

HOW TO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Col. 3:1-14

Good morning! Today is exciting because you know what's happening later? We have a baptism service. How many? Six! I wish it was seven then it would be perfect. But Kuya Rey is not ready yet.

Anyway, I'm just so excited about the recent changes we're experiencing and the changes that God is doing in the lives of people in the church. God never changes but he changes people, Amen?

Say to the person next to you, "He can change you!"

That's our topic this morning. I'm going to talk about change, changing for the better. It's based on Colossians 3:1-14. Please open your Bibles and let us read alternatingly.

Think about this for a moment. If there's anything in your life that you would like to change, what would it be? Would it be your looks? Would it be your job? Would it be your car? Would it be your address? Would it be your spouse? Nope, don't even think about it. It's a no-no, you can't change that.

I'm sure you've thought of at least one thing. You see, to want to change is a natural desire. Because we are imperfect, we aspire for better things to improve our lot in life.

I heard the story of this man from a remote province in the Philippines who went to Manila for the first time to look for a job. In tow was his son and wife. Inside a big building, he found himself standing outside an elevator. His wife, meanwhile, excused herself to go to the bathroom. Then, the elevator door opened and he watched as an old, haggard woman entered the elevator and the doors closed.

A few minutes later the doors opened and a young, attractive woman marched smartly off. The man hollered to his son, “Jon-Jon, go get mother.”

That man surely wanted to change something. Don’t we all do? As I said, we’re imperfect and we want to be better.

When I asked the question earlier, I wonder how many of us thought, “I’d like to change my attitude.” You see, more than anything else, this is what God wants to change in us. God wants to change our characters, not cars. Our personalities, not possessions. While we’re still on this earth, God is changing us to be like Jesus. I don’t know whether there’s anyone here who is exactly like Jesus. Even Billy Graham or Mother Teresa would deny that. You have to be perfect to be like Jesus. But the Bible says that God is faithful and he will finish what he has started in our lives.

So, we’re in the fourth part of our series “On the Move”. We’re talking about how God is busy doing something in our lives. Moving us from one state to another, from one place to another, so that we may experience more and more satisfaction in our lives through him.

This morning, I’d like to share with you three things we can do to get on with God’s agenda of changing our characters. Shaping and molding us to be like Jesus.

If I want to change for the better, I must

I. THINK LOVELY THOUGHTS

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

What are you thinking? Perhaps, some of you are thinking, “I hope his message is not long.” That’s not a lovely thought. “I’m going straight to the Fellowship Hall after this to be the first in line for food.”

That's not a lovely thought either. How about "Pastor Rolly's shirt is nice." That is a lovely thought.

Folks, my point is, we must fill our minds with thoughts that are pleasant and pleasing to the Lord. So, let me ask you? What is inside your mind? If people could read your mind, would they see something beautiful there? Or would they be appalled at the things that you are hiding in your mind?

No one can read minds. But there's someone up there who can. His name is God. God knows your thoughts. Nothing can be hidden from him. It displeases him to see the bad things we keep in our minds.

The Bible says we must renew our thought lives because we are new creatures in Christ. *"The old has gone, the new has come"* Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:17**. We have no business dealing with our old way of thinking anymore. Unfortunately, many of us are in the habit of entertaining unpleasant thoughts in our minds. When we do that, **it produces three results**. What are these?

1. Guilt – what is it? It is when you're not proud of what you were or what you've done. Bad memories keep coming back to you like an old movie. It condemns you. Prevents you from moving forward. Friend, if you're already a Christian, hold on to what the Bible says about you. Believe what the Bible says about you. It says, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1) God is saying, "Why do you keep thinking of the past? That's long gone. I've erased it from my memory. Don't bring it up. I love you and whatever you've done in the past or who you were in the past doesn't concern me." Folks, if you've already asked Jesus forgiveness for your sin, don't try to replay it in your mind anymore. When you gave it to Jesus, he erased it.

He came to rub it out, not rub it in. The main reason he came to earth was to die for your sins and forgive you. The Bible says, *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”* (Eph. 1:7)

Another result that unpleasant thoughts produce is

2. Worries/Anxieties – Do you know that worrying is a sin? It is, because you’re showing that you lack faith in God. “God, I don’t think you can handle this and so I’ll handle it myself.” But can you really? How come we worry?

