

THE PUT-OFF/PUT-ON PRINCIPLE OF TRANSFORMATION

What is God's *goal*...what is God's *desire*...what is God's *will* for every child of His? To be "conformed to the image of His Son." What does that mean? To become more and more *like Jesus*, right?

Anybody *there* yet? Have any of you *arrived*? Are any of us at that point where we *don't need to change* anymore? **No**—not if we are honest with ourselves—and comparing ourselves to Jesus!

Here again is the quote I've given you a number of times in this series from the book, "How People Change" by **Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp**: "The Christian life is a state of **thankful discontent** or **joyful dissatisfaction**. That is, I live every day **thankful for the grace** that has changed my life, but I am **not satisfied**. Why not? Because, when I look at myself honestly, I have to admit that I am not all I can be in Christ." (pg 119)

For the past couple of weeks, we've been talking about the *process* of transformation. We know from Philippians 2:13 that **God is the agent** of change. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." But...it doesn't happen all by itself.

Staring out the window at your garden isn't going to make it grow; there is some *work involved*! "Sanctification"—the theological word for Christian growth—is a *cooperative effort* between us and God. **God** will unquestionably do **His part**—but He won't do our part! And if we *don't do our part*, we won't grow! It really is that simple!

What is our *responsibility*—what is our *role*—in the process of change? We need to seek to know—**and do**—the *will* of God—as seen in the **Word** of God—and the Holy Spirit will do the *work* of God to change us!

Piece of cake, right? **Wrong!** Why? Because there is a *battle within* us between our *sinful, self-pleasing nature* and the Holy Spirit that dwells inside all true believers. **How** are we to "*treat*" our sin nature?

First, **don't feed the dragon!** We are to consider our sin nature *as dead*—even though it is not dead yet! It is as *good as dead*, though, because Christ has **delivered a death blow to it**, and it is slowly dying. It will not—praise God—be *coming to heaven* with us!

How—in a practical sense—do we *not feed* the dragon? Last week we looked at two *word-pictures* that God gives us to help **us visualize** how we are to treat our sinful, selfish nature.

One was the picture of crucifixion. According to the teachings of both Jesus and Paul, we are to take up our cross—meaning "die to self." We are to consider the world being **dead to us**—and us being **dead to the world** (Galatians 2:20; 6:14).

The second picture we looked at was that *of a seed*. Just as the *seed of a plant* must go into the ground and "die"—meaning **shed its outer shell** for the life inside it to "be released"—we need "to die" to self in order for Christ's life to be seen in us. **Same concept**, different analogy.

Please take your Bibles and turn to Ephesians 4. Paul wrote this letter to the **believers in Ephesus** from a prison in Rome between 60 and 63 A.D. Ephesians has **6 chapters** with a very distinct shift in emphasis in the **second** half of the book. Chapters 1-3 are **doctrinal** in nature and focus on the many blessings we have from God through Christ. In Chapters 4-6, we are told **how we ought to live** in light of what Christ has done for us.

Notice what it says in vs 1 "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," What does that mean? God called you to be His child—and if you **accepted** His call, **you are** His child. And since you are His child, God through Paul says you **need to live like one!**

Jumping ahead to vss 11-16, we see that God **gives spiritual leaders** to the church "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry" with the goal being that we grow into mature believers that are like Christ.

--In vs 17, Paul tells them not to live like the unsaved—and in vss 18-19 he outlines what that looks like. And then we come to verse 20, please follow along as I read through vs 24.

The title of the message this morning obviously comes from the “put off” in vs 22—and the “put on” in vs 24. Other passages where this principle is found are: Rom 13:12-14, Col 3:8-14, and I Peter 2:1-2.

Before we look at the principle, though, it is important to see...

1. The prerequisite for change is personally knowing Christ! (vss 20-21)

Notice again the beginning of vs 20 “**But ye...**” **Why** is the “but ye” there?

To point out... A. The contrast between believers and unbelievers

How do we know that’s what Paul is doing?

