

Be Renewed In The Spirit Of Your Mind!

Text: Eph 4:22-28

1) What This Renewal Consists Of In General

Suggested Hymns:

2) What This Renewal Demands In Particular

134, 376, 229, 358, 383

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 4:22–28, ²² ... *put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,* ²³ *and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,* ²⁴ *and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

²⁵ *Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,” for we are members of one another.* ²⁶ *“Be angry, and do not sin”:* *do not let the sun go down on your wrath,* ²⁷ *nor give place to the devil.* ²⁸ *Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind!” This is St. Paul’s exhortation in the Epistle today. To whom does he address this exhortation? To the Christians at Ephesus, to those whom in the beginning of the Epistle he calls ***“To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus.”***¹

Is it really necessary to address such an exhortation to Christians and to tell them, ***“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind”***? Are not old things passed away with the Christians and all things become new? Have they not been made new creatures? Have they not been born anew by the Spirit of God? Has not the spirit of their mind already been changed, so that they are made heavenly-minded and set their affection on the things that are above?

It is true that every true Christian has undergone a radical change of sentiment equalling a new birth. He who has not been born again, he who still remains in his natural state, as he was born into this world, he who does not repent of his sin, and does not believe in his Saviour Jesus who bled and died on the cross for his sins, and does not walk in newness of life, may be a nominal Christian, but he is not a true Christian, for he is merely a withered branch on the tree of the Christian Church.

Still, we must not overlook the fact that Christians are in the flesh as long as they are in this life, and we know that in us, that is, in our flesh, *nothing good dwells*.² Sin clings to us, the world seduces us, and the devil tempts us. These are the three enemies against whom the Christians must continually contend.

Daily a Christian must pray, *“Forgive us our trespasses!”* Daily he must repent of his sins, and be found willing to amend his sinful life. Daily he must be renewed in the spirit of his mind. This renewal is not a thing which is completely accomplished and finished in the Christian’s conversion.

It is a thing which is a continual process with the Christian, and daily to be practised, because in this life there is always something lacking to the Christian’s perfection, with some more, with others less, and he never becomes such a new creature as God would have him to be.

Luther, therefore, very pointedly says: *“Woe unto him who has already been entirely renewed, that is, who imagines himself to be already renewed. He, doubtless, has not yet begun to be renewed, and has never tasted what it is to be a Christian. For he that has begun to be a Christian does not consider himself a Christian, but desires very much to become a Christian, and the more he grows and increases, the more he strives to be and the less he considers himself a full Christian.”*

The theme for today is Paul’s Exhortation: *“Be Renewed In The Spirit Of Your Mind!”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. What This Renewal Consists Of In General

The Apostle says, *put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,*²³ *and be renewed in the*

spirit of your mind, ²⁴ *and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

What therefore, does the Christian's renewal consist of in general? Obviously in two things, in putting off the old man and in putting on the new man.

Putting off the old man — what does that mean? The old man is our natural sinful inclination, our tendency to evil, man inasmuch as he is defiled and corrupted with sin. The Apostle gives a description of this old man when he says, “*which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.*”

The old man is something to be detested, a corrupt and deceitful thing, an agent of evil sending out lusts which seem harmless, but really are ruinous. This old man dwells in us all. He dwells in the new-born infant, innocent as the child seems to be; for the child has inherited this old man, the old Adam, from his father and mother, and even before the child's mental faculties are developed, the old Adam will show himself in bad behaviour and tantrums.

*“The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.”*³ And the old man does not depart from man as he grows up and gets on in years. *“There is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.”*⁴ *“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one.”*⁵

The old man, the sinful inclination, the tendency to evil, sticks to us all, even to the best of Christians, and we are not made entirely rid of this old man until we breathe our last.

Now the Apostle says: To be renewed, you must, concerning your former conduct, put off the old man. Strip yourself of him, as you would put off a soiled and ragged garment which you feel ashamed to wear. Let not sin have dominion over you! Fight against that evil tendency which is within you! Daily drown and kill the old Adam with his sins and evil lusts!

Watch your own sinful heart, and when you see that anything sinful is encroaching upon you and making headway, down with it, off with it, out with it! Crucify your flesh with the affections and lusts! This is the negative part in the Christian's daily renewal, to put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.

The positive part is to put on the new man. Putting on the new man — what does that mean? The new man is the opposite of the old man. The Apostle gives a description of the new man when he says, *which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

The new man is the pattern of man as he originally came forth from the hands of the Creator. *“God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”*⁶ So when God made man in the creation, there was not a stain upon man; he was like unto God, holy, righteous, and as clean from sin as the angels are in heaven.

This image of God has been lost to man in the fall, and it would be lost forever if God in His mercy had not made provision for us. He sent His beloved Son into the world to live and die for us, and thereby to restore to us the lost image of God.

The new man, therefore, is a creation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a product of His great redemptive work. The new man has that righteousness in which we can stand before God, and that holiness which pleases God. If Christ had not come, there would be no such righteousness and holiness among men.

