

LANZAROTE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP. 1/5/16

READINGS: EPH.4:17-32; ROM.6:1-14

THEME: 'LIVING OUT THE RISEN LIFE: KEY 4 (part 1) – 'PUT AWAY THE LIFE YOU ONCE LIVED - PUT YOUR NEW CLOTHES ON!'

Let's begin by reminding ourselves what Paul has been saying to the Colossian Christians: 'You are not the people you once were. *'Since you have been raised with Christ'* (Col.3:1)... something has happened to you.... you are not the people you once were.... *'you have been raised with Christ'* and what that means is that everything is in place for you.... everything has been done for you, to live out this risen life this new life in Christ.

'Christ is all you need.... your faith is not deficient in any way.... you are complete in Him.... don't listen to those false teachers who are saying it has to be Christ plus....law/ritual/human philosophy... or enlightenment or visions or Christ plus spiritual experience... Don't listen to them... All you need is to be found in Christ..... you are complete in him, *'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'*.... why go to broken cisterns when you can go to the fountain? Everything you need is to be found in him.

Let's make sure we have really grasped the significance of this.... can I remind you of my imperfect illustration of a few weeks ago? It might just help. My new car is outside.... it's a Mercedes sports coupé.... it's a fantastic car.... powerful.... fast.... sleek.... beautifully designed and engineered.... it has every extra imaginable.... it can't be improved upon. Everything is in place for that car to perform as it was meant to. Then somebody comes along and says, 'Very nice car but.... it's OK but it's lacking something.... it needs four wheel drive. *What?* That's ridiculous! If you add four wheel drive to that car, you would ruin it.... you would destroy it... do it untold damage.... It's not designed or built to go off road. It doesn't need anything extra for it to fulfil what it was designed to do. It's the finished article. For it to perform as it was designed to perform, all somebody has to do is get in the driving seat and turn the key!

That's a bit like what Paul is saying here – if you are in Christ, you are the finished article.... everything is perfectly in place for your new life in Christ.... this is the way God designed it to be.... this is his plan... and it's perfect and it is complete.. he has made it possible for you to live out this risen life you don't need anything else! If you add anything, you do yourself untold spiritual

damage... your spiritual life is not designed for Christ plus.... it's designed for Christ and for him alone.

All you need to do is get in the driving seat and turn the key! And that's what we are looking at – those keys to make it possible for us to live out that risen life. Key 1 – 'Set your hearts on things above'. Key 2 – 'Set your minds on things above'. Key 3 – 'Put to death what is earthly in you'. And now, this week, the final key, Key 4 'Put away the life you once lived' – Put your new clothes on!

Remember I told you at the beginning of this series that the city of Colosse and the surrounding region was a hotbed of pagan religions.... a whole host of weird and wonderful gods were worshipped. Those who worshipped those gods were inevitably caught up in sexual immorality, impurity, lust etc. – the evil within which they were to put to death – and all that was linked to their pagan lifestyle.

The church at Colosse was made up of people who had become Christians from that kind of background, and it's to this that now Paul turns.... *'the way you once lived'*.... old patterns of behaviour.... old habits..... destructive and abusive speech, lying, malice and slander - all of which were accepted as the 'norm'. All these things had now to be challenged and changed.

He says this, *'You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived'*.... You didn't think anything of a life marred by rage and anger... it didn't concern you if your mouth was full of malice and slander.... you didn't think twice about lying to each other.... that's the way it was.... that's the way everybody behaved.... it was part of your pagan lifestyle... the pagan culture of which you were a part'.

'But now', says Paul, you've got to *'rid yourselves of all such things'*.... those things of your past are not to be tolerated in your new lives as Christians or in the life of the church.

He says, *'But now'*, because these Colossians are in Christ... more than that, they are a new creation in Christ... they are not the people they once were.... they have been changed.... they have a new identity. So, in the spiritual sense they are to dress themselves spiritually to suit their new spiritual identity. That's why Paul says things like, *'taking off your old self'*.... *'putting on the new self'*... and *'clothing yourselves with...'* (3:12-13). In other words, 'take your old clothes off, put you new clothes on.... dress yourselves appropriately as *'God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved'*.

