

Ephesians 4:17-24

¹⁷So I tell you this and testify to it in the Lord: Do not walk any longer as the Gentiles walk, in their futile way of thinking. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their hearts. ¹⁹Because they have no sense of shame, they have given themselves over to sensuality, with an ever-increasing desire to practice every kind of impurity.

²⁰But you did not learn Christ in that way, ²¹if indeed you have heard of him and were taught in him (since the truth is in Jesus). ²²As far as your former way of life is concerned, you were taught to take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed continually in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴and to put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness.

Split Personality

I.

The inspiration was said to have come either from a dream or from his friendship with a man who was later convicted and executed for the murder of his wife. The writer was Robert Lois Stevenson; his story was called: Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The concept, which was supposedly the case in Stevenson's friend, was of a person who was a fine, upstanding citizen of the community, but one who had a dark side, as well.

Jekyll and Hyde were, of course, one person with a split personality. These days split personality is called dissociative identity disorder. The definition of the disorder states that it is a mental disorder in which a person has two or more distinct personalities. The thoughts, actions, and behaviors of each personality may be completely different.

The story of Jekyll and Hyde wouldn't be written for many centuries. The disorder wouldn't get its name and definition for even longer.

It is a common misperception that people are born innocent—without any flaws or faults. The Bible states the exact opposite. Earlier in his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul said: “You were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1, EHV). King David said in Psalm 51: “Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5, EHV). We don't *learn* to be bad from our environment; the Bible says we are born evil. By nature, human beings are totally corrupt.

Paul is pointing out the same thing in today's Second Reading. “So I tell you this and testify to it in the Lord: Do not walk any longer as the Gentiles walk, in their futile way of thinking” (Ephesians 4:17, EHV).

Most of the Christians in the Ephesian congregation were not of the Jewish race. The Jews would have called them Gentiles. Paul, however, is not speaking of ethnicity, but of religion—their faith in Jesus.

II.

Jesus had come into the world. By living a perfect life, dying an innocent death on the cross, and rising to life once again, Jesus completed God's plan of saving activity for the world. In the Gospel for today, people were looking for physical food from Jesus. Though *they* were Jewish by decent, what they wanted was a welfare Jesus. They thought he should make it so that they would never have to work a day in their lives ever again to provide for themselves. God wants us to use our God-given talents and abilities; that is how he provides

our daily needs. Jesus told them that what they really needed was “...food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27, EHV). Jesus wanted the people to believe in what he had come to do for the world. Faith in Jesus is the only way to go to heaven, because by faith Jesus gives you his perfection, which is what God requires.

You could say that the Jewish people in today’s Gospel were exactly the same kind of people as those Paul describes in this lesson as Gentiles. They didn’t get it. “Do not walk any longer as the Gentiles walk, in their futile way of thinking. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their hearts. ¹⁹Because they have no sense of shame, they have given themselves over to sensuality, with an ever-increasing desire to practice every kind of impurity” (Ephesians 4:17-19, EHV).

Whatever race or ethnicity you are by birth, every human being has this in common: each of us were born sinners. Dead in trespasses and sins, Paul said in that passage from chapter 2. Guilty and sinful are the words with which King David labeled us in Psalm 51. Here Paul says that condition comes about because of ignorance—ignorance of what God has done for all in Jesus.

But ignorance is no excuse. Those who remain in ignorance eventually harden their hearts and want nothing to do with God. Their lack of a sense of shame over the sinful condition everyone is born with naturally leads to, as Paul puts it, “an ever-increasing desire to practice every kind of impurity.” Your imagination can run wild with all sorts of godless and immoral behavior, I’m sure.

“But you did not learn Christ in that way, ²¹if indeed you have heard of him and were taught in him (since the truth is in Jesus). ²²As far as your former way of life is concerned, you were taught to take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires” (Ephesians 4:20-22, EHV). Every Christian was once the same as those Paul calls Gentiles—an unbeliever. Everyone who can call him- or her-self a Christian has something in common: the Holy Spirit has *given* you faith in Jesus. He has given you the “Bread of Life,” as Jesus called himself in the Gospel.

It is a gift. No human being can choose faith. No human being can create faith. Faith is a miracle. We got to witness such a miracle this morning as another child was given her adoption papers by the waters of baptism into God’s family. What a special and precious moment; what a gift of God. Every Christian can look back at baptism and give thanks to God for such an indescribable gift.

III.

The past haunts us, however. Since the time of Adam and Eve, since the fall into sin, those who believe in God’s promise of forgiveness—in other words, Christians—have a split personality. The challenge of a split personality won’t ever cease to be a problem this side of heaven. Paul said in his Letter to the Romans: “For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not keep doing what I want. Instead, I do what I hate” (Romans 7:15, EHV). In other words, Paul knew what he was *supposed* to do and how he was *supposed* to behave and how his New Christian Self *wanted* to behave, but it never seemed to quite work out.

Each of us would have to agree. Christians do bad things every day. “You were taught to take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires” (Ephesians 4:22, EHV). This isn’t a one-time occurrence, but a daily struggle. Addicts have to fight to overcome their addiction every day; years later they will still call themselves “recovering” in the present tense. Every one of us redeemed children of God is a recovering sinner. Just as Paul did, we often slip into doing what the Christian side of our split personality hates.

IV.

“You were taught to take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires,²³ and to be renewed continually in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and to put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24, EHV).

The Old Self that wants to revert to the old, sinful, Gentile way of life. But God loved us. He loved us in Christ Jesus. Continually we are to be renewed in our faith by putting on the New Self.

Martin Luther echoed what Paul said in Part IV of Baptism in his Small Catechism. He said: “Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” This is why Luther encouraged people to say “I *am* baptized” rather than “I *was* baptized.” Every day the Christian must once again put on the New Self. At a baptism, we give the child a candle for this same reason. The intention is that this baptismal candle can be lit at the anniversary of the child’s baptism to help reinforce the concept that every day is a repeat drowning of the Old Self and a putting on of the New Self.

“Be renewed continually in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and...put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:23-24, EHV). The putting on of the new self is an ongoing process. We are renewed continually when God works in our hearts through his Word and Sacraments. Each day, as we reflect on what God has done for us, we want to live in the new creation God has given us: righteousness and true holiness.

God has done it all for us. We still live with a split personality. The Old Self wants to drag us back down, but the New Self understands the righteousness and holiness God wants for us. Having been given spiritual life by faith in Jesus, we now are empowered to take an active role in living to the glory of God. God give you strength as you strive every day to live for him. Amen.