

A New Year, A New You  
(And a New Wardrobe too!)  
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Psalm 40:1-5, Colossians 3:1-14

You've seen them. The advertisements for a weight-loss or exercise program or equipment promising life-changing results if you simply buy and use their product. Of course these are accompanied by dramatic "before" and "after" photos. It sounds so easy. That's what they want you to think! Don't you believe it!

As much as we might want to turn over a new leaf, break an old "unhealthy" habit and institute a new "healthy" one in its place—any who have tried, will tell you that it can be a real challenge, for a number of reasons.

Paul is writing to the Colossians about a lasting change that begins in the heart and mind of a believer and which penetrates our attitudes and actions to the degree that we are indeed, new people! We are changed from the inside, out!

This transformation is a result not of our own feeble human effort. Rather this transformation occurs when we surrender the control of our lives to God. We acknowledge that we cannot change on our own, that we are powerless in the face of sin, and we are totally reliant on the power of the resurrection.

This truth is visualized for us by Paul, in the death and resurrection of Christ which is tied to our baptism. Whether you remember it or not (you may have been baptized as an infant, as I was) many of you have been baptized?

How one is baptized OR at what age one is baptized (whether water is sprinkled or poured, or whether one is immersed) matters not. The meaning and significance is the same: God is taking action to make us part of his forever family, to wash us clean of sin. But more than that, the image of immersion carries a meaning that may be otherwise lost, and Paul makes reference to it here.

Through the image of or actual immersion of baptism we "Die" to our old, sinful selves, and we rise again to new life **in Christ**. We are identified with Christ!

Christa McAuliffe was one of the seven astronauts who lost their lives in the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle on January 28, 1986. She had been selected from among many applicants to be the first teacher in space. Her commitment to education and the space program had captured the imagination of many. At her memorial service, one teacher said,

"When Christa stepped onto that shuttle, we stepped on with her. And when she died, a part of us died too."

These comments about Christa remind me of a much deeper identification—the believer's spiritual union with Christ. Because of our relationship to Him, we can say, "When He was lifted up on that cross, we were there with Him. When He died, we died!"

We are so identified with Christ, "our lives are hidden in Christ". That means when God looks upon us, God no longer sees our old sinful self, God sees us "in Christ's" righteousness!

The apostle Paul said that we died with Christ ([Col 2:20](#); [Col 3:3](#)), and we were also raised with Him ([Col 3:1](#)). Therefore, in Him we are accepted and forgiven by God ([Eph 1:6](#)).

What remains to be seen is whether our lives show that we really do believe we were united with Christ in His death and resurrection. Our confession of faith must be more than a memorial statement. It must show that we have put away our old life of sin and have set our mind on things above. (M R De Haan II)

For this reason Paul uses the very strong language of putting to death our old ways of behaving—

***<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.***

***<sup>8</sup> But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices.***

These have no part in the life of a Christian—they are incompatible with Christ-like character. They reflect an aspect of how our lives "used to be", before Christ entered into and transformed us.

One evening we had a potluck dinner with the families of children in an afterschool program at our church, and church members. Our Children's Ministry Coordinator had us talk with the person next to us, and then we went around the room, introducing our new friend.

I was sitting by Pelevene, a second grader. We discovered that we had several things in common: loving to read, a favorite author, and so on. She was listening carefully as the sharing began. Because there were a number of retirees present, it was often said, "This is Joe, he *used to be* Boeing engineer." "This is Joan, she *used to be* a nurse" and so on.

Having heard these introductions, Pelevene turned to me with a concerned look on her face and asked: "Pastor Lynell, *what did you used to be?*"

Paul gets it—he says clearly that all believers “used to be” those who walked in these ways—we used to possess a manner of life in which we were self-seeking—“looking out for number one”. The old way we **used to be** was dominated by selfishness, and the desire for immediate self-gratification. We were undisciplined in our speech, and totally lacking in self-control.

BUT NOW...because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and our identification with Christ in our baptism, we are new people. Transformed. Not retreads. Not refurbished. Not recycled. Totally New!!

We now have a new identity as new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) The old way of life is dead and gone. It has no longer has any power over us—we are free from the old ways of being, thinking and doing. This transformation happens as we “set our minds” on God’s agenda (v.1) The word Paul uses here (phronein) carries with it the idea of one’s mind being laser focused.

Romans 12:2 “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

And so in compliance with this new way of life we are to “take off”, “put away”, or shed the old ways of being in exchange for a totally new wardrobe of attitudes and actions that are befitting of our new life in Christ.

How many of you would like a new wardrobe? I imagine that periodically one goes through one’s wardrobe, discarding what is worn out, what no longer fits, etc.

In the same way, Paul says, if you discard the old ways of being and doing, now you need to PUT ON or CLOTHE Yourself in a new wardrobe.

No doubt you’ve heard of the “fashion police”?

I did not know I was living with my own, until one morning as I was getting ready to go out the door, I put on a hot pink blazer.

My then, thirteen year old son said to me:

“Mom! You’re *not* going to wear that *out in public*, are you?!”

That certainly gave me pause! (Yes, I wore it anyway!!)

I wonder if that is now the role of the Holy Spirit in our new transformed way of living, to say to us:

Lynell, you’re not going to say that/do that/ behave that way—because it belongs with the old, dead way of life! It is not life-giving! It is not in keeping with the new life that you are living in Christ! Instead, “wear” this...instead, “do this” or “say this” -- because this is what Christ would do, or this is what Christ would say.

Every day—sometimes several times a day—we stand in front of our closets deciding what to wear. Depending on the activity (and the weather) we may select something casual, or more formal, grubby or water-proof, or our “Sunday best”.

I’m guessing that there are occasions we stand there, thinking to ourselves:

“I’ve got nothing to wear!”

Paul says, no problem! I’ve got good news for you!

For the Christian, the all-occasion garment is LOVE!

What does love look like?

It looks like compassion...kindness...humility...gentleness...patience...

forbearance, and forgiveness. Have you noticed? Each of these are named by Paul elsewhere, as the Fruits of the Spirit. In other words, these do not come naturally to us! The actions and attitudes that come naturally to us are those of the old self—the negative ones that we are supposed to discard.

These loving attitudes and actions reflect the character of Christ. They are grown in us through our dependence on the Holy Spirit to make us more like Christ. And if we are “new creations in Christ”, we will “look like/act like/speak in Christ-like ways”.

So your new wardrobe and mine will fit each of us--and each occasion--perfectly! When we clothe ourselves in LOVE, we will seek to meet the needs of others before our own. We will express genuine care and concern, with kindness and gentleness. When we speak, our words will edify and encourage. We will speak the truth, lovingly. Love is gracious—and grace is not getting what we deserve.

What does love look like? It looks like Christ in you, and Christ in me.

Some time ago there was a best-selling book called “Dress for Success”. The main premise of the book was this: “If you want to succeed, dress like your boss.”

What we used to be no longer figures in the equation. We are new creations in Christ, thinking and acting in Christ-like ways.

Do I begin each day by acknowledging Christ as the Person in charge, the One for whom I work?  
Do I, with the Spirit’s help, clothe myself with attitudes that please Him?

Am I wearing what others long to experience: kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love?

If so, I’ll be dressed for success in God’s service. (D. C. McCasland)