

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 22, 2006

Ephesians 4:22-24

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition

1. Off with the ugly old self
2. On with the beautiful new self

^{NIV} Ephesians 4:22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds;²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The makeover show has become a staple of television programming today. There are shows in which old jalopy cars and trucks are restored to become customized beauties. In other shows older homes are remodeled and made to look like showpieces. And, of course, the mother of all the makeover shows is the one where a person with some physical imperfections is made over by a team of cosmetic surgeons, dentists, personal trainers, hair and beauty salon personnel, and wardrobe consultants for a modern-day Cinderella effect. The transformation is many times dramatic enough to draw ooohs and aaahs or even to produce tears from the onlookers.

Today's epistle lesson from the 4th chapter of Ephesians also deals with a makeover, but there's more at stake here than a nice car, a beautiful home, or a physical appearance that meets contemporary standards of beauty. This is the makeover of the soul and that by God's grace every Christian has undergone. Before we came to know Christ, we were only the sinful old self, ignorant of the God and unwilling and unable to serve him. But when we came to faith in Jesus we were given a new self that knows and loves God and is eager to serve him.

But as with most makeovers, the effects of the transformation aren't permanent. Customized cars eventually look beat up again. As the years pass, homes need remodeling again. Even cosmetic surgery can't forever restrain the effects of advancing age. And with us Christians, unless we are daily engaging in the spiritual makeover the Bible calls repentance, the ugliness of sin will soon become prominent again. So this morning let's examine this New Testament version of the makeover show. Let's see what needs to be changed and how this change is accomplished.

1. Off with the ugly old self

Paul writes, "*You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were*

taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self which is being corrupted by its evil desires.” When I was a kid I thought the pinnacle of ugliness was the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*. I remember being so frightened by her appearance when I was 7 or 8 years old that I cried while watching the old black-and-white version of the movie. I don’t know why I was surprised to learn later that the actress who played the witch was actually a very nice woman named Margaret Hamilton, who played many other roles on stage and screen.

But if you want to see humanity at its ugliest, you have only to look at what Paul describes in the verses just previous to our text. He writes, *“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.”* This kind of ugliness stems from ignorance of the true God. Its symptoms include futility of thinking, hardness of heart, and a nearly complete insensitivity to sin. When you compare this way of living with the way God made human beings in the beginning—in his image, that is, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness—then you have to agree: this is an extreme disfiguration of human beings as God intended them to be.

It’s apparent from reading this letter that Paul believed the Ephesian Christians needed an ongoing makeover. Too easily they had begun to drift back to the old Gentile way of living. In the succeeding verses he will specifically mention the sins of lying, stealing, drunkenness, sinful anger, unwholesome talk, and sexual impurity. What a rotten package! But notice how contemporary his list of sins is. He could as easily be writing to Christians today.

Our sinful nature is easily deceived, it says here. The desires of the old self are “deceitful.” This deception consists in believing that lying is more advantageous than telling the truth. It rationalizes taking what doesn’t belong to us. It falls for the line that drunkenness is a stress reliever and sinful anger is a means of getting things done our way. It likes to minimize the damage we do with our unwholesome talk and promotes sexual impurity as pleasure rather than as something that is ruinous on so many levels, including the spiritual level.

Paul responds to the ugliness of the old self by speaking to the new self. He speaks to us as Christians, as people who have been brought by God’s grace from darkness to light, from death to life. He speaks to us as people who love and trust Jesus when he says, “Put off your old self!” An unbeliever can’t do this. Unbelievers don’t have the spiritual strength to lift an eyelid to do what God commands. But we believers, by the power of God’s Spirit at work in us, by the power of Christ dwelling in us, can do this. To put off the old self is to repent of our sins. It is to summon the power given us in baptism and acknowledge our sin and its disastrous consequences not only for this life but for all eternity. Putting off the old self means not letting sin have the run of our hearts anymore. It means not quibbling with God when he calls certain attitudes and behaviors sinful, but

instead renouncing these sins and wanting nothing to do with them. The picture in the command, “Put off!” is to remove something that is so dirty as to be disgusting.

This part of the spiritual makeover could be compared to sanding an old car down to the bare metal or gutting a house. But a stripped-down car and a gutted house are not yet made over. There’s still more to do. That’s why the Bible here in speaking of our spiritual makeover says not just, “Put off the old self,” but it also says, “Put on the new self.” It’s not just off with the ugly old self, but also on with the beautiful new self.

2. On with the beautiful new self

You restore a car with tools like a screwdriver, a wrench, a sander, and a paint sprayer. You renovate a house with a hammer and saw and paintbrush. You might use a scalpel or a laser to make over a human body, but what do you use to accomplish the makeover of a soul? Here only the gospel of Jesus has the power to effect change. Having come to grips with the reality of our sin and its deadly consequences, we return to the promise of forgiveness like the one given us at our baptism. “Your sins are washed away.” That’s the promise that brought the new self into being in the first place. That’s the promise that empowers the new self to prevail over the will and the conduct of the old self. The gospel of Jesus that declares us forgiven is God’s power for salvation, but it is also his power for *sanctification*.

Paul’s language here, when he speaks of being “created to be like God,” takes us back to the early chapters of the book of Genesis where God made Adam and Eve in his image, in his likeness. The image to God, you know, is not that humans bear a physical resemblance to God, because God is a spirit. Rather, when the Bible says that Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, this means that they had perfect knowledge of God’s will and that they were completely righteous and holy. Of course, this image of God was lost in the Fall into sin and thereafter human beings have had children in their own sinful image rather than in God’s holy image. But when the Spirit of God works through the gospel to create faith in us, then we are restored to God’s image. We are once again holy and righteous in his sight. Our ignorance of God and his will is replaced by knowledge. And with the restoration of God’s image comes new strength to live for him.

The spiritual makeover produced by repentance and faith in Christ is sometimes dramatic. I think of Saul, the feared persecutor of Christians suddenly beginning to preach that Jesus is the Son of God. Or what about Zacchaeus, now a changed man, giving away his illicitly-gotten wealth?

The transformation isn’t always so dramatic, but when Christians do put on the new self there are clear differences. The Bible here speaks here about people who use their gift of speech to build each other up. It describes Christians who are kind and compassionate, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave them. It encourages us to aim to live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. It speaks in this letter to Christian husbands, calling upon them to love their wives like Christ loved his bride, the Church. And it speaks to Christian wives, calling them to respect their husbands. It addresses Christian children and calls upon

them to express their faith in Jesus by obeying their parents, just as it address Christian parents and calls them to bring their children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. It leads us to expect that there will be a transformation in Christian employees, who now approach their work as if they were serving the Lord Jesus, and not just their boss. And it leads us to expect that there will be a transformation in Christian employers and supervisors, who now realize that the model for their role is our Master in heaven, who is never unfair. That would be an extreme makeover of the spiritual kind.

The makeover concept isn't new. It's been around as long as the gospel of God's mercy in Jesus has been transforming lost sinners into children of God. The Bible's encouragement to us here in Ephesians is to practice the daily makeover that's better known in the Bible as repentance. As we put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, and put on the new self, which is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness, the result is truly stunning: a believer living life as God intended: in the image of God. Amen.