

Title: Mount Challenger
Date: March 12, 2023
Subject: Followers of Christ are to put off the old life and put on the new.
Scripture: Ephesians 4:17 - 24

Mount Challenger is the northern anchor of Washington's North Cascades' Picket Range. Someone known as meganerd wrote (summitpost.org/mount-challenger/151237): "I can't think of a more appropriate name...This area is the most rugged and remote mountain wilderness in the lower 48 states (somewhat arguable, but not very)...The climate is quite atrocious, probably the worst in all the Cascades. The valleys surrounding the Pickets are filled with wild and all but impenetrable temperate rainforest choked with brush and blowdown. The terrain is steep and cliffy from valley bottom to peak and the whole area is riddled with wildly disrupted glaciers calving off seracs to the valleys far below. There are no walkup routes in the Pickets. Here one must deal with the peaks on their own terms, over days of real hardship. All of this conspires to make climbing in the Pickets a unique, incredible, but challenging experience at best, and a full-on epic at worst...If all that sounds dark and gloomy, sorry, it's all true, but it's also true that a perfectly clear summit day anywhere in the Pickets, after the challenges of the approach have passed is pretty much climbing Nirvana."

As followers of Christ we face an even greater and more epic challenge. We're to leave the valleys and keep climbing into the heights of our faith in Christ. There are more summits to reach. Sometimes there are easy walk ups. Some advances will be achieved with great difficulty. However, the reward is far greater than some climbing Nirvana. We're on the way to heaven and the view from there will be amazing.

The teaching in Ephesians has focused on unity and maturity. The focus shifts to purity and individual responsibility.

Read Ephesians 4:17 - 24. Weighty words await us.

I. No, no, never, never, no way, no how. (what we aren't to be)

Sometimes people ask us to do something, maybe something we aren't inclined to do like put dirty laundry in the hamper, and add "Pretty please with sugar on top?" Or "I'll give you an extra piece of dessert."

That's exactly **not** how Paul writes. He's not saying it'd be really nice if we did what he asks. It's not a suggestion or hint. He insists. It's like calling a person to witness, putting them under oath and issuing a solemn charge. The insistence is connected to the Lord, the ultimate authority.

A. The appeal. V. 17. The appeal is to live lives different from those who haven't trusted in Christ as their Savior. They're called Gentiles. This isn't slamming an ethnicity but using the term to refer to people disconnected from God. They're non-Christian, nonbelievers. Their lifestyle, attitudes, practices and character are in opposition to God. These are no longer suitable for people who've placed their faith in Christ.

The Bible says the wicked won't inherit the kingdom of God. Then it lists what some Christians had been - sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, greedy,

drunkards, slanderers, swindlers. The reminder is given that those who trust in Christ have been washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 5:9 - 11).

V. 17 recalls earlier truth: we were dead in our transgressions, we used to live in the ways of the world and the devil (2:1 – 3), we were without God and without hope (2:12)... but we've been changed by God's grace (2:4, 8, 9) and are to live in a way worthy of the calling we've received (4:1). Since we've undergone the greatest change, crossing over from spiritual death to life, we are to live out the change, to live like Christians, be continually transformed to be like Christ. This is the demand placed upon our lives.

B. Elements of the old way of life. 1. Intellectual impurity (vv. 17, 18). Futility in their thinking. They follow their intellect and what their minds can dream up. However, all the ways they devise in their search for peace, happiness and fulfillment don't end up where they want to go. They don't reach Nirvana, paradise, enlightenment or bliss. They're chasing shadows. Their pursuit is useless. It's meaningless. It makes no sense. It's like a person thinking they can take a dozen golf balls, place them on a cookie sheet, pop it into the oven for 50 minutes at 425 degrees and use them for meatballs on top of spaghetti.

The predicament is further described as being darkened in their understanding. The darkest place I recall is in the Colombian Andes during a missions trip. We stepped out of a hut and the night was pitch black. Couldn't see anything. Seemed like the darkness swallowed up any light.

The nonbeliever has darkened perception. They're blind to God. They don't grasp his love. They don't comprehend how to be saved, how to have a right relationship with him. People have lost the ability to think so they think men can become women or women can become men.

Their understanding is a defective guide. It's like the blind leading the blind as Jesus said. John Godfrey Saxe wrote the poem "The Blind Men and the Elephant," the most famous version of a story that's been around for 2500 years. Blind men describe an elephant as each touches a different part and claims the elephant is completely and only like the part they experience – trunk so it's a snake, leg like a tree, tail like a rope. They each had a piece of information, but they failed to put it all together.