As Christians, we are to dress the part.... I'm not saying we all go out and buy Tee shirts with 'L.C.F. - Jesus Saves!' written all over them – but as new

creatures in Christ, wear suitable clothes for your new identity.... behave in a way that suits that new identity.

Here's an illustration that may help – Many years ago.... when I was young!....I played hockey for a leading London club – Hounslow. Whenever I played for them I wore the club colours..... dark shorts and a mauve shirt. I was proud of my association with this famous club and didn't think twice about wearing their colours. I played for Hounslow for about three seasons, but then my job moved me up to Manchester. I joined another top club – Brooklands – the leading club in the north of England – maybe I'm a little biased, but it was another famous, well established club and I was proud to be part of that club.

When I started playing for Brooklands, I did not bring my Hounslow shirt and shorts with me.... I got rid of them...I left them behind. I had moved from Hounslow to Brooklands.... I had a new identity, so I wore suitable clothing for my new identity... my new club. Imagine how out of place it would have been for me to wear my old Hounslow colours – mauve shirt and dark shorts amongst white shirts, blue shorts and red socks.... I would have stood out like a sore thumb....it would have been totally unacceptable & inappropriate..... it would have ruined the game and confused everybody. 'Who is this bloke? We thought he was a Brooklands player but he's wearing the wrong clothes! Which side is he on?!

That's what Paul is getting at... if you're in Christ you have a new identity.. you have left your old club.... the pagan world.... and you belong to a new 'club'....you belong to Christ and his church. Put on clothing that reflects your new identity.... behave in a way that honours Christ and his church. If you don't, you do untold damage to the new team you belong to.... and not only that, you confuse people.... they look at your behaviour and say ' we thought this bloke was a Christian. But look at his behaviour! He's wearing the wrong clothes! Which side is he on?!

This change of clothing was acted out quite graphically in the early church – when new believers came to be baptised they came in their old clothes... these were thrown away and they were then given a new white robe as a symbol of their new identity.

You have a new identity! Your behaviour and your lifestyle must reflect that new identity. Old patterns of behaviour are no longer acceptable or appropriate – put on your new clothes!

It's as though Paul is saying there could be a lot of people in the church who could be arrested for impersonating a Christian. People who claim to be Christians, but who are still wearing their old clothes.... their behaviour and lifestyle are a complete denial of who they claim to be.

When I was Oak Hill training for the ministry, a number of the students used to put posters on their study doors. One student had a rather challenging one -'If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to arrest you? I was almost scared to go into his study! At least it made me check to see if I had my new clothes on!

Paul not only gives us the challenge – *'put off your old self with its practices'*, but he also gives us the remedy – *'put on the new man... the new self'*..... make sure you're wearing the right clothes.

Now let's make sure at this point that we are really sure what Paul is getting at here. Very easy to get confused with all this talk of the 'old self/man' and the 'new self/man'... the old self and the new self. Have we somehow got two identities? Are we two spiritual people in one? Are we some sort of split personality, spiritually speaking? Are we spiritual schizophrenics?

Let's spend a little time to clarify our thinking on this. The bottom line is that, as Christians, we are a new creation. *'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2Cor.5:17)*. And as Paul puts in his letter to the Romans, *'For we know that our old self, was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with so that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin' (6:6)*. You are a new creation.... you are a new creature....you are not the person you were before you came to Christ.

You don't have an 'old man' and a 'new man'. You are a new creation in Christ.... but there is a struggle going on... there's a battle that we have to fight, but, and this is very important, it's not a battle between the new man and the old man... you are just a new creation in Christ.... you don't now have an old man and a new man.... that would be like saying, 'I'm only half converted'. That's not what Paul is saying here – you can't be regenerate and unregenerate at the same time – you're either 'in Christ' or you're not....you're either born again or you're not.... you're either regenerate or you're not.... you're either a new man or you're not. The 'old man/self' was crucified with Christ – he is dead and gone. You are a new creation in Christ – you have a new identity.