--Vs 18 makes it pretty obvious that he is talking **about unbelievers**: “...being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:”

--Vs 19 describes what they do: “**Who being past feeling**” [having become callous and having lost all sense of shame] “**have given themselves over unto lasciviousness**” [meaning indecent behavior, lewdness] “**to work all uncleanness with greediness**” [greedy to practice every kind of impurity].

“**But you**”—child of God—are not to be like that! You are to be **radically different compared to** unbelievers—and different from what you were like before **you were saved!**

Back to vs 20, “**But ye have not so learned Christ;**”

Here we see...

B. Christ is the “topic” they had learned

Interesting way to put it, isn’t it? We **can imagine** a teacher—or home-schooling mom—saying to a student (or their child), ‘You have not **learned math** that way—why did you do it like that?’ But to say, ‘You have not **learned Shakespeare** that way’ would sound kind of strange!

Peter O'Brien put it like this: “The phrase ‘to learn a person’ appears nowhere else in the Greek Bible.... In Colossians, the same verb is used of the readers having ‘learned’ the ‘grace of God’ from Epaphras, who had given them systematic instruction in the gospel (Col 1:7). Here in Ephesians **Christ Himself is the content** of the teaching which the readers learned.” (https://www.preceptaustin.org/ephesians_420-22#4:20)

Not only is Christ **the topic** they had learned, C. Christ is the Teacher they had learned from

We see that in vs 21 “If so be that ye have **heard Him**, and have been taught **by Him**, as the truth is in Jesus.”

Had the believers in Ephesus **literally sat down** at the feet of Jesus and **heard Him** teach like Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus did? **No**; Paul was writing this 30 yrs after Jesus had died and gone back to heaven!

So in what sense had they **heard** Jesus—and **been taught** by Him?

The same way **we** can hear Jesus and be taught by Him now—through His Word! **How** does that work? **How** do we **now**—2000 years after Jesus returned to heaven—**hear** His voice?

Do we simply read the Bible and **imagine** Jesus is speaking to us? No; there is **more to it** than that! When we read the Word of God, the **Holy Spirit speaks** to our hearts—not our **ears!**

In a way that is **difficult to explain**—but undeniably real—God the Holy Spirit **convinces us** of the truthfulness of God’s Word. We read that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” and instead of telling ourselves “We are not that bad,” the Holy Spirit **impresses upon us** an awareness of our sinfulness.

We read (or hear) that “the wages of sin is death” and instead of thinking “I deserve heaven,” the Holy Spirit **convinces us** that God is absolutely **fair and just and righteous** to send us to hell!

But then we read (or hear) words like **Romans 5:8** “But God commendeth [demonstrated] His love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners**, Christ died for us.” And the Holy Spirit takes that precious thought—that Jesus died in **my place** to pay for **my sins** because **He loves me**—and **makes it real** to me. I personally **sense His love** for me in my heart!

And then we read (or hear) the wonderful promise found in **Romans 10:13** “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” And we are convinced—by the Holy Spirit in our inner most being—that that is what **we need to do**. And so we **ask** Jesus to forgive us and save us—and He does!

And then we enjoy the **affirmation**—the assurance in our hearts—that Paul speaks of in **Romans 8:16** “The Spirit itself **beareth witness** with our spirit, that **we are** the children of God:”

What about you? **Have you heard** the words of Jesus? **Have you been** convinced of the truth of Jesus' word? **Have you come** to know Christ personally in this way? Jesus said in **John 10:27** "My sheep **hear** my voice, and I know them, and they **follow** me:"

What is the **prerequisite for change**? We have to **personally know Christ**—we have to be born-again and become a child of God—so we can have a **new nature** and be transformed by the Holy Spirit **from the inside!**

Am I saying that **it is impossible** for someone who is unsaved to change? No; I am not saying that at all! What I'm saying is this—only God can actually change a person's **heart**. Unsaved people can stop drinking and smoking and doing drugs. But...often times they **go back** to those things. Why? Because **their desire** for those things hasn't changed! **Only God** can change the "desires"—the "want-to"—that is within us.

So—based on us being different from the world because we **personally know** Christ—we are to...