Those outside of Christ are also described as possessing ignorance. They may be intellectually brilliant, able to probe the mysteries of the world at an atomic level but they don't understand the ways of God. This is caused by a hardening of their hearts. They're like ancient Pharaoh who had evidence upon evidence about God but refused to see. He hardened his heart. He became calloused, unfeeling and insensitive. People harden their hearts. There's no sensation. Their hearts are like a petrified tree, full of stone that doesn't allow any sap to flow through.

These people are separated from the life of God. They're alienated from him. They don't participate in and are excluded from what God has. They may believe that God exists but he's irrelevant. He doesn't make any difference in how people live their lives, find pleasure or treat others.

It comes back to futile thinking. It doesn't get anywhere. It goes in circles never making progress towards being in a right relationship with God which is where peace, happiness and fulfillment are found.

Callousness is an inability to feel. The NIV says, “having lost all sensitivity.” Their “consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 Tim 4:2). Without a relationship with Christ a person is: “Without sense of shame, without conscience, without fear of God or regard for man, without any perception of the dignity of human nature, the glory of the Divine image, or the degradation of sin” (Pulpit Comm, Eph 4:19).

They disregard and suppress the truth of what God reveals in his Word and through the general revelation of what he created. Here’s a homework assignment, read Romans 1:17 – 32. It describes how God revealed himself, people choosing to not worship God, becoming futile in their thinking and hearts that were darkened so that God gave them over to their sinful desires and the tragic results. It's a disheartening passage to read so I'd encourage you not to stop there but read on to see how God acted to turn people back to him.

It's a sign of health to be able to feel pain, pain caused by sin and physical pain. It makes us withdraw from a hot stove. Lepers lose their sensitivity and can burn themselves badly. Similarly, people can lose the capacity to feel the moral pain caused by sin. This condition leads to the next aspect.

2. Moral impurity (V. 19). Sensuality “signifies a lust devoid of all sense of decency, recklessly and grossly animal. Hence its result is not only to work out uncleanness of every kind, but to do so "with greediness," with a reckless delight in foulness for its own sake. The union of this brutality of sensual sin with intellectual acuteness and aesthetic culture was the most horrible feature of that corrupt Greek civilization, tainted with Oriental grossness, of which he was especially writing” (Ellicott Commentary, Ephesians 4:19).

Many translations speak of shamelessness, people losing all sense of shame. It describes our culture when acts of moral impurity are praised and glorified. They've jumped into any and all kinds of impurity, belly flopped into the sewage pond of sin. They do any and every kind of impurity, uncleanness, evil. They've given themselves over, yielded themselves. They have a continual lust or greediness for more. They constantly crave more to feed the addiction meaning they need more and more and more attempting to find some sense of satisfaction. It's not a temporary visit. They intend to stay long term. They grow comfortable in it.

Sometimes social services is tasked with removing children from deplorable and unhealthy situations. They arrive at the home to find a living room with a foot of garbage. Pets have been using the entire house as a litter box. The sight and smells are stomach wrenching. And yet, sometimes, workers have difficulty persuading the kids to leave because that's all they've known and they're used to it.

We’re God’s kids. He doesn't want us to live in the filthy garbage of the world. A relationship with Jesus Christ isn’t merely an add-on that doesn't interfere with how people have been living and they are free to continue to live any which way they want. As followers of Christ we've undergone a change. We've become new creations. Our minds are no longer darkened. We've been brought into the light. We are different.

II. Yes, yes and more yes (what we are to be and do) Vv. 20-24

A. What we know. vv. 20, 21. Christians have heard and know the truth in Jesus Christ. He is the subject matter and teacher. We’re to learn about him and learn him – what it means to be in relationship with him (position) and what’s to be our experience of proper living (practice that aligns with position).

A church bookkeeper was going over the weekly finances. She found a receipt from a paint store signed by someone named Christian. She didn't know anyone who would have purchased paint so she called the store to inform them they must have sent the receipt to the wrong church. In speaking with the manager, she said, "I'm sorry, but there are no Christians here at First Baptist Church." I trust her slip of the tongue wasn't the true situation.

If Christians continue to live after the pattern of the old life, it could be difficult to tell if there are Christians around. The moral and ethical implications of being a follower of Christ includes the need to get rid of the old lifestyle, the kind of person we used to be.