What the bible teaches is that the 'old man/self' is our unregenerate self and the 'new man/self' is the regenerate self. It's not the unregenerate man warring against regenerate man. You are either 'in Adam' or you are 'in Christ' – it's one or the other, not both and.

As John Calvin said (remember him from last week? My Master's thesis on 'The Christian's conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil in the theology of John Calvin – excellent reading for insomniacs!) - 'The old man is whatever we bring from our mother's womb and whatever we are by nature. It is called the old man because we are first born from Adam and afterwards we are born again through Christ'. That makes it very clear doesn't it? You are either 'in Adam' or you are 'in Christ'. You are one or the other, it's not both and.

Another theologian, Thomas Goodwin (a 17th Century Puritan), says the same thing in a different way: 'There are but two men that stand before God, Adam and Jesus Christ and these two men have all other men hanging at their girdles'. There it is again – you are either 'in Adam', or you are 'in Christ' – you are one or the other, it's not both and.

The 'old man' cannot be converted – that is totally impossible. Do you remember how Paul puts it? *'The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them'* (1Cor.2:14). The old man/self cannot respond to the Spirit of God.... talk to an unbeliever about the things we are touching on today for example, and he'll give you a very funny look – because he can't understand.... he will think you have lost your marbles.... such talk is foolishness to him.... the old man is a hopeless case. It's no use trying to convert him – he has to be replaced. That's why Jesus said to Nicodemus, who was very religious, respectable and responsible, that even he had to be born again – 'You must be born again' (John 3:7). No matter how 'good' you are or think you are.... no matter how 'religious' you are you are 'in Adam' and that old man cannot be converted – 'You must be born again'.

So are we clear on all this? You are a new creation in Christ. We are not two people in one.... we are not spiritual schizophrenics.

But then you will no doubt say to me, 'This is all very well Adrian, but why do I keep sinning? Why is that? How do you explain that? You say I don't have an old man or an old self, but from where I am, it does seem as though he's alive and well and living in me! If there is no 'old man' in me, what on earth is going on?

Well, it's all to do with our 'new man' still being connected up with.... tied into, our flesh. We have to make a distinction here between the flesh and the old man. The best way of describing what the bible means by our 'flesh' is to think of it in terms of our being 'human'.... our humanness. We live in the flesh.... we live life in the body. Remember how Paul put it? *'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body (or 'flesh', as in AV and NKJ) I live by faith in the Son of God....'* (Gal.2:20).

He no longer lives, his 'old man' is dead.... Christ now lives in him, but whilst he's still here on earth he has to live his life in the body.... in the flesh. That's how it is.... that's the normal Christian experience.... you can't avoid it.

The flesh though, is weak.... and it makes the Christian life difficult....it keeps dragging us back from what we want to be. Let me quote Paul again from Romans: *'I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature (flesh). For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out'* (7:18). The Christian life is difficult.... it's a battle.... the flesh is that part of us that jumps out of the wardrobe in the mornings and says, 'Put these old clothes back on. You're much more comfortable in these. You know you prefer these clothes. Your new clothes aren't really 'you' – give up the struggle... It's too much like hard work.... and anyway, they don't fit you as well.... they don't really suit you. You look weird in those new clothes! Put the old clothes back on, don't bother with the new outfit!'(Grateful to John MacArthur for that illustration!)

That's the battle.... that's the struggle. Now, are we going to give up because the flesh is so weak and the lure of sin can still be so strong? Or are we going to turn Key number 4.... put off our old self, and *'put on the new self, which is being renewed in the image of its creator'* (Col.3:10)? We are no longer to live as the Gentiles do.... no longer live as the pagans do – no longer live as unbelievers do....you are a new creation in Christ.... you are different.... you are not the person you once were.... you have a new identity. That's who you are.... you are 'in Christ'....that's who you are now – positionally, in Christ – now live it out. Become what you are!

(I had hoped to cover what Paul means by our being renewed, but putting on our new clothes I felt needed to be covered in some detail and I soon realised that there needed to be two sermons, so we'll come back to this in three weeks time).