

## Authentic Christian Living

By Mark Jarvinen

*“<sup>22</sup> 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; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” **(Ephesians 4:22-5:2).***

For some, Christianity is a put-on. It's hypocritical or fake. Paul wrote to Timothy about those in the church of Ephesus who were holding to a form of religion, but denying its power. It's not ours to judge others, but we all know people who seem to be pretenders when it comes to the faith. Authentic Christianity by its very definition can't be a put-on.

But there is a sense in which true, authentic Christianity must be a put-on - more precisely, a put-off and a put-on. In **Ephesians 4:22-24**

Paul writes:

***“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; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”***

These verses refer to a “***new way of life***” that one puts on when they come to faith in Jesus Christ. **Colossians 3:9-10**, for example, refer to this idea of “***taking off***” and “***putting on***” as action in the past tense:

***“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”***

But this is not a once and done aspect of the Christian life. This new way of life is something that Paul urges believers to “***put on***” continually. **Romans 6:13** speaks beautifully about this, where it reads:

***“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”***

Notice the present tense of the word “***offer,***” which implies continuous action as part of a daily walk with Christ. To offer ourselves to God conveys the idea of “***putting ourselves in the service of God***” - offering ourselves on the altar of sacrifice, so to speak, day by day, moment by moment.

There we have it. Authentic Christianity is not phony but it ***is*** put-on. **What are the characteristics of this new way of life or this “new self” that the Christian is urged to put on?** Paul draws our attention to three characteristics in the context of today's text.

## I. PUT ON HONESTY.

Ephesians 4:25 says,

***"Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, ...."***

Verse 28 goes on to say,

***"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, ...."***

In other words the new way of life that we Christians are called upon to live involves **speaking and dealing honestly** with others - especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. To do otherwise gives the devil a foothold, according to v. 27, where it says,

***"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."***

I love movies dealing with the Old West. The movie **Geronimo**, is the story of the legendary Apache chief, who was among the last of his people to succumb to the relentless Westward thrust of the "White-eyes" in the latter years of the 19th century. The story of Geronimo is told through the eyes of a young 2nd Lieutenant, named Davis, who came to Arizona fresh out of West Point. In shocked disbelief, the young idealist watches his superior officers break promise after promise to a people whose word was their honor. Finally, to the disappointment and dishonor of his family back home, the disillusioned young lieutenant resigns his commission, and spends a lifetime with the recurring memories of deception and fraud in high places, and the knowledge that his countrymen had lied to the Apaches and stripped them of their honor as a people. \_ **DISHONESTY IS DISILLUSIONING** in any arena of life, but especially in the church. Dishonesty is inconsistent with the

new way of life in which we are called to walk as Christians.

## II. PUT ON ENCOURAGEMENT.

**Ephesians 4:29** says,

***"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."***

Words can be powerful tools of both creation and destruction. As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to putting on the new self, we are called to use words to build up, not to tear down.

The Kisi people of Liberia, West Africa, have a proverb that goes like this: **"When a man steps into the center of the circle to dance and no one claps, he will soon tire and sit down; but if everyone claps, he will dance all night."** Isn't there a lot of truth in that saying? **WE NEED TO CLAP FOR ONE ANOTHER.** We need to encourage one another and offer words of support.

There is probably no better example of an encourager in all of Scripture than we find in the New Testament character, **Barnabas**, whose very name meant **"Son of encouragement."** In **Acts 4:37** we find Barnabas providing **financial encouragement** by selling his farm and giving the money to the apostles to distribute to the needs of the church. Then, in **Acts 9:27**, we find Barnabas standing before the apostles, endorsing the newly converted Saul of Tarsus, giving him the **encouragement of fellowship.** It didn't matter to Barnabas that only recently this same Saul of Tarsus had been a killer of Christians. Barnabas stood by the side of one under suspicion and believed in him when nobody else would. Who did Saul of Tarsus become? He

became none other than the apostle Paul, himself. Even further along, in **Acts 15:36f**, we see Barnabas at it again, this time exercising **the encouragement of forgiveness**. Paul and Barnabas disagreed over young John Mark. He had traveled with them before, but had deserted them. Paul thought it unwise to take him along again, but Barnabas couldn't hold a past failure against John Mark. Barnabas not only forgave John Mark, but was willing to part company with Paul, in order to demonstrate his forgiveness. **Over 1900 years later, aren't we glad Barnabas gave John Mark a 2nd chance?** John Mark later associated himself with Peter and became the author of the second gospel, which we call the **Gospel of Mark**.

Encouragement is the **inspiration that one person gives to another through the technique of pouring in courage**. This is another aspect of what it means to **put on the new self**. Put on honesty, put on encouragement, and thirdly ...

### **III. PUT ON LOVE.**

**Ephesians 5:1-2** clearly state:

***"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and 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's a proven fact that children who grow up with rejection have a more difficult time giving and receiving love, than those who grow up in a loving, affirming environment. Notice how Paul refers to the Ephesians as ***"dearly loved children,"*** in **Ephesians 5:1**. Paul is saying to them, *"You are dearly loved children. Because you are in Christ, you are fully accepted by God. Live in the light of your full*

*acceptance by God, and love others in the same way."*

Children imitate their parents, often without knowing why. You've probably heard of the little girl who asked her mother why she cut the ends off the ham before placing it in the roaster. Scratching her head thoughtfully she replied, "**I don't know why, except that was the way my mother always did it.**" In the same way, Paul exhorts us to "**Be imitators of God,**" in the way we love others. He then points to Christ, who loved the church sacrificially, giving up His life for them.

**Judy Anderson**, whose husband was at one time the West Africa Director of World Relief, grew up as the daughter of missionaries in Zaire. As a little girl, she went to a day-long rally celebrating the 100th anniversary of Christian missionaries coming to that part of Africa. After a full day of long speeches and music, an old man came before the crowd insisting that he be allowed to speak. He said that he would soon die, and that he alone had some important information, which if he did not share, would go to the grave with him. He explained how when the first missionaries came a hundred years before, the Africans didn't trust them, and thought their ways were strange and their message unusual. The tribal leaders decided to test the missionaries by slowly poisoning them to death. Over a period of months and years, missionary children died one by one. Pausing, amidst the hushed silence, the elderly African, in a voice cracked by old age, said these profound words, "It was as we watched how they died that we decided we wanted to live as Christians."

That story had gone untold for one hundred years. Those who died painful, strange deaths never knew why they were dying, or what the

impact of their lives and deaths would be. But they had stayed in Zaire, serving and loving. **WHY? Because they trusted Jesus Christ, who had given His life sacrificially for them, so that they could imitate His love toward others.**

## **CONCLUSION**

And so, as blood-bought followers of Jesus, with gratitude for all He has done for us through His finished work on the cross, and in humility, knowing that by grace we have received far more than we deserve; by faith, put on honesty, encouragement, and love, walking in this new way of life that is ours in Christ, believing that this way of life will somehow leave its mark on the world in which we live, a world that needs Jesus and the peace and the hope that knowing Him brings.

**A-men.**