

INTRODUCTION

Most people like new things – new gadgets, new clothes and new cars. I bought a new old car a few months ago. Some of the guys among us may be curious to find out what kind of car their pastor drives. I found this picture on the internet that shows the exact model and color of the car I now own. Once a brother saw me in the parking lot. He commented: “What a nice car you have!” I reacted: “Thanks! In fact this is a recycled car.” He didn’t quite understand what I said. Let me show you a real picture of the car when I bought it. The car was declared totaled because apparently a tree fell on the top of it and crushed the front and back windshields. A mechanic who specializes in fixing damaged vehicles repaired the car and sold it to me at a price I could afford. When he delivered the car I could hardly believe what I saw. It does not only look brand new, when I sit inside it smells new too! But if you check carefully you will realize that it is far from new. Some of the paint job has a different texture, and a few panels are not perfectly aligned. While some people have the skills to restore things back to a near-original condition they cannot make old things new. However, when God saves us He creates a new person in us. We look the same on the outside. We will not become a few years younger or lose a few pounds after we accepted Christ. But we are a new person on the inside because now God lives inside us. In the book of Colossians Paul told the believers that because of the change inside of us, there has to be change on the outside as well. As a pastor I don’t worry that no one will come to the church. A bigger concern I have is that sometimes we live a double life. We appear like nice people in the church. However, once we step out of the church doors we are like peeling off our skin and become a different creature. That should not be the case. That is why in this passage Paul reminded us that in Christ we can be different because we are already made different.

EXPLANATION

1. 原則 Principles

To prevent ourselves from living a double life, first, we have to review some important spiritual principles. Look with me in **verses 1 and 2**: 1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. When we received Christ our old self died with Him. When Jesus rose from the dead we rose with Him and received a new life. As a result, there has to be some changes in our mindset. Paul said in verse 1 that we have to “set (our) hearts on things above.” The word “set” here means to pursue. It talks about our actions. Then in verse 2 Paul urged us to “set (our) minds on things above.” Here “set” is a different Greek word. It can be translated as “devote to.” So it points to our attitude. When our attitude is changed then our actions will follow suit. The men among us can concur with that when you were still dating your wife. Your whole person was completely changed! You hate to go to the mall. But when your girl-friend wanted to go there you gladly served as her driver. Romantic movies are not your taste, but you eagerly went with your lady to the theater to watch them, and you even pretended to get emotional with the story too! Similarly, we have to make changes to please God. In the past you may live like a king at home, waiting for others to serve you. But now you joyfully

serve others in ministries. Before you became a Christian Sunday afternoons in the fall season means football to you. Now you stay behind after church to have fellowship time with others or go help cleanup. Do you intentionally switch your focus from earthly things to the things above? When my family moved to Memphis my wife and I got rid of a lot of stuff accumulated all these years. We dug out one item after another hiding in closets that we didn't even know existed. Those are the earthly things we don't really need in everyday life. Some ended up in donation and others went to the dumpster. Some people try to create their heaven on earth by hoarding treasures. When catastrophe like a fire or a flood strikes, they soon realize how long-lasting their heaven really is. As Christians we have our two feet planted on the ground but we should always feel home-sick about heaven. If we set our hearts and minds on the things above then we can overlook our loss and gain. We would also feel at ease even if our accomplishment is not recognized. We do not live for today's glory but we long for God's eternal glory.

2. 實踐 – 脫去犯罪老我 Practice – Put off Sinfulness

In Christ we can be different because we are already made different. After we have reviewed some principles we have to put them into practice. In this passage Paul used the expressions of putting off and putting on to illustrate how we should practice living our new life in Christ. The analogy is like putting off dirty clothes and putting on some clean ones. First, Paul told us to put off our sinfulness. He says in the first half of **verse 5**: Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature... Paul told us that we have to put our sinfulness to death. Recently I found a big cockroach in our home. I quickly put it to death because I know that if there is one cockroach there will be a whole gang hiding somewhere. What if your problem is not cockroach but a tumor? There is no way you can co-exist with such terminal disease. If you don't put it to death then it will put you to death sooner or later. That should be our mentality when we deal with sin. Here in the passage Paul gave us a long list of sins. There are sin in our actions, in our mind and in our speech. You can refer to the slides as I briefly go through the list. The sinful acts include sexual immorality, impurity, lust and evil desires (v. 5). Accordingly to the Bible any relationship outside of marriage is considered adultery because God sees marriage as holy. Next, the sins in our mind include greed (v. 5), which is coveting things that do not belong to you, and also anger, rage and malice (v. 8). Uncontrollable emotional eruption that can lead to devastating outcomes. Then there are sins we commit with our lips. There are slander and filthy language (v. 8) and lie (v. 9). Filthy language refers to obscene remarks. Both slander and lie have to do with speaking of falsehood. Jesus once said that Satan is the father of lies. It goes without saying that verbal attack is a vicious weapon Satan uses to destroy the church. As part of our sinful human nature we like to entertain rumors and we like to spread them too. Once a few people circulated a rumor that their pastor had a Cadillac. The information was later corrected. The pastor did not have a Cadillac, but he had cataract in his eyes. That may be a laughable moment. But we all know that there are more damaging rumors in the church. As God's children we have to put to death this sinful nature of stirring up and spreading rumors. We have to be truthful in our words. Next time someone told you: "I heard about so and so..." you have to stop him/her, then ask: "Is that true? If you are not sure perhaps we should go to the person in question and verify it." Before we pass along some news we also need to examine our intent. Am I just showing off that I am knowledgeable in other people's business? Am I telling the fact as it is or do I exaggerate something and make up my own interpretation? Am I building people up or tearing them down? People of God: it is time to put to death our sinfulness in passing rumors!

