking about putting away the patterns of the old self at the same time. So, **the focus of our continual action is to be on the positive** (e.g., abiding in Jesus, walking in the Spirit, thinking of the things above), **while the need to zero in on this decision to "put off the old" is described as an episodic choice, ...*in-the-moment, at-the-moment, for-the-moment*.**

**(b.) It is *not* saying that we are able to make a single choice that will have ongoing results.** In other words, it does not indicate that we can put off the old self, and its behaviors, by a single, once-for-all decision. Apparently, that is no more within our power to do than is it possible to be continually putting off the old person. We can make a commitment *in-the-moment*. That is a turning away from the old self with its practices. This opens up new possibilities, which we can then focus on. If we mess up, we make another *in-the-moment* choice to "put off the old" and refocus on the new. **We can't make, and keep, a once-for-all commitment. That's just not possible for us, right now. So, don't be surprised or discouraged if you stumble or fall. What Paul is saying is choose to get up and get back on the right track.**

In Romans 6:12-14, Paul utilizes a different word-picture for this same part of the process of learning to walk in our new identity. Instead of commanding us to "put off" the practices of the old self as a single, *in-the-moment* act, he speaks in terms of not ongoingly allowing sin to rule in our lives. Sin has been on a roll in our lives. We are to no longer permit it. He doesn't tell us what to do, specifically, but the implication is to break up the sin pattern. (This is where the *at-the-moment, in-the-moment, for-the-moment* choice to "put off" would seem to fit.) What he does say is that **we are to no longer be presenting our members** (your body, mind, mouth, tongue, etc.) **as tools to express sin any more. The verb tense here describes ongoing, repeated action, ...*a repeated withholding of our availability to express sin*.** We belong to God now. We have been bought with a price. Our allegiance, responsibility, and accountability are to Him. When confronted with a temptation to serve sin, we are to *repeatedly refuse to participate*. Instead of "put off the practices of the old self", here Paul exhorts us to *not get involved with them at all*.

**We are to *see ourselves as "employed" in service to God, and therefore unavailable to express or fulfill the notions of the old life*.** This is an interesting picture, isn't it? It seems we will partner with, or serve, *either* God or sin, since both have an active agenda for our lives. To do nothing would *still* be to-not-serve-God, and thus it would be to miss-the-mark, or to sin. So here we are, workers with our toolboxes, people with our innate gifts, talents, abilities, time, energy, and resources. We either will actively serve God, or our actions will expend our life energy to serve something other than His will.

**In the Ephesians word picture, it is like *God is calling us off the job that we were employed in, saying, "Stop! Don't work here. Bring your tools and work for Me."* -- *The emphasis is leaving the old construction site, the old activity, the old employment*.** It is a momentary choice. As often as we might find ourselves at this old construction site, we are to choose to pack up and leave. **In this word picture in Romans 6, the emphasis is on refusing to go to the old site.** It is like the old boss and crew stop by and want us to work for them today. **Our responsibility is to consistently, repeatedly refuse to go with them. This is a mindset of repeatedly resisting temptation when it comes.** "No, thank you. I am working for God, now. I don't have time to do both. I have fully committed my tools, time, and abilities to serve Him."