

TRANSFORMED – Our Lives Renewed to be Like Christ (a DISCIPLESHIP Journey)

Mile Marker 9 ... “A Transformed Life – Like Christ in Our Conduct (Holiness)”

“Ephesians 4:17-5:20 and Colossians 3:5-17”

Throughout these mile markers, we have been looking at the theme of transformation – it’s what this discipleship journey is all about. As we follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit shapes and molds us to be like Christ. Again, God’s Word declares that this is to be an all-encompassing reality, not just a single compartment of our lives – a **HOLISTIC** transformation. Our commitment to Jesus should infiltrate *every* part of who we are and influence *every* area of our lives. For the past few mile markers, we have focused on the more **INTERNAL** self – our minds and our hearts. Indeed, it’s not about some kind of external-only renovation where we modify our behavior, but an inside-out renewal. **Yet, we need to see that it is an inside-OUT reality.** Nothing in God’s Word allows us to settle for anything short of a transformation that also changes the way we practically live as those who are in Christ: **a TRANSFORMED LIFE.** Our conduct – living lives that reflect Christ in our actions – certainly matters!

God Cares about His People’s Conduct

Few would ever make the case that our external conduct is irrelevant to a life of faith in Christ. (*There was a “dualism” around in the 1st century that identified the spiritual as good and the physical as bad/evil; because of that, how people practically lived didn’t matter because there was no hope for that part of us anyway. That’s not at all a Biblical perspective!*) Yet, there are a couple of perspectives that can come along and seemingly minimize our actions/works. For example, **“we’re saved by faith, not works”** – as if that means what we do becomes unimportant. It’s true that we enter salvation only because of God’s grace in Christ – that’s the Good News of Jesus; but that *never* eradicates good works from the equation (remember the progression of Ephesians 2:1ff leading to v. 10). Or, consider the phrase **“God knows the heart!”** While He is certainly able to see beyond the surface actions to motivations, attitudes, etc., that should never provide a basis for putting conduct in a category of “insignificant.” Throughout the OT and the NT, there is an emphasis on the way God’s people live.

Consider these basic themes:

- In the OT Law, God demanded that *His covenant people* – those whom He had graciously rescued and chosen – express their holiness in very practical conduct (see Leviticus 11:44-45; a phrase re-emphasized for us in Christ in 1 Peter 1:16). It meant everything from the clothing worn to the treatment of the poor to dietary laws to sexuality, etc. Conduct matters! *While our relationship to the OT Law as a “system” is different in Christ and while there are specific commands that don’t apply directly to us, that doesn’t mean the general principle of holy conduct is irrelevant for us in Christ – again, it’s the same command in 1 Peter 1:16 that we read in Leviticus. Like the OT people of God, He has also graciously rescued and chosen us; that means we too should reflect His character in our conduct!*

- Jesus emphasized that citizens in His Kingdom were to live as those shining LIGHT in the midst of DARKNESS (see Matthew 5:14-16). Notice the primary expression of that: it's in the "good deeds/works" that we display to bring honor and praise to our heavenly Father.
- Throughout the Gospels, Jesus' message was consistently emphasizing how people should live – what they should practically *do*. It's in the closing charge to wrap-up the parable of the Good Samaritan: "go and *do* likewise" (see Luke 10:25-37). It's in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 – the presence or absence of practical expressions of mercy form the basis of the separation at the final judgment. *Somehow, in God's economy, while saved by grace through faith in Christ, we are still judged according to our works!*
- **READ Ephesians 4:1 or Philippians 1:27 (sample texts)** ... Throughout the NT letters, the Good News of salvation carries very practical implications for the way we are to live (we will see a couple of key texts briefly). Just read any of them and this theme is evident. Much like with the OT Law, this includes our relationships with others (*e.g.* in the home, in the church, in society more broadly, etc.), our speech, our handling of money, our involvement in culture and again, even our sexuality. In other words, there is an "ethic" that should characterize those who are in Christ with "LOVE" being the supreme virtue!
- **READ Ephesians 2:10** ... we've seen this verse already: while good works can never be the *cause* of our salvation, they are certainly intended to be the *RESULT* of us being re-created as God's workmanship in Christ!
- In reality, it's what the basic metaphor of "FRUIT" is all about (*e.g.* in John 15:1-8 or in Galatians 5:22-23) – there should be an external produce/result in our lives because of our connection to Christ and His Holy Spirit! While that is never intended to be a matter of a fake façade, it *is* supposed to be a part of being in Christ.
- **READ James 2:14-26** ... notice what James thinks about faith without works (see Galatians 5:6 for a similar statement from Paul).
- **READ 1 Peter 1:13-16 and 2:9-12** ... throughout this whole letter, Peter emphasizes the importance of how we live **as God's people in this world** – practically speaking, we conduct ourselves here-and-now *as those who belong to a heavenly Kingdom*.

