

Character Building Messages

Dealing With the Old and the New Nature

Ken Birks, Pastor/Teacher

I. Introductory Remarks.

In this message we will be exploring the transformation process of putting off the old nature putting on the nature and why it is an important aspect of our salvation. This is more of a doctrinal statement on the need for change and letting go of past sins and the need for change by clothing ourselves in Christ and His nature than on how the transformation comes about.

In much of today's Christianity there is a lack of true conversion and transformation in the lives of those who are attempting to follow Christ. Many are being seduced by a watered down version of Christianity that doesn't challenge people to put off the old nature by being crucified to the world.

■ **The Ultimate Goal for the Christian.**

We must keep in mind that the goal or the ultimate destiny for the Christian is to come into the fullness of Christ, being changed or transformed into His image.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 4:1-3 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ²But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

The above Scriptures not only show us how being changed and transformed into the image of Christ is our ultimate destiny, but they also show us that when we fail to change as we have been directed, it affects our ministry to those who are perishing.

II. The Foundation of Change – Colossians 3:1-4.

In this passage of Scripture the apostle Paul is dealing with the character of the new man that is being formed in every Christian who has come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving power. Paul is making a transition from theological statements to practical precepts in Christ. He has laid a strong doctrinal foundation in the preceding chapters on Who Christ is and now his attention turns to how Christians should live their lives.

In these verses Paul lays the foundation for effective change in our lives. Because our lives have been raised with Christ, our lives are to be different. They are to reflect a new pattern of life.

1. Not Carnality but Christ.

Colossians 3:1-2 *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

Colossians 3:1-2 (NLT) *Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power. ²Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth.*

- The operative word here is “Set.”

We are set our mind and affections on things that are above – the realities of heaven. If we are to see true and lasting change in our lives, it means setting all of our affection on Christ and His kingdom. The person who has been raised with Christ sees things from the eternal perspective, which should result in having their whole pattern of life on earth being dominated by this perspective.

We once walked according to the world, but now God has raised us up together in His likeness and made us to sit in heavenly places with Christ.

Ephesians 2:5-6 *(even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

Carnality does not produce faith but rather unbelief and defeat. Think of the ten spies who came back with a bad report after being sent out by Moses to spy out the land. They came back with a defeated report based

on unbelief, because they were not seeing things through God's perspective. On the other hand, Joshua and Caleb came back full of faith with a good report because they new where they were seated. They had set their minds on the realities of heaven. They knew where they were seated.¹

2. We Have Been Hidden In Christ and Crucified to the World

The reason for the call to this new pattern of living and heavenly mindedness is the fact that, in Christ, the believer has died to the world and his life is now hidden in Christ.

Colossians 3:3-4 *For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

- **Hidden expresses a permanent condition created by God in Christ.**

The fact that the Christian's old sin nature has been crucified with Christ and buried together with Him in baptism and that he is now liberated, resurrected to live a life pleasing to God, must be accepted "by grace... through faith", just as was the initial salvation.

Galatians 2:20 *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Galatians 6:14 *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

3. Putting Away and Putting to Death the Sins of the Past.

Being crucified to the world means that we are now in a state where we are actually in the process of putting away or putting to death the sins of the past.

Colossians 3:5-7 (NLT) *So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry.*

⁶*God's terrible anger will come upon those who do such things.* ⁷*You used to do them when your life was still part of this world.*

- **To be heavenly minded does not mean living in the clouds.**

The believer who obeys the apostolic charge to aim at the things above will be involved in spiritual warfare here on earth as he or she puts to death the sinful flesh and allows the new nature to find outward expression in a godly life.

The word “so or therefore” found at the beginning of verse five signifies the transition from doctrine to practice. The connection between doctrine and duty is very important because in the end, we really behave as we truly believe. We express what we fully confess. In other words our actions are based upon what we believe and confess.

Romans 8:12-13 (NLT) *So, dear Christian friends, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. ¹³For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live.*

1 Peter 2:11 (NLT) *Dear brothers and sisters, you are foreigners and aliens here. So I warn you to keep away from evil desires because they fight against your very souls.*

The idea in the above Scriptures is that we are to live in heaven so that may really live on earth. As a result the following evil desires will be done away with.