Worrying is a waste of time. A woman said, “I’ve had a lot of trouble - - most of which never happened!” And a wise man said “Worry is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do but doesn’t get you anywhere.”

And the third thing we get from thinking unlovely thoughts is

3. Lust or Obscenity – it will surprise you to know that many Christians, especially men, are in bondage over this thing. Sexual addiction is a real menace to society. Many lives and marriages have been destroyed because of it. A pastor who was interviewed on the radio said that his addiction to sex as a young man led him to molest a girl in a park. And he was already a Christian at the time. He was arrested and it was in prison that he recommitted his life to Jesus.

How is your thought life? If you’re not proud about it, here’s Paul’s practical advice on verse 2: “Set your mind on things above.” The Living Bible translation says, *“Let heaven fill your thoughts.”* What he is saying is “learn to fill your mind with things that are eternal, not temporal.” In the first place, you have been raised with Christ, you are heaven-bound and so you must practice thinking about things that have eternal significance.

Folks, be careful of what your thoughts dwell on. If it’s a thought that is malicious, unwholesome, or dirty, vanish the thought right away.

The Bible says, *“whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”* (Phil. 4:8)

Be careful also of what enters your mind. Garbage in, garbage out, the saying goes. Stay away from unwholesome web sites or movies or TV programs or magazines.

Paul continues to say in verses 3-7 that we should kill off all those things that are not beneficial and profitable for us. That was our way of thinking before. Now, it must be replaced with something entirely new. Replace those dirty thoughts with the Word of God. Make it a habit to read the Bible everyday. Joshua 1:8 says, *“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”* And memorize scripture. Psalm 119:11 says, *“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”* To improve your thought life, just discipline yourself. That’s the key.

If I want to change for the better I must think lovely thoughts. I must also

II. SPEAK LOVING WORDS

“But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Now, Paul deals with our tongues. What we say. What comes out of our mouths. James has a mouthful to say also about the tongue.

In James 3, he describes the tongue as just a tiny member of the human body and yet wields a lot of influence. He says it's like a rudder that can turn the ship in whatever direction it wants. He also says that it can do a lot of damage if not put under control. Like a tiny spark that can start a forest fire. He recommends and rightly so, the taming of the tongue, the mastery of the tongue.

Paul talks about four areas that can easily ensnare the tongue.

1. Anger/Rage – obviously, Paul is talking here about unhealthy anger. The kind of anger that makes you want to get back at the other person with words that kill. Some of us get angry at the slightest trouble. We're impatient with people, with things around us, with our children, spouse, and even ourselves.

Just check yourself when you're driving. When you're in a hurry and someone in front of you drives ever so slowly like he is in a park, don't you feel like shouting at the person behind the wheel? I do.

Let me tell you a true story. I heard it on the radio. There was a man who left his office in a very bad mood because of an argument with a co-worker. So, he drove out of the parking lot to cool off. Then he stopped at a traffic light. Suddenly, the driver behind him honked his horn twice. Immediately, he got off his car, dashed toward the hapless driver, and lashed at him angrily. The driver put up his hands and said nervously, "Uh-oh, I'm sorry. But your bumper sticker says, 'Honk twice if you love Jesus.'"

Anger is a natural reaction to a difficult situation. But as the Bible says, **"In your anger, do not sin."** (Eph. 4:26) Control your anger. Don't let anger control you. More importantly, control your mouth. Because you cannot take back what you've said.

2. Malice/Slander – have you ever been slandered? Has someone said nasty things about you that weren't true? It hurt really bad, right? Even if those things were true, they still hurt, right? I'm sure you don't want others to experience the same thing. Paul says that we should be careful not to hurt the reputation of others. In short, don't gossip. Don't talk unnecessarily about people. Proverbs 16:28 refer to a gossip as a "whisperer" or a "talebearer". Aren't those the characteristics of a gossip? They whisper in someone's ears, in low tones, "this is just between me and you" and they spread tales.

Why not spread a good word about someone instead? Tell others how great your friend is. Praise your mate or your children to others. Let others know how someone is a blessing to you.

Early in my Christian life, I was greatly encouraged when people came up to me and said, "Rolly, you're a blessing". Although they didn't know what they were talking about. So, practice saying that to someone who has been a blessing to you. Let's practice it now, actually. Say to your neighbor, "You're a blessing".