3. 實踐 – 穿上關顧之情 Practice – Put on Mindfulness

In Christ we can be different because we are already made different. Besides taking off our sinfulness Paul encouraged us to put on mindfulness about others. He said in **verse 12**: Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Since we are loved by God we have to imitate after His love to treat others. All the five virtues Paul stated deal with inter-personal relationship. The Greek word for compassion describes one's emotional being stirred up when seeing someone suffer. People who act in kindness treat others in a friendly manner. Next, people who show humility are not puffed up about their own abilities or social status. Rather, they are eager to help others like servants. Gentleness is not weakness. It is an expression of calmness and self-control even when one receives unfair treatment. Finally, people who display patience willingly bear insult from others without retaliation. We all need wisdom and strength from our Lord to grow in all five areas. If you are indifferent to others' feelings then you need more compassion. Sometimes we may be harsh in our words and attitude toward others, and we need to ask the Lord to give us kindness. We can be too quick and strong in our reaction when being offended and we can use more gentleness. Then in situations where we are too eager to show off ourselves may the Lord add us His humility. In addition, we need patience to endure hurt in adversity.

Besides putting on those five virtues we also need to put on mindfulness when resolving conflict. **Verse 13** reads: Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. The root for the word "forgive" is grace. Therefore, to forgive others is to give people grace. By definition grace is not something we earned or deserve. Therefore, we forgive even before the offender admits the fault and offer an apology. Paul also specified how we should forgive: Forgive as the Lord forgave you. How did our Lord forgive us? Freely and completely! As God's children we must extend the same forgiveness to those who wrong us. You may protest: "But you don't know how much hurt that person caused to me. I can never forget that." By saying forgiveness is what we must do, I never imply that it is an easy thing. By our nature we want to make even. For those who have a bigger tolerance they may simply ignore the person and hide the pain. But God has the best solution for us – forgive. You know, Christian life is not like squeezing a toothpaste when there is little content left inside. It is about yielding ourselves to the Lord in our weakness. After all, if we can do it ourselves why we need God? Let me give you a Bible verse that offers me constant encouragement. **Hebrews 12:3** reads: Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. We have to think about Jesus all the time, especially when we are weak, or we are too stubborn to hold onto our grudge and do not want to forgive others.

4. 實踐 – 穿上感謝的心 Practice – Put on Thankfulness

In Christ we can be different because we are already made different. The final thing Paul encouraged us to put on is thankfulness to God. In verse 15 Paul told us to be thankful. How? Continue to read the **next verse**: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Paul told us that we have to let the Word of God dwell in our hearts. The word "dwell" means to stay. Therefore, we don't allow God's Word come in from one ear and exit through the other ear. When God's Word dwells our thankfulness to Him will

grow. We read the Bible at home. We come to fellowship and Sunday school to study the Scripture. We can also memorize different verses. Besides, Paul mentioned singing as another way to remember God's Word. In this verse psalms, hymns and spiritual songs refer to different kind of music people composed. For example, Bible scholars generally agree that in the Old Testament times every chapter in the book of Psalm were sung by the Jews. Christians in past eras also composed beautiful melodies for selected Psalms. A familiar one is Psalm 23. As we sing God's Word will echo in our hearts. Singing is an excellent way to remind us of God's nature and His work. You see, almost all classical hymns have a few stanzas because the composers were writing a continuous story. Take "Amazing Grace" as an example. The lyrics describe the spiritual journey of John Newton, the composer. Stanza 1 talks about his conversion from a spiritually-blind person to a believer. In the next stanza he gives praise to God for the grace he experienced. When it comes to stanza 3 Newton recalls how God delivered him from difficult times. The song concludes in a crescendo in the last stanza as he looks forward to the unspeakable joy when God's people gather in heaven. Therefore, a song like that give us comfort and strength no matter what we go through in life. Singing in the church should not be only for entertainment. It is first and foremost a way to give thanks to God, then secondly it is a reminder to believers about how great our God is. From worshipping God with songs Paul expanded the scope to our whole life in **verse 17**: And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Our worship to God is not only restricted to a church. Every moment of our life should be a form of worship. We have to do everything in the name of our Lord. In other words, everything we do is for the sole purpose of giving Him glory. If Jesus is your Lord then whatever you do in and outside of the church is a form of worship to God. If you are a student, then glorify God in your grades. If you are an employee, then glorify God with your job performance. For the stay-home moms you glorify God by taking care of your kids and being diligent in your housework. Even for the retirees among us the way you spend your time should bring glory to God. When we do all things in the name of Christ then our hearts will be filled with thankfulness.

CONCLUSION

In Christ we can be different because we are already made different. The Bible is not some idealistic dogmas for us to study in the church. It is a practical guideline that we can apply in our everyday life. Renowned evangelist Billy Graham once said that Christians should put God first, others second and oneself last. When we live in our sinfulness we are being self-centered. When we are mindful of the needs of others we switch our focus to the people around us. Then as we develop thankfulness to God we put Him in the core of our lives. It is a life-long changing process. After all, we are so used to seeing ourselves as the center of the universe. A story was told when a person became allergic to peanuts out of the blue. He was dumbfounded because he never had the medical issue since a kid. The doctors ran different tests and looked into his medical record. Finally, they discovered the problem source. This patient had a recent kidney transplant. The organ donor was allergic to peanuts. Therefore, in receiving a new body part he adopted the illness. He understood that from now on he had to make adjustment in his diet because of the change inside of him. Similarly, for Christians, there is a revolutionary change in us. Once we are in Christ our old self is no more. We now have a new life. We have to make adjustments in our lives to live for Christ alone.