

1. **Introduction:** *Becoming like Christ through the help of the Holy Spirit.* As the Holy Spirit works within to transform us into a likeness of Christ, we are to cooperate by thinking thoughts and having attitudes and actions corresponding to His gracious work.
 - Becoming Christ-like in character means we must both “put off” bad behavior and “put on” righteous behavior (Eph 4:20-24).
2. **Putting Off the Old Self:** Paul urges believers to put off our old self (dominated by a fallen nature). The old self is corrupted by deceitful desires. The redeemed “new self” has a new attitude of mind toward righteousness enabling putting on a righteous new self.
 - The indwelling Holy Spirit enables both putting off the old self and putting on the new self.
 - Things Christians must eliminate from their life (Eph 4:25-32) include lying, anger, rage, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, and malice.
 - Vices that are intolerable in the Christian life (Eph 5:3-4) include sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking.
 - Godly traits Christians must “put on” (Gal 5:22-23) include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
3. **The Problem:** But how do we “put off” the bad and “put on” the good. How can we control thoughts and actions to develop new patterns of thought, attitude, and behavior?
 - We have all experienced the discouragement of trying hard but failing to break some bad habit.
 - We focus our mind, screw up our will power to its highest level, set to work, and just when we think we have it licked – there it is again!
 - Or when we were about to pray or read our bible, thoughts or images come into our mind that would make us blush with shame if they were televised or broadcast over a loudspeaker.
 - Or perhaps we begin to see progress in our Christian life, and then a situation erupts that makes us lose our cool, evoking reaction so hostile we can’t believe we caused it.
 - Experiences like these highlight a gap that exists between what we are and what we know we ought to be. It is the righteousness gap.
 - How can we close the righteousness gap? How can we break bad habits of thought and action and develop new righteous habits?

- The top-level answer is, we must depend on the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.
 - But we are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and not grieve or quench him. What can we do?
4. **A Helpful Insight:** Larry Christenson in his book, **The Renewed Mind** (Bethany Fellowship, 1974), makes three useful observations:
- (1.) We experience an ongoing struggle between our desire to “live by the Spirit” and the urgings of our “sin nature.” (2.) Scripture says there are things we can and must do, but other things only God can do. (3.) We get into trouble when we confuse the two.
 - Philippians 2:12-13 says we are to “work out” our salvation for it is God who “works in” us “to will and to act according to his good purpose.” “Work out” concerns what we are to do, while “works in” concerns what only God can and must do.
 - In Gal 5:16 Paul gives us further insight when he says, ***“live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”***
 - Martin Luther commented on this verse that we should *follow the Spirit as our guide and resist the flesh, for that is all we are able to do.*
 - Luther is saying that we should be able to resist (that is, to not gratify) the desires of the sinful nature, but **we cannot eliminate the desires.**
 - This is an important insight. There are some things we can and should do. There are other things only God can do. To know what is expected of us is important, but of equal importance is to know what is not expected.
 - Trying to do in our own power what only God can do is as great an error as failing to do what we can and should do.
 - We “are able” to “not gratify” the desires of our sinful nature, but we are unable to eliminate the desires themselves.
 - As the Holy Spirit “works in” us to transform us into a likeness of Christ, we are to “work out” what we have been enabled to do. To do our part and avoid trying to do God’s part, we must know how God intends the labor of transformation to be divided.
5. **Useful Help from David:** Psalm 51 helps to understand the intended division of labor.

Psalm 51: 6-12

“Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost places. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow ... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

6. **Questions:** In these verses of Ps 51, who acts and who is acted upon? Who brings about wisdom in the inner being? Whose salvation brings joy? Who creates a pure heart?
7. **Answers:**
- (1.) It is God who teaches, cleanses, washes, renews, restores, and grants.
 - Whatever change takes place deep within the center of our being can only be the work of God. He changes the essence of who we are.
 - (2.) Colossians 3:12-14 illustrates the things believers are enabled and required to do.
8. **Col 3:12-14:** *“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.”*
9. **Questions:** Who “clothes themselves” with the Christ-like qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience?
- Who bears with each other, forgiving whatever grievances each has against another?
 - And over those virtues, who puts on love to bind them together in perfect unity?
10. **Answer:** All these are things the believer is both enabled and expected to do.
- As the change of our inner most being is God’s work, so the outward visible work of “clothe yourself” and “put on” is work for the believer.
11. **Putting the two pieces together:** We see that in transforming a believer into the likeness of Christ, God works the necessary inward change in the innermost being of the believer, and He enables and requires the believer to put on the outward form of Christ-likeness.
- This division of labor between God and His people is somewhat analogous to the process of building a structure out of concrete. Temporary forms are built into which concrete is poured to produce the real thing.
 - In a building project using concrete, forms are first constructed. The forms are temporary in nature and rough in appearance but define the shape and volume of the desired structure.
 - With the forms in place, a mixture of cement, sand, and pebbles is poured into the forms, smoothed and left to cure. At the right time, the forms are removed.
 - What is left is the real structure. The forms are necessary, but only temporarily.

- That's the way it is as we "clothe ourselves" and "put on" outward signs of righteousness.
- We build forms defining the desired outward shape. We may not want to be patient and kind towards a person – may in fact be furious and angry with them, feeling a strong desire to "get even." But desiring to please God by being obedient to him, we refuse to gratify the desire to "get even" and instead strive to be patient and kind.
- We act in consistent ways with patience and kindness. We refuse to gratify desires we know to be wrong. Going against our "feelings," we act in the way we believe will please God.
- Such obedient actions are the outward form of patience and kindness into which we trust God to pour true inward patience and kindness.
- We cannot eliminate our sinful desires, but we can refuse to gratify those desires.
- We make a big mistake when, with the best of intentions, we try to do God's job, which we cannot do, and ignore the job, we can do.
- As Luther said, all we are able to do is to refuse to gratify the sinful desires. As we repeatedly do this, God will change our innermost being, eliminating the sinful desires themselves.

12. **Continued next time with examples.**