3. Filthy Language – What's worse than swearing when you're angry? It's swearing when you're not angry. There are people who never say a sentence without a cuss word. Just watch some of the movies they make in Hollywood. If you take out all the swearing and the cursing, what is left? Of course, I'm exaggerating. But you know what I mean.

Filthy language, however, is not just cuss words. It could also be critical words. Like when you say, "She walks like a duckling." Or "His nose looks like a tomato."

Be careful of what you say. What you say reflects what's in your heart. Jesus says, *"For whatever is in your heart determines what you say."*

(Matt. 12:34 NLT) Use language that can build others up. Encourage them with your words. Proverbs 16:24 says, *“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”*

4. **Lying** – I wonder if there’s anyone here who never lied. If you say you never, you just lied. Lying is a very interesting phenomenon. It shows up at different times in our lives, in different occasions, in different situations, in various relationships.

When we lie, we offend God himself because He is a God of truth. The Bible says that God cannot lie. Numbers 23:19, *“God is not a man that he should lie.”* So, God wants us to be truthful too. If we want to become like Jesus, we need to follow his example.

Folks, we need to be conscious of what comes out of our mouths. Is it helpful or harmful? Is it beneficial or baneful? Most importantly, is it glorifying to God?

If I’m to change for the better, I must think lovely thoughts, speak loving words, and lastly, I must

III. DO LOVING DEEDS

“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:12-14)

Again, Paul points out that if you’re a child of God, you’re expected to live a holy life. You are holy because God set you apart. For his own use. He wants to use you to bless others. And the way you can bless others is by doing good things for them, being nice to them, making them feel important, loving them like you’ve never loved them before.

Paul compares our new life to like getting new clothes. Before, we wore ragged clothes, they were filthy, they didn't even match. So, God says, "My child, those clothes look awful on you. And they stink. A skunk wouldn't even dare get near you. But, you know, I love you just the way you are. With all your dirt and disheveled clothes. I'm glad you want to change. Come now, let me give you a hug. Then, you can change to something new."

Friend, God loves you just the way you are. Whatever your past, whatever your present, all your sins and mistakes, and foolish deeds, God loves you. He wants to hug you and whisper in your ears "I love you."

If you're a Christian, he has given you a new set of clothes. You've just put away your old clothes of guilt, worries, lust, anger, malice, slander, lying. What you ought to wear now are the clothes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

All these traits are the same exact traits that Jesus displayed when he was on earth. He was patient with people. He endured opposition. Then, he showed compassion and kindness to everyone, even to his enemies. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He forgave sins. That's why he can say "love your enemies." "Give to the one who asks you."

He was gentle as he went around dealing with people but strong in his convictions. He never condemned anyone except the religious hypocrites. His humility was shown in the way he always wanted to serve others. He says, "*...the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve...*" (Mark 10:45)

Another set of clothes consists of bearing with each other and forgiving each other. They always go together. You know, each one of us is unique. That makes 7 billion unique people on this planet. No one is an exact copy of the other.

Since we are all different, with different tastes, temperaments, personalities, we must learn to bear with each other. And because of our differences, we naturally clash with each other at times. But Paul says, forgive! Don't let those differences become a hindrance to relationships. Remember, Jesus forgave you. Because he wanted to have a good relationship with you.

Now, you must not forget the most important piece of clothing. Which is...love. You must love in the same way God loves you. Unconditionally. Without strings attached. The trouble with us sometimes is before we love, we ask, "what's in it for me?" Then, there are those who can't love because they're afraid. "I might not get loved in return." Then, there are those who don't love because they have an attitude. "How can I love a fool like him?" And still there are those who don't love just because they don't want to love. "I'm not my brother's keeper."

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Treat your neighbor the way you would like to be treated. Live by the golden rule.

You know what, the greatest expression of God's love is when he sent Jesus to die for your sins and mine. One sin was enough to send me to hell. But no matter how many sins I have, God still loved me. He let his own son Jesus die on the cross, and his blood was shed so that my sins can be forgiven. Jesus took the penalty of my sins. Then, he rose from the dead on the third day to give me eternal life. Now, I can look forward to a life of eternity in heaven.

Folks, God wants us to realize that we can't change on our own. We need the power of Christ to change us from the inside out. And as we cooperate with God as he changes us, let us think lovely thoughts, speak loving words, and do loving deeds.