

Change

Part Two

Put Off Sin / Put On Righteousness:

The Christian process of change

Introduction: Do You Sin?

Do you sin? The Bible says 'yes'. As we saw in the previous chapter, the four things God seeks to accomplish in our lives through the Word all have to do with change. If change is required, sin must be present in us. Further, 1 John 1.8, speaking to believers, says that, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." You sin. I sin.

To know that you sin is the starting point for change. This realization presents a dilemma: growth is necessary. The good news for us as believers is that it is also possible. God gives us the information needed to change as well as the power to complete the job.

1

The Source Of "Put Off Sin / Put On Righteousness"

Ephesians 4:22-24

...that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

This landmark passage gives us a pattern for change which is illustrated throughout the New Testament. We are to remove sin from our lives and put something else in its place: righteousness. This exchange is illustrated in many familiar New Testament texts. We will consider a few of them in this chapter to better understand the dynamic of it. The Word also contains strategies for battle which enable us to do well in the deed of putting off / putting on.

We are to put off, or "lay aside" the old self. Verse 22 describes the old self as our "former manner of life", the "old self", as "corrupted", and as including the "lusts of deceit." These are descriptions of our lives before we were saved, before we were forgiven through the blood of Christ, before the Holy Spirit resided in us. The remains of these former ways are to be put off. We must acknowledge the presence of the influence of these past factors and labor to lay them aside.

We are to put on a "new self." The things with which we are to replace the old self are related to the Lord. They are in His likeness. They are associated with righteousness, holiness and truth. As we clean out the closet of the inner man, tossing sin, lust and selfish ways away, we are to put in their place truth from the Word and righteous God-honoring motives and deeds.

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Did you notice how verse 23 describes the putting off / putting on process? "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." There is where the act begins. It starts with renewed thoughts. When we stop asking "What do I want?" or "What would please me?" and instead ask "What would please God?" and "How can I be a doer of the Word in this situation?" the putting off of sin and putting on of righteousness is imminent.

The principle is clear: put off sin and replace it with righteousness. This is my focus today. I will view sin in my life as something to lay aside. I am committed to seeking God's help to put holy thoughts, words and actions in place of sin. I am pursuing understanding what to put off and what to put on in the areas of my sin of which I am most aware. This is accomplished through thoughtful study of the Word each day. I also seek from Scripture effective plans of how to fight the battle.

Will you be a doer of the Word? Will you choose to view your life as a process of putting off sin and putting on righteousness?

My friend, may your life and my life be illustrations of putting off sin and putting on righteousness. Let's honor our God by such change. Wouldn't it be great to one day look back on a record of systematic obedience to Ephesians 4.22-24? To say, humbly, "Yes, by God's grace in 2001 I stopped lying at work. In 2002 I replaced anger at home with initiating conversation. In 2003 the Lord enabled me to put off selfish obsession with golf and put on serving in ministry..." and so on!

2

Put Off / Put On: A Transformation In The Mind

Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

In this passage we are to put off being conformed to this world. In what ways do you think, speak or act like the world? These are now your opportunities to put off sin. Think about these things. In what ways are they like the world? What does the world say about them? Why do you do these things---what is the thing you are trying to achieve?

We are to put on doing God's will. What thoughts, words and actions would be right? What does the Bible say about what to do? Will you choose to go this direction? Will you seek God's help in making changes?

As in Ephesians 4, the process of change is described as "the renewing of your mind." The same phrase is used here. As stated, the idea is to go from "What do I want?" to "How can I obey God?"

This renewing of the mind is illustrated in the father of a disobedient child changing from anger to the balance of love and discipline which honors God and helps the child. Or the woman with the unfair boss at work going from a pattern of bitter complaining to following Jesus' example of righteousness when suffering unjustly. The renewed mind is also seen in the teen who could fear man most and be friends with the cool, popular, unbelieving crowd which does not honor God but

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instead fears God more and is willing to stand alone for the purpose of putting on righteousness. Even in the four-year-old who understands and receives the gospel: she can go from disobeying when mom's not watching to doing right to obey God, whether mom is watching or not.