- **Fornication** – Sexual sin between non-married people.²
- **Uncleanness** – Uncleanness or impurity embraces every manifestation in look, word, and deed of the immoral spirit. We are to avoid all appearances of evil.
- **Passions** – Inordinate affection and sensual appetites.
- **Evil Desires** – Lusts which lead to sinful actions³
- **Covetousness** – Idolatry, which is anything that is set up as an idol of their own making in place of God.

Covetousness and idolatry are very dangerous and perhaps more so than the others because they may assume a cloak of decency or respectability.

Colossians 3:6-7 *Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*

The wrath of God is directed against the devil, his angels, and sin, which destroy those for whom Christ died. But it is also coming upon those who pridefully refuse the only remedy for overcoming the power of sin: Christ's atoning death.

In light of the reality of God's coming wrath, Paul exhorts the believers to destroy the deeds of the flesh. If we don't kill them, they will eventually kill us.

4. Putting off the **Garments** of the Old Nature.

Colossians 3:8-9 *But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,*

The expression put off is a strong one calling for a complete putting off from oneself of all that pertains to the old life. We are to strip off completely the former habits which cling to us like an old garment and fling them away like an outward suit of clothes. The following habits are as follows:

- **Anger and Wrath** – Associated with anger is wrath or vengeful rage. When anger boils up there is wrath.⁴

Proverbs 29:11 *A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.*

- **Malice** – Anger and wrath are bad, but malice is worse because it is more rooted and deliberate. It is anger heightened and settled.⁵
- **Filthy Communication** – This would involve swearing, coarse talking and jesting. As Christians our language should be pure and holy.

Ephesians 4:29 *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*

- **Lying** – A false statement or piece of information deliberately presented as being true; a falsehood. Lying is anything meant to deceive or give a wrong impression.

Lying is contrary to the law of truth and the life of love. It is both unjust and unkind and works to destroy faith and to weaken our fellowship with one another. Lying is a part of the devil's image in the soul, for the devil is the father of lies.

John 8:44 *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

We see from the above Scriptures that it is being asserted that when in regular contact with fellow believers and even non-believers we must speak the truth since the old man and his practices have been put off in Christ's death. We are to have no part with false speaking or any of these repulsive habits. They are not fitting for saints of God.

Our goal as Christians is to have our negative characteristics and habit patterns that have been formed in us by our sinful, fallen nature to be transformed into Christ like characteristics and for the new man or nature to come forth that God has created.

III. The Essential Characteristics of the New Nature.

Colossians 3:12-15 (NLT) *Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.¹³ You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.¹⁴ And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.¹⁵ And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

The above characteristics from *Colossians 3:12-15* are essential characteristics that must be in each and every one of us if we are to grow into balanced and mature Christians with the power and anointing of God flowing through us. These are the characteristics that enable others to receive the gifts and callings in our lives. These are traits that keep us from becoming wild tares⁶ in the kingdom of God.

■ Brief Descriptions of the Above Character Traits.

1. **Tender Mercies** – This is a heartfelt compassion that is expressed with tenderness of the heart. Because God comforts us through His mercy, we are able to comfort those who are in need as well.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

2. **Kindness** – Kindness has to do with being of a friendly nature, a person who is generous, hospitable, good and warmhearted. It is often exhibited in acts of kindness that show consideration, sympathy and understanding towards others. A kind person is very courteous and thoughtful towards others.
3. **Humbleness of Mind or Humility** – Humility has to do with being aware of your own shortcomings so that you don't exalt yourself above others. It also has to do with showing an attitude of deferential respect. You are satisfied to be lowly and unpretentious.

Pride comes in all shapes and sizes. Some of us put ourselves on a pedestal from which we judge the faults of everyone else. Others are so self-effacing that they cannot take their eyes off themselves and their own inadequacies. A poor self image is not humility. Still others swing like a pendulum from one extreme to the other. Paul exhorts us neither to exalt nor to belittle ourselves, but to think with sober judgment.

Romans 12:3 *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

We are to be clothed with humility, because God resists the proud.

1 Peter 5:5-6 *Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."*
⁶*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,*

4. Meekness – Meekness is strength under control and has to do with a consideration for others and a willingness to waive your rights. It is important to keep in mind that neither meekness nor gentleness is to be confused with weakness.

The meek are those people who humble themselves before God, because they acknowledge their utter dependence upon Him. In consequence, they are gentle in their dealings with others. You can be tender and gentle with people because you have given control of your life to God and you don't have to "win" all the time.