That's more than sufficient to establish the importance that our external conduct is a matter of great significance *even and especially for us who are in Christ!*

Based on these texts, when it comes to our CONDUCT (i.e. actions, behavior, etc.), what are the basic principles it seems that God cares about?

While we want to guard against settling for just the right externals (remember hypocrisy!), we also need to guard against minimizing the importance of our conduct. How can we keep the INSIDE and the OUT in proper balance and perspective?

Holy Conduct in Two Directions – a “NO” (Take Off!) and a “YES” (Put On!)

One of the common errors we can make when it comes to a theme such as HOLY CONDUCT is thinking it's only about the *avoidance* of certain behavior. That's certainly part of it – it *is* about rejecting the kinds of behaviors that are contrary to God's character. And yet, there's another direction too – it's *also* about embracing the right kinds of conduct. In other words, Biblically speaking, reflecting God's holy character is about a “NO” and a “YES!”

What happens to our concept of holiness when it's just about what we avoid?

For the rest of this mile marker, we're going to focus primarily on two texts. Both emphasize each of these directions when it comes to this change in conduct as part of a TRANSFORMED LIFE. Go ahead and **READ Ephesians 4:17-5:20 and Colossians 3:15-17.**

After reading these texts, what stands out to you overall about the kind of CONDUCT that should characterize a TRANSFORMED LIFE in Christ?

There are some obvious parallels within these texts that are worth exploring:

1. Both emphasize this sense of contrast between the OLD (before Christ) and the NEW (now in Christ). ***What does this indicate about the TRANSFORMED LIFE we are called to in Christ (think about that practically in terms of the before vs. after contrast)?***
2. Both connect this change in our conduct to a broader sense of our lives being renewed in Christ (see Ephesians 4:23 and Colossians 3:10 – a part of the overall transformation).
3. Both utilize the metaphor of changing clothes – taking off one set and putting on another (it's a different metaphor, but in 1 Timothy 6:11ff, Paul uses the imagery of “running from” vs. “pursuing”). ***What does this metaphor suggest about a TRANSFORMED LIFE?***
4. Both indicate that this transformed life is connected to becoming like God, our Creator (Eph. 4:24 & 5:1-2 plus Col. 3:10). This is again similar to the language of “be holy because I am holy” we've seen elsewhere. ***What are some practical ways where you need to “take off” and “put on” certain conduct in order to become more like Him?***

5. Both texts identify some practical ways this transformation should be on display through our conduct in (a) what we AVOID/PUT OFF and (b) what we EMBRACE/PUT ON (see the language of Titus 2:11-13 and 1 Peter 2:11-12 for other texts that emphasize both directions). **Use the table below to list specific things Paul identifies in these categories.**

What to "TAKE OFF" – the "NO!"	What to "PUT ON" – the "YES!"

Let's get down to some of the practicalities of all this.

Taking off the "OLD" (see also 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 and 1 John 2:15-17). Without question, part of the transformed life means avoiding that which is wrong/sinful/evil. It's what we could call "worldliness" – so participating in the values and customs of the world around us that we do not maintain any sense of distinctiveness. On one level, we live "in the world" and will do many things just like unbelieving neighbors. On another level, we are not "of the world" and so should be distinct in the way we live as followers of Jesus (see the language in Romans 12:2).

What are some parts of the "OLD" that are most challenging for you to take off and say "NO" to as a follower of Jesus?

Practically speaking, what are some ways we can be strengthened to say "NO" to that which belongs to the OLD?

Putting on the "NEW." We see it throughout Ephesians 4 and 5, but especially in Colossians 3:12ff. There is to be something positively peculiar about our lives – not only because of what we avoid, but also because of the good and honorable conduct we display (remember Matthew 5:14-16; Titus 3:8 and much of the message of 1 Peter – e.g. 2:12, 15-17; 3:8ff). As Paul writes in Colossians 3:14, we are to "above all" be clothed with love. It's certainly part of becoming like God.

In a practical sense, how can you learn to think about holiness not only as the wrong/sinful to avoid, but also the good/right to pursue?