The concept of change is defined by the word 'transformed.' The Greek word is "metamorphoo." It's the word from which we get "metamorphosis." What a vivid picture of dramatic change! The difference between being conformed to the world and proving what the will of God is in our lives is being characterized as like a crawling caterpillar becoming a flying, beautiful butterfly! Us putting off sin and putting on righteousness is said to be like a water-breathing tadpole becoming an air-breathing frog! The Lord is making a strong statement, which we will do well to embrace.

My friend, grab hold of this idea. Pursue honoring God. Pursue metamorphosis of the mind, by His strength and for His glory. Put off sin, put on righteousness. Be an example of a Christian who is being transformed.

How gracious is our God. He takes us, sinners who were once slaves to sin, and gives us this new life in Christ. Now He tells us that because of His Word and His work in us we can be transformed (like the caterpillar to butterfly), metamorphosized, in putting off sin and putting on righteousness. What a life! How gracious is our God!

3

The Christian Process Of Change:

A Battle Strategy

Romans 13:12-14

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

What are we to put off according to this passage? We are to lay aside "deeds of darkness." These entail carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife and jealousy. These things must go.

What are we to put on? We are to put on the armor of light, to behave properly as in the day, actually putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a stark contrast with the previous list of sins.

We are given further instruction in verse 14: *how* to put off sin and put on righteousness. "Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Provision, Greek "pronoia", means to consider in advance, give forethought, to plan. Lusts, Greek "epithumia", is literally, the center of heat, a word that expresses the longing for the forbidden, the attraction to something because it is wrong or daring. So we are to make no provision for our lusts. If a man struggles with arrogance, he is not to plan in his mind all day the harsh words he will speak to his co-workers or family. If a woman

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battles self control in relation to food, she is not to let plans for eating a special meal to dominate her mind.

When do you have your thoughts revolve around lusts rather than figuring out how you can please God in this day? When do you calculate ahead for times of ungodly pleasure or power? Here is the battle strategy of Romans 13.12-14: repent of this way of thought. Determine to, with God's strength, no longer let such ideas fill your head.

1 Peter 2.11 says that lusts wage war against the soul. To fight as in a war is serious. If the body of a fallen comrade lied near you, you would not tell yourself, "I didn't have much energy today, maybe tomorrow" or "I was worrying about other things." If you had lost a hand and were three miles behind enemy lines you would not think, "I'll make a bigger effort tomorrow" or "It doesn't matter how this goes, God will forgive me." We are to take sin seriously and fight against it as if in a war.

A friend of mine fought a particular sin in that way. He memorized Scripture and prayed when tempted. He had some success, but still sometimes sinned. Next he increased times of review and found a friend to pray with regarding the matter. More progress, but sometimes he still gave in to temptation. He did more studying of the Word; he took steps to minimize occurrences of temptation. More progress, but the war was not over. Finally, he added more times of examining his motives in regard to the choices he faced, reading the verses he had chosen and praying at the heart level. He was deliberate and intent. He continued to add new troops and artillery from God's arsenal until finally it happened: he no longer gave in to his temptation. He fought the war and by God's grace he war was won.

Will you fight lusts in your life as a war? What would making no plans for the flesh look like in your life?

4

Putting Off Sin / Putting On Righteousness:

The Process Illustrated In The Arena Of Communication

Ephesians 4:29

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

The battle to honor God in the words we speak is one of the most difficult to win. James 3 tells us the tongue is "a small part of the body, yet it boasts of great things...fire, the very world of iniquity...defiles the entire body...set on fire by hell...it is a restless evil." That's a lot to overcome. We are not tempted beyond what we are able; we need God's grace to help in this time of need to be victorious in this intense battle.

What kinds of words are rotten (that's the idea of the word translated, "unwholesome")? Angry words, selfish words, lies, vulgar words, sarcastic words, insults, they are all rotten. They do not express love, they do not impart truth in an honorable way. When do you speak these or other types of unwholesome words?

This verse tells us to put off speaking unwholesome words and replace them by putting on edifying words which address the need of the moment and give grace to those who hear.

What words could you say which are in this category? What could you say which is edifying to your children? To your siblings? Think of recent interactions with your spouse. What words could you have said which would have addressed the need of the moment? What was the need of the moment? How important to develop habits of thinking which allow you to answer those questions. Finally, what words can be spoken which give grace to those who hear?