2 Timothy 2:24 (NLT) *The Lord's servants must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone. They must be able to teach effectively and be patient with difficult people.*

5. Forbearing and Forgiving – To exercise forbearance means to endure, bear with, put up with by Christians towards one another. Forbearance and forgiveness are qualities of meekness and patience in action.

The forbearing person will remain calm whatever the provocation and will keep clear of unkind reactions. The forgiving person must go even further and wipe clean from his or her heart all bitterness and irritation.

If we expect forbearance and forgiveness from God, we must be able to forbear and forgive others as well.

- **Forbearance and forgiveness go hand in hand.**

Mark 11:25-26 (NLT) *But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.*²⁶ (NKJV) *"But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

Luke 17:3-4 (NLT) *I am warning you! If another believer sins, rebuke him; then if he repents, forgive him. ⁴Even if he wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him."*

No matter how much you are sinned against you must be willing to forgive. We must continually be willing to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us and continues to forgive us.

6. **Love** – Love is the crowning grace of the new nature, because love is the glue that holds everything together.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 *Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.*

Each of these character traits show how we as Christians are to be clothed and how we are to behave in our dealings with others, particularly with fellow-believers. These are character traits that will enable the body of Christ to come forth as one new man.

IV. Simple Faith Principles For Transformation.

Think of Peter, a man who was a profane fisherman who later became a powerful man of God as his character was transformed – a man whose very shadow healed people. This is the kind of transformation God.

1. Believe In Christ and What He Has Accomplished.

The first step of faith in this process of becoming new is that of believing in Jesus Christ – Who He is and what He has accomplished for you. You must believe you are a new creation in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

The incorruptible seed⁷ of God's word has been planted in your hearts, which is intended to bring forth the new creation and divine nature of God within you.

Let this be the confession of faith that comes out of your mouth. You are no longer in bondage to sin. You have been made completely new in Christ. Believe and speak what Christ what Christ has made you to be.

2 Corinthians 4:13 *And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,*

2. Understand that God is the Enabler.

Romans 8:11 (NLT) *The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, He will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you.*

The Apostle Paul's ambition was to present every man perfect in Christ understanding that it is God who is working mightily on our behalf. It is the Spirit of God that quickens us and then we respond in obedience.

Colossians 1:28-29 *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.²⁹ To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.*

Notice that it says, "*His working which works in me mighty*ly." God is working in a mighty way, but if we are not exhibiting an intense exertion in a violent manner we end of frustrating the grace of God. "The violent take the kingdom by force."⁸

The important thing to keep in mind when pressing into the character of Christ is that it is His Spirit who is working mightily on our behalf, taking us through the metamorphous or character transformations, but we must co-labor with Him in the process otherwise we will frustrate the grace of God

3. Understand that Habits are a Part of Your Makeup.

Habits are a part of our makeup. Whenever one does something long enough it becomes a habit. Habits can be hard to change because of the fact that they have become unconscious responses.

The key to change is to start becoming aware of your habit patterns by allowing God to reveal them to you.

Putting on new clothing is not always comfortable. You old clothes were comfortable even though they may not have looked very good. You old ways may have become comfortable, but they no longer look good in the kingdom of God.

You may say, "Being kind is not comfortable to me, forgiving is not natural to me or humbleness of mind is not natural." The answer is to keep doing them until they become comfortable. That's how change comes.

Illustration: How do baseball or football players do what they do so well? By practice, disciplined practice until it becomes second nature. Your new nature must become second nature to you, but that will only happen as you add diligence to your faith.

2 Peter 1:5-6 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,*

IV. Concluding Remarks.

Galatians 6:14-15 *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.*

If we have truly been saved and converted the New Creation in Jesus Christ will begin to come forth in our lives; and our character will have gone through a transformation.

Remember, these traits start out in their infancy and mature more and more as we grow in the Lord Jesus Christ. The seeds of the transformation process were planted when you were born again with the incorruptible Word of God.

¹ Numbers 13:17, 25-29, 30-33

² 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

³ James 1:15

⁴ Ephesians 4:26 & Proverbs 10:19

⁵ 1Peter 2:1-2

⁶ Matthew 13:24-30 – The Parable of the Wheat & Tares.

⁷ 1 Peter 1:23

⁸ Matthew 11:12