2. "Put off" the old man (vs 22)

Notice again what it says in vs 22.

--To "**put off**" means just like it sounds—to take something off and lay it aside. During that particular time in history, it was common practice to lay aside outer garments before participating in some kind of phys activity.

You probably remember that when **Stephen was stoned** to death by the religious leaders of the day, "they laid down their clothes" at the feet of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:58).

What is to be "put off"? "The old man!" But **who**—or **what**—is "the old man?" Commentators spend a lot of time trying to determine if the "old man" refers to our **sin nature**—or our former **way of living**.

--"former conversation" points to a **former manner of life**—the way we used to be before we were saved.

--"corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" sounds more like a reference to our **sin nature** than manner of life.

To further add to the challenge, the verb tense for "put off" is the aorist—meaning **past action**. In other words, our "old man" has **already been** put off! We see that same thought in **Romans 6:6** "Knowing this, that **our old man is crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

But...if our "old man"—our sin nature—has **already been crucified** with Christ, **why** do we have to put it off? Because **the dragon is still alive**, right? **Positionally**, our sin nature is counted as already having been crucified with Christ. Using last week's analogy, the dragon has **received the gash** that will lead to its death!

But...because he is **still alive**—we must not feed him! **In practice**, we must "put off"—we must lay aside—our former way of living! If we don't, we are feeding the dragon!

We can't just "put-off," though. We must also... **3. Put in the Word of God (vs 23)**

We see that concept in vs 23 "And be renewed in the Spirit of your mind;"

Some of you might be thinking, 'Hey Pastor, where are you getting that from? "**Put in**" is not in the verse—and I'm not seeing any references to **the Bible** in this verse, either!'

True...but—we know by comparing Scripture with Scripture—that God **uses His Word** to change us! We know that from previous verses we've looked at, II Corinthians 3:18 in particular:

II Corinthians 3:18 "But we all, with open face **beholding as in a glass** the glory of the Lord, **are changed** into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Here are some other verses that demonstrate God uses His Word to change us:

I Peter 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the sincere **milk of the word**, that ye may **grow** thereby:"

II Peter 1:4 "Whereby are given unto us exceeding **great and precious promises**: that by these ye might be partakers of the **divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

--How are we changed? By taking in the Word of God!

--How do we grow? By taking in the sincere milk of the word!

--How do we become partakers of the divine nature? By knowing—and claiming—God's promises!

I think you'd also agree that the only way to truly know **what to** "put-off"—and **what to** "put-on"—is to see what God says in His Word! It is also noteworthy to see from the Greek that the verb "be renewed" is in the **present tense**—meaning continuous action; but in the **passive voice**—meaning something that happens to us. In other words, our minds will be **continually renewed**—by God—if we are **consistently taking in** God's Word!

4. "Put on" the new man (vs 24)

Vs 24 "And that ye put on the new man..." Similar to vs 22, commentators wrestle with what is meant by the "new man." Is Paul talking about us adopting **a new manner of life**—or is he talking about the **new nature within us**? To which I reply...**Yes!** He is referring **to both** a new way of living—and a new nature living in us!

How do we know he is referring to our **new nature**? Notice again what the verse says: "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is...what's the next word....? **"Created!"**

The new man is **created!** Can you or I create anything? It depends how you define "create," right? Here are a couple of definitions from the Greek word that "create" comes from in **BibleHub**: "The Greek verb 'ktizó' primarily means 'to create' or 'to form.' In the New Testament, it is used to describe the **divine act of creation** by God." It "applies **only to God** who alone can make what was 'not there before.'"

We cannot create something out of **nothing**—and we certainly cannot create a "new man, which after God [not in reference to time, but in likeness] is created in righteousness and true holiness."

But...**because we are a new** creature in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17), we are to **live a new kind** of life! **I Peter 1:14-16** "As obedient children, **not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts** in your ignorance: ¹⁵ But as He which hath called you is holy, so **be ye holy in all manner of conversation** [life]; ¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." Sounds kind of like **"put-off"** and **"put-on,"** doesn't it?