B. Put off. V. 22. The old self is being corrupted by deceitful desires. These desires conceal the true nature of what they offer and the result. They dress up to be means to pleasure and fulfillment what they intend to destroy.

The imagery is of getting rid of old, worn out, stained, filthy clothes that aren't fit to be donated to Goodwill or even to be used for rags. Throw them in the garbage and leave them there. Don't longingly follow the garbage truck to do some dumpster diving.

We're to renounce the old life, what used to govern our lives and its habits. Colossians puts it in stronger language: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other" (Colossians 3:5 - 9). The stuff of the old life displeases and disgusts God. They're sin. Sin is corrosive like an acid that disintegrates whatever it's poured into.

Some of putting off was accomplished when we received Christ as Savior. Putting off continues as we face the effects of the old nature in our lives. When it tries to come up again, we're to get rid of it. Change the channel. Walk away when someone tells that kind of story. Remind self don't have to act that way.

Putting off is incomplete unless there's a putting on.

C. Put on. vv. 23, 24. When we placed our trust in Christ, we became new creatures. God clothed us in a new nature. There's nothing we did to bring it about. We were crucified with Christ. It was totally by God's grace. We received it by faith.

The second aspect of God's work is the ongoing purifying and sanctifying. The working out of our salvation requires faithful and continual effort. The renovation is phrased in two ways. We're to be being made new in the attitude of our minds and put on the new self which is the way God calls us to live. We grow to be more like Christ - "in true righteousness and holiness." Righteousness is personal purity and goodness. Holiness is purity toward God, goodness itself. These combine to indicate living rightly, set apart and dedicated to God. These are the practices, character, and principles of life. We discover these from the truth about who Jesus is, what he has done and what he is doing in us.

Soldiers train in all conditions because they need to be able to fight in all conditions. This includes night maneuvers. Truck drivers utilize night vision goggles which increase the ability to see. A drawback is limited peripheral vision. Johnny James was with the 82nd Airborne Division during a night exercise when he overheard an instructor telling a driver: "When you're driving down the road with trees on both sides, and you start hearing loud thump, thump, thump noises on your right, you need to start moving to the left."

In the Christian life, when we begin to hear the thump, thump, thump noises of the old sinful life, we need to move toward the new.

Alexander MacLaren, "So let us learn how impossible are righteousness and holiness, morality and religion in men, unless they flow from this source. It is the truth that sanctifies. It is the Spirit who wields that truth who sanctifies. It is Christ who sends the Spirit who sanctifies. But, brethren, beyond the range of this light is only darkness, and that nature which is not cleansed by His priestly hand laid upon it remains leprous, and he who is clothed with any other garment than His righteousness will find 'the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.' And let us learn, on the other hand, the incompleteness and monstrosity of a professed belief in 'the truth' which does not produce this righteousness and holiness. It may be real - God forbid that we should step into His place and assume His office of discerning the thoughts of the heart, and the genuineness of Christian professions!

"But, at any rate, it is no exaggeration nor presumption to say that a professed faith which is not making us daily better, gentler, simpler, purer, more truthful, more tender, more brave, more self-oblivious, more loving, more strong, more like Christ - is woefully deficient either in reality or in power - is, if genuine, ready to perish - if lit at all, smoldering to extinction. Christian men and women! Is 'the truth' molding you into Christ's likeness? If not, see to it whether it be the truth which you are holding, and whether you are holding the truth or have unconsciously let it slip from a grasp numbed by the freezing coldness of the world.

"And for us all, let us see that we lay to heart the large truths of this text, and give them that personal bearing without which they are of no avail. I need renovation in my inmost nature. Nothing can renew my soul but the power of Christ, who is my life. I am naked and foul. Nothing can cleanse and clothe me but He. The blessed truth which reveals Him calls for my individual faith. And if I put my confidence in that Lord, He will dwell in my inmost spirit, and so sway my affections and mold my will that I shall be transformed unto His perfect likeness. He begins with each one of us by bringing the best robe to cast over the rags of the returning prodigal. He ends not with any who trust Him, until they stand amid the hosts of the heavens who follow Him, clothed with fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of His Holy ones."

An artist was filing, scraping, and polishing every little surface of a bronze sculpture. An observer asked, "When will it be done?" "Never. I just keep working and working until they come and take it away."

It's the same with us. We're to be busy filing, scraping and polishing every little surface of our lives as we advance in the challenge of becoming more like Jesus Christ. Get rid of the old, put on the new, keep shining it up until Jesus comes and takes us away.