It is a difficult process to put off sin and put on righteousness in the arena of communication. In Ephesians 4.29 the template for such change is laid. If this is your place to begin the adventure of Godward change, embrace the challenge. Need God's help. Review this study. Hunger for the truth of the Word, by which you can change. Fight this war. Honor the Lord.

5

Putting Off Sin / Putting On Righteousness:

The Christian Process Of Change In The Issue Of Anxiety

Philippians 4:6-8

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

God has provided the means for overcoming anxiety in our lives. This is great news in our present age! In a world that calls anxiety a disorder and a sickness, Christians may know that God is bigger than anxiety. He can enable us to put it off in our lives.

What are we to put off and put on in this text? "Be anxious for nothing" says it clearly. This was Jesus' point in Matthew 6.25 and 34: "Do not be anxious for your life," and, "Do not be anxious for tomorrow," respectively. So anxiety is to be put off. With what are we to replace it? With right prayer and right thinking.

It is understood that the requests we make in prayer are in accord with God's will. Other Scripture make this clear. 1 John 5.14-15 tells of confidence that, "if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us...if...He hears us...we have the requests which we have asked." Similarly, Hebrews 4.15-16 encourages us to have confidence when asking for "mercy and grace to help in time of need." So when Philippians 4.6 directs us to pray rather than be anxious, the requests are for strength to trust and obey, not to be magically at peace. Our prayer is to remember what is true about God and believe it, not to make our problems go away. We ask for help to put off sin and put on righteousness, with desires to grow amid the trial and follow in Jesus' steps of glorifying the Father when our souls are troubled.

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So how does this dynamic work? A young man facing reconstructive surgery on his leg had the faith to pray, "Whatever you choose, Lord. Strengthen me to glorify you in how I respond to whatever happens." That prayer was answered. When the surgery was completed and the bones did not subsequently grow together, the man was not anxious. Rather, his faith and ministry grew. He was stronger spiritually because of it all.

Correspondingly, a wife was seeking to be a doer of the Word by replacing criticizing her husband with loving him. Some financial consequences of his past bad choices came forward. In the past she'd typically respond by being anxious about what would happen next. Harsh words would be spoken. But this time she prayed to love, to obey God by being patient and kind, by working together to solve the problem. God granted the grace to help in time of need. With His help she focused on doing what the Word said more than how she felt about the difficulty. Her prayer was answered.

In verse 7 God gives us some powerful encouragement. The result of facing anxiety His way is a powerful peace. His peace surpasses understanding. Ironically, it also guards our hearts and minds. The very antithesis of anxiety, peace from God, is given to those who obey His way. He tells us what to do, then graciously blesses those who follow though with it.

The rest of the plan for how to battle anxiety is revealed in verse 8. It involves what we think. Rather than thinking anxious thoughts (Why is this happening? How will it turn out? I want... I'm afraid that... What will people think?), we are to limit our minds to what is true, honorable, right, lovely, of good repute, excellent and worthy of praise. In general, this means thinking about God rather than me. It means having the goal of His glory, not my ease. He is true and pure ; His will is honorable, right and excellent. Anxious thoughts, as if God doesn't hear us or His Word isn't true, fail the criteria of Philippians 4.8.

So, what should we think when we are tempted to be anxious? What is true? 1 Corinthians 10.13: we are not being tempted beyond what we are able; God will provide the way to endure. What is honorable? John 16.33: we have tribulations in this world, but Jesus has overcome the world, therefore take courage. What is right? Philippians 1.21: resolve that to live is Christ and to die is gain. What is lovely? Galatians 2.20: a heart that appreciates the new life in Christ and is focused on living by faith and for our Lord. What is of good repute? 1 John 5.3-5: living the Christian life of overcoming the world. What is excellent? John 12.27-28: walking in Christ's steps of pursuing God's glory when the heart is troubled. What is worthy of praise? Philippians 2.5-8: Jesus, who denied Himself and was obedient to the Father to the point of death.

When do you face the temptation to be anxious? What are you anxious about? What do you fear? What do you hope will happen? Now consider what thoughts you can replace those anxious thoughts with. Are you willing to request God's will in this?

Application

In this chapter we have considered the principle of putting off sin and putting on righteousness, as well as some New Testament examples of it.

Change. That's the idea. Today is the day to begin to improve at change.