Simply put, **Paul** is saying in Ephesians 4 what **Peter is saying I Peter 1**: live your life **in a new way** that reflects your **new nature!** The Apostle John makes a similar statement in **I John 2:6** "He that saith he **abideth in Him** ought himself **also so to walk**, even as He walked."

Lastly, I want to briefly consider... **5. Practical application of the put-off and put-on principle**

It is easy to miss the fact that God **gives us several examples** right here in the same chapter and we often don't see them. It took me literally years to notice them—and I still didn't see them until I was studying what others had said about the "put-off/put-on" principle!

A. "Put off" lying; "put on" truth-telling (vs 25)

We see that in vs 25, don't we? "Putting away lying" is obviously the "put off;" "speak every man truth" is the "put on." Jay Adams puts it like this: "A liar is still a liar until he becomes something else—a truth teller." (*Use of Scriptures*, 300-301). The "mind renewal"—if you want to call it that—is realizing we are members one of another—meaning being in the same family.

B. "Put off" stealing; "put on" working (vs 28)

Look at vs 28. Even though it doesn't say, "Put off stealing," isn't that what "Let him that stole steal no more" means? And even though it doesn't say, "Put on working," isn't that what is meant by "rather let him labor"?

To again quote Adams: "...a thief who stops stealing is simply **a thief between jobs!** When is a thief not a thief? When he becomes something else..."—in this case **a worker** and **a giver** instead of **a taker!**

We see that in this verse, don't we? There is a replacement of **the bad**—stealing; with **the good**—laboring and working with our own hands. But there is also a **heart-change** indicated here, isn't there?

A thief is **greedy** and **selfish** and thinks only about what they **can take**. But if a person stops stealing—and starts working—for the purpose of **giving to someone** else who has needs, he has changed on the inside!

C. Personal example: "putting off" one kind of music; "putting on" another kind

Here's a **personal example** that I gave you a couple of years ago. I grew up in the 70's and **loved** Rock music. Not the heavy-metal, head-banging kind, but bands like "The Moody Blues," "Fleetwood Mac," "Jackson Browne," and "The Eagles." But early in my 2nd semester of college—having just turned 19—God really began working on me. I was in a pre-med program at UW-EC b/c I felt God wanted me to **be a doctor**.

In fact, I even **told people that!** But...I was too busy to **pray**...and too busy to **read my Bible**...and too busy to **go to church**.

And the **hypocrisy** of that mind-set—which in essence was, “I’ll get back to you when I’m done with my education, God”—really began to work on me. To make a long story short, I really began seeking God and His will. God led me to the woman who is now my wife—and she encouraged me to attend church with her. I did that—and for the first time in my life I was getting a “steady diet” of **Biblical preaching**.

About a month later, Evangelist John Goetsch came to our church and **God used him** to convict me of my need to “die to self.” I surrendered to God—I gave myself to Him as a living sacrifice—and one of the many things God worked on me about was **my music**. He convicted me of my need to “put off” the old—and so I did!

I don’t remember that being hard to do—probably because it was 44 years ago! But even though the details are fuzzy, I do know **two** things helped. **One** I already mentioned—me making a conscious decision to “die to self.” I am firmly convinced that that **one decision** makes other decisions relatively easy.

The **second thing** that helped was the principle I’ve been sharing with you today. I didn’t just “put off” bad music; I “put on”—I began listening to—godly music.

What about you? Is there something **God wants you** to put off, but you are really having a hard time doing that? Maybe it’s because you aren’t trying to replace **the bad** with something **good!**

Or maybe it’s because you haven’t “died to self!” I said it once already, but here it is again: I am firmly convinced that the decision to “die to self” makes all other decisions relatively easy.

Have **you done that?**

Romans 12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies **a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is **your reasonable service**.”

So what is it that God would have us do?

1. First, do you personally know Christ? Have you heard His voice? Have you received Him?
2. Second, have you died to self? Have you presented yourself to God as a living sacrifice? If not, why not do that today?
3. Third, do you have a sinful habit you are trying to overcome? If so, I would encourage you to follow God’s plan: Put off the old/Put in the Word of God/Put on the new.