Now the Apostle says: To be renewed, you must not rest with putting off the old man, but you must also put on the new man. As many of us as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. But you must keep on putting on Christ daily. Daily you must seek and find comfort against your sins in Christ’s wounds and suffering.

Daily you must seek to grow and increase in the faith. And as to holiness of life and Christian virtues, can you say that you are perfect? Do you not lack many of those accomplishments which the Word of God demands of a true Christian? *“Pursue peace with all people,”* as the Epistle to the Hebrews says,⁷ *“and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”*

God tells us through the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:8, ⁸ *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.*

This pertains to the putting on of the new man in the Christian's renewal.

2. What This Renewal Demands In Particular

In the following part the Apostle comes down to particulars and mentions several points to show what this renewal demands of the Christian; three things, namely, a tongue freed from lying and deceit, a heart void of sinful anger, and hands that steal no more.

²⁵ *Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.* Here the Apostle obviously deals with the tongue, and tells in what manner that member of the Christian's body should be renewed, putting off the old and putting on the new man.

What is the Christian to put off as to his tongue and lips? Lying. Unbelievers and godless people generally lie whenever and wherever they find it convenient and to their advantage to do so. They tell falsehoods in the streets, and in business, and in common conversation, and in the daily press, and they think no more of telling a lie than to drink a glass of water.

But a Christian, should he not shrink from lying as from a venomous serpent? Is not the devil, whose works he has renounced in Baptism, the father of lies? Should not God's command be continually in the minds of the Christians: *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"*? Should he not fear and love God so as not deceitfully to belie, betray, or defame his neighbour, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything?

In putting off the old man, put away lying, then, and in putting on the new man, *"Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor."* Are not we Christians the children of light, and followers of Jesus who is the Truth?

Let us always abide by the truth, then, and speak the truth, and thereby prove that we are true followers of Jesus who says in John 18:37, *"Every one that is of the truth hears my voice."* The Apostle adds a special reason for Christians to speak truth among themselves and not to lie one to another. He says: *"For we are members one of another."*

Christians are all members of that mystical body the head of which is Christ. What an unnatural thing, then, for Christians to lie to another! An old church

father says: *“If the eye were to see a serpent or a wild beast, will it lie to the foot?” Certainly Not!*

The Christian’s renewal, furthermore, calls for a heart void of sinful anger. ²⁶ ***“Be angry, and do not sin”***: *do not let the sun go down on your wrath,* ²⁷ *nor give place to the devil.*

As to the heart, the Christian is to put off the old man by putting away sinful anger. We say sinful anger; for the text implies that there is an anger which is not sinful. Anger is the mind in emotional antagonism. In a world of dishonesty, sin, and crime there is much to justify the strongest antagonism of the soul.

Christ Himself looked upon the conduct of the Jews with anger. Indignation filled His breast, and woes rolled from His lips like thunderbolts, especially against the Pharisees and scribes.

But there is an anger which is sinful, and such is the anger of which Jesus says, ***“Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment.”***⁸ There is always danger in anger, even if right and just. If nourished and persisted in, it easily leads to rash words which would better have not been spoken, and to deeds for which we feel sorry afterwards.

The Apostle therefore says, ***“do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”*** Banish from your heart those thoughts of hatred and malice which come to you. Let them disappear with the setting sun, and go to sleep with a tranquil mind.

“Nor give place to the devil.” An angry soul is just the sphere to which the devil has the freest access and can best work out his malignant ends. Christians should always learn more and more to control themselves and to subdue their passions so as not to give place to the devil in their hearts. This is the way to put off the old man and to be renewed.

Lastly, this renewal calls for hands that steal no more. ²⁸ ***Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”***

Stealing is something that pertains to the old man whom the Christian must put off. And is not stealing as prevalent an evil as lying? We call him a thief who sneaks away his neighbour’s property or goods.

But is not he a thief as well who in some other ingenious and subtle way takes possession of some one else's property? The tradesman who deals in short weights and measures, or overcharges for his wares? The employer who makes his employee work for starvation wages? The servant who neglects his duty, and does not perform the work for which he is paid?

Put off the old man, then, by keeping your hands clean from any ill-gotten gain and labour, "*working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*" The new man whom you are to put on demands of you that you be not an idler, i.e. lazy, but work and thereby make your own living, work that which is good, that is, in an honest, God-pleasing calling.

You are to work not only with a view of providing for yourself and for those who are dependent on you, but also to give to the person who is in need, to assist the poor, to alleviate the sufferings of those who are in actual want, and to help in the spreading of the Gospel and enlarging God's kingdom.

May the Lord, then, grant us all His Holy Spirit without whom we can do nothing in a spiritual way. May the Spirit of God enlighten, sanctify, and keep us that we be renewed always more and more until God's image is fully restored in us in the beautiful realms above. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Ephesians 1:1

² Romans 7:18

³ Genesis 8:21

⁴ Ecclesiastes 7:21

⁵ Job 14:4

⁶ Genesis 1:27

⁷ Hebrews 12:14

⁸ Matthew 5:22