

## **VICTORY OVER SIN – Progressive Sanctification: A Process of Renewal (Part 15 in a 16 part study)**

In our last segment, we promised to elaborate on the apostle Paul's use of the metaphor occurring in both Colossians 3:9-10, as well as Ephesians 4:22-24. There, he speaks of putting off the old self and putting on the new self, along the manner in which one would put on a garment. The connection to Romans 6:1-11 is undeniable. The action encouraged here in achieving victory over sin is absolutely essential. But if these verbs of "putting off" and "putting on" are in the aorist tense, does this mean that we should view this responsibility as a "once and for all" enactment, with no need of being repeated? Absolutely not.

The key for properly understanding Paul's admonition in both Colossians and Ephesians consists of viewing it in both its immediate and larger context. Perhaps you have heard of the proverb which speaks to the importance of this in accurately interpreting a particular text: "A text without a context is a pretext." In other words, we can easily distort the meaning of a text by pulling it out of its relationship to what precedes and what follows. So, it's important for us to remember that Paul's involvement in planting the churches in Ephesus and Colossae was direct and personal (Acts 19:1-9; cf. v10). On the other hand, he had nothing to do with establishing the fellowship in Rome, which explains why the Roman epistle is so comprehensive, unlike any of his other letters.

In the immediate context of Colossians and Ephesians, the similarity is remarkable. Both epistles were written after Romans, in the aftermath of Paul's imprisonment. Just prior to the admonition of "putting off" and "putting on," Paul's concern about the spiritual condition of these respective believer's is obvious. In both instances, the issue involves an apparent "reversion," also known as "backsliding," to the behavior of their previous lifestyle, prior to their conversion experience. Please read the respective passages of Colossians 3:5-9 and Ephesians 4:17-21, and make your own determination as to whether or not my understanding of this context is correct.

Now, let's place the immediate context within its larger framework. In all likelihood, Paul and/or Epaphras (Colossians 4:12), would have directly taught them the principles revealed in Romans 6-8. But it certainly seems as if he is writing to them in a manner which expresses concern as to whether or not those principles are still being practiced. He operates on the assumption that they are NOT. Notice Ephesians 4:20 – **"But you did not learn Christ in this way. . ."** Or Colossians 3:7-8a – **"and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside. . ."**

In light of the negative implications of these statements, is Paul using the aorist tense in his put off/put on metaphor to encourage a commitment to be made once, and then not maintained? Hardly. He would not have viewed that as a solution, but as the problem. And the problem was that in spite of being initially taught the principles for victorious Christian living, that lifestyle had been neglected, and perhaps even abandoned. Paul's use of the aorist tense serves as a reminder to them of the spiritual commitment which they had made, and how an ongoing re-commitment was now in order. In concluding this segment on a positive note, consider the relevance of 2 Corinthians 4:16 – **"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."**

As someone who is 71 years old, I am not in denial as to what Paul is saying about my outer man. But I can also affirm that my spiritual condition is indeed being renewed day by day, as a result of God's grace at work in me, through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Just as that renewal is taking place day by day, so is my responsibility for reckoning myself to be dead to sin and alive to God, through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord.