

TAKE OFF AND PUT ON

INTRODUCTION

Our daily lives are filled with many repetitive routines. In summer, I mow the lawn on a Saturday and come the next Saturday, I must do it again. Yolande Hoover's the house on Monday and a few days later she must do it again. We wash the dishes and then the next day again. We make our bed today and then tomorrow morning we must do it again.

So much seems to have natural tendency to move from clean to dirty, order to chaos, efficient to inefficient. If we do not attend to these routines or maintenance as required, things eventually fall into disrepair. This is true for all aspects of our lives on a smaller or bigger scale and with less or more serious consequences. The effort and cost then needed to bring something up to the required standard could be much greater than simply attending to the routines.

Living the life of a Christian also needs daily routine and cleaning to remain on track. When we by faith accepted Jesus as our Saviour, all our sin is forgiven. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are reconciled with God and put in the "right" relationship. This is known as justification and righteousness.

Our identity changes from that point and we are given the right to be a child of the Most Holy God. And because we are now children of God, we will inherit the Kingdom of God and will be united with God in the New Jerusalem. As a sign of our adoption and identity as a child of God, we are baptised and we receive the Holy Spirit as our Helper. When Jesus returns for the final judgement, we will be resurrected in a new body and will be glorified with Jesus. We refer to this future state as our glorification.

Now, the hard part is the present time between our "past" justification and "future" glorification. We are called to be followers of Jesus and to live a life of holiness. Jesus commanded us to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength, and to love others as ourselves. He also commanded us to be His ambassadors and tell others about Him and the path to salvation. These commands require us to change. Change our priorities, our thoughts, our words and our deeds. This journey of change is called our sanctification.



But this is precisely where things become hard. Righteousness saves us from our sin but not from our sinful nature. We are left with a broken nature and broken body and mind. The Bible refers to this as “our flesh”. We also live in a broken world and we are being attacked by the Evil One. Our flesh, the world and the Evil One constantly tries to pull us away from our journey of sanctification.

No Christian is exempt from this struggle. Even the Apostle Paul said: *“for I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I the very things I hate.”* Rom 7:15. The call to sanctification requires two conscious decisions:

- **STOP:** I will not let sin reign in my mortal body (i.e. my flesh and by mind) to make me obey the passions of my body and of the world (Rom 6:12); and
- **START:** I will present my body (again my flesh and my mind) to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13b).

These conscious decisions require us to make an about turn from marching in the direction of the world to marching in the direction of God and his Kingdom. Paul is so clear about this in each one of his letters. His letters deal with the doctrine of salvation and every time concludes with the about turn that is needed in our lives.

DAILY CHANGE OF CLOTHES

Our reading from Colossians 3 is a good example of Paul addressing the change needed in us. The chapter is aptly headed as “Put on the new self”. It is a powerful narrative because we are used to a change of clothing in our daily lives. “Put on a new self” also implies that we must take off our old self. So, what is Paul guiding us to take off and what are we meant to put on?

Take Off:

Sexual immorality
Impurity
Passion (lust or inordinate affection)
Evil desires
Covetousness
Idolatry
Anger
Wrath
Malice
Slander
Obscene talk
Lying

Put On:

Compassionate Hearts
Kindness
Humility
Meekness
Patience
Bearing with one another
Forgiveness (as we have been forgiven)
Love (binds all together)
Thankfulness
Word dwelling in me
Singing to God
(Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs)

In the same way we take off our old clothes and put on fresh clothes, the above should become a daily routine. Jesus also referred to a daily choice we must make. In Luke 9:23 He said: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

WHY IS A CHANGE OF CLOTHING IMPORTANT?

One of the biggest dangers we need to guard against, is a misunderstanding of why our actions and behaviour as Christians matter. The Bible refers to this as our works. Paul explained in Romans that we can never be saved by our works. We are only saved by faith. Without any merit on our part, faith and not our works is the access to the gift of salvation. The Evil One is very skillful to twist this truth into making us believe that works do not matter. For clarity, we indeed receive justification by faith and not by works. But because of our justification, our works during the journey of sanctification is the proof of our justification by faith. Works must follow on from faith.

Jesus is very clear about this when He said: ***“the tree is known by its fruit”*** Mat 12:33. James clarified the link between faith and works: ***“Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works...for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”*** James 2: 18, 26.

So, we need to guard against a possible misconception: ***“I believe in Jesus, I have my faith ticket with the baptism stamp to go to heaven but in the meantime, I can go on living just as I please”***. Each one of us must be so clear on that this simply is not true.

Do I understand that when I have been justified, I received Christ within me? Paul said to the Galatians: ***“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*** Gal 2:20. And to the Colossians he said: ***“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith...abounding in thanksgiving.”*** Col 2:6. Do I understand that with Christ in me, I can no longer be the same, think the same or do the same as before?

Indeed, Christ lives in us now and our “clothing”, being our thoughts, words and actions must reflect Christ in us and us in Him. Our new clothing becomes our living testimony. It shows that we are fulfilling the commandments given to us to love God, love others as ourselves and tell others of Jesus.

PRACTICAL STEPS

Now, the change needed in us requires a daily effort. Any change for the good requires an effort and does not come naturally. Our parents spent many years teaching us good values and behaviour and establishing good habits in us. I don't know of any parent that had to teach their child how to behave badly, be disobedient, be lazy or to use bad language – these things somehow just came naturally, easily and are inherent in us. Jesus confirmed it in our gospel reading from Mark 7: ***“And He said: “what comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.”***

Research suggests that bad behaviour and habits can be established within 3 repetitions. In contrast, good behaviour and habits take around 28 repetitions to be established. Here are suggestions for our path of change:

- **FOCUS:** Start each morning with prayer and Bible reading. This will help to focus the mind on God and away from ourselves. Paul said: *“Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth.”* Col 3:1,2. Remember the order to **JOY:** First Jesus, then Others then the You (Me).
- **MUST DO vs WANT TO DO:** We have so much to be thankful for and the best way to show our thanks is to willingly put on our new clothes. Change is so much easier if you want to do it rather than feeling forced to do it. If you feel “must do” is your motivation, talk to God and talk to others to help you gain an appreciation of the enormous love and grace we receive from God each day. Ask God to give you a “want to” heart and motivation in your life.
- **WORK:** Change requires work and persistence. Do not expect it to come naturally. If you need to stop bad behaviour and replace it with good, be mindful that it may take 28 times. The effort is required to resist giving into temptation, not to let our natural instincts and reactions rule over us and not to give up trying. So, when someone revs your engine and you want to spit fire, bite your tongue, count to ten, breath deep, “flash pray” to God and wait for the Spirit before you say or do anything.
- **THE HELPER:** When we try to change all in our own power, we are almost sure to fail. That is why the Lord gave us the Helper, the Holy Spirit. Are you allowing the Helper into your life and are you listening to his voice? Ask the Helper to assist you in the change you need. It is like riding an electric bicycle: you must peddle but the electric motor works in unison to power you up the hill. Be specific in your request of what you need to change.
- **RESET:** We have a powerful reset mechanism: forgiveness. We should end our day with prayer asking for forgiveness from God for our daily failures. Be specific and reflect carefully on matters where we have fallen short during the day. Equally, we should ask for forgiveness from other people whom we may have wronged. More importantly, we must grant forgiveness to others unreservedly. Forgiveness goes hand in hand with repentance, which means an about turn, 180 degrees away from the wrong to the good.
- **DISCONTENTED not DISCOURAGED:** The path of sanctification is going to have ups and downs and often present unexpected and untimely setbacks. Just as we brush our teeth before bedtime and then wake up with the need to brush our teeth again, sanctification will require the same daily effort. Guard against becoming discouraged and then just giving up brushing teeth – our teeth will then just rot away. Healthy discontent is a good thing – it gives us the energy and will to keep on brushing our teeth.

CHOOSE LIFE

Brothers and sisters, we have a wonderful God we serve. He loves us, knows us and sustains us. We receive from God not what we deserve but abundantly more through his grace and mercy. But God does not force Himself on us. We have a choice. In Deuteronomy 30, we are presented

with the choice that we can make between Life and Death. Each choice presents a polar opposite outcome. I pray that each one of us will chose to turn to the Lord today and each day, as it is written: ***“Chose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days.”*** Deut 30:20 **AMEN**

Collect (Prayer before the readings): O God, the Protector of all who trust in You, without Whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that with You as our Ruler and our Guide we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not our hold on things eternal; grant this, heavenly Father, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, who is alive and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Readings: Old Testament: Deuteronomy 30:9 - 20
New Testament: Colossians 3:1 - 17
Gospel: Mark 7:1 -23

Hymns:

1. 555 (Common Praise): Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDe0ABw5IHs> ('Praise Him' not 'Alleluia')
2. 1003 (Mission Praise): My Jesus, my Saviour
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGmZcTCXjmM>
3. 1072 (Mission Praise): In Christ Alone
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn9-UNer6MQ>
4. 622 (Common Praise): Will you come and follow Me
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o469PRLdbHU>