

Question: Is there anything about you, you don't like and would like and would like to change?

Recent research shows that most of us are not happy with some aspect of ourselves. One study found, "Adults say more than 1,000 negative things about themselves each year, including moaning about their hair, skin and weight."¹ "The typical day sees the average man say or think three negative things about himself - a total of 1,095 a year - while women do so four times a day - or 1,460 times annually."

But I'm not really talking about the desire to make physical changes. I'm talking about the desire to change the kind of person you are... morally, ethically, or spiritually. Maybe patterns of thinking, or the way you react to things, or maybe habits you'd like to break. Maybe you'd like to worry less, be more courageous, or have a greater trust in God.

Studies shows the vast majority of us desire to change for the better. New research appearing in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* contends that personality change may be more attainable than we might think. Specifically, a group of researchers...from Southern Methodist University found that people who actively worked to change aspects of their personality were, in many cases, successful in achieving the results they desired.² This seems like good news...but does the Bible agree?

Today we take another step in our series in the book of Colossians that we're calling "Freedom in Christ." And I want you to know the freedom we're referring to is in many ways the freedom to become a better

¹ <https://www.newsweek.com/adults-say-over-thousand-negative-things-about-themselves-each-year-study-1722350>.

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/social-instincts/201909/is-it-possible-change-your-personality>

person, the opportunity each of us has to grow, and change and morph into better versions of ourselves. The Bible refers to this internal change process as transformation—being transformed into the image of Christ. Or the theological term—sanctification. And the best news of all is this; the change we desire is not all up to us.

[Transition] - One of the most concise descriptions of how change can happen in the life of the Jesus follower is taught by the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 3. Let's look at that before we get to our Colossians text for today.

"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."- 2 Cor. 3:18

Let's dissect this a bit...

"We all" ...means this change possibility is available to each person who has opened their hearts to Jesus. So, if you are a Jesus follower, real, meaningful change is possible for you.

"with unveiled faces" ...this means openness and honesty paves the way for real change. This means we are to be open to Jesus...open to others in our church community. It calls for honesty in places like step studies, support groups, small groups, and with trusted friends. Real change won't happen if we remain masked up toward God, or if we're hiding our true selves from him, or fellow trusted believers.

Unveiled refers to three primary things:

- It calls for honest reflection on yourself and your current condition.
- It involves inviting your friends and allies and those who will love you with courage and have the guts to give you honest feedback, and fill in your blind spots.

- And this requires reflection on the Bible and its directives and calling as it describes how we are to live in our freedom. The truth in the Bible is the Lord's glory we're contemplating! The book of James calls this looking into the Bible as we look into a mirror...not forgetting what we see needs changing...but remembering it and practicing it. (James 1:25)
- Then notice it says we all are being transformed...and this is from the Spirit as we walk in step with him. Change requires the courage/desire...the guts, and the desperate "want to" to make the choice again and again to *cooperate* with the Spirit's transforming efforts in us.

That cooperative effort is clearly evident in Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:12b-13, when Paul commands Christians to, "...*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*" (Philippians 2:12b-13)

"To work out" = This word and the form it's in refers to something overcome or refined by constant use, so that the verb signifies working at, and finally accomplishing a task.

So, Paul is saying Christians are to put their whole selves into this "transformation towards Christlikeness" process with all endurance, keeping at it to put off the old and put on the new, as Dillon and Doug have been talking about the last few weeks.

Why? Verse 13 says, "For it is **God who "works"** in you." There is an interesting word play here. The word "work" here is a different word for work than in verse 12. This is the word we get our word "energy" from. The word points to "action or active zeal."³ It is the word the Greeks used

³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 251.

to translate the Hebrew for the energy God used when he created the world.

So, here's what this means friends; we are to use our freedom in Christ to continue to seek the change process because God's energy is zealously and actively hovering over the waters of our lives, re-creating us—working in us to change our will and affect, and our actions in order to fulfill his good purposes.

As Paul attempts to fulfill his calling as an Apostle, he alludes to this same interactive, dynamic cooperation between his efforts and God's efforts in his comments in Colossians 1: 28-2:1a

He {Jesus} is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how hard I am contending for you..."

"Strenuously contend" is one English phrase made up of two Greek words. The first word means, "to toil, implying hard work, severe labor, and struggle. It is used to describe a soldier in battle or a laborer working hard at a task."⁴ And the form here reveals it is to be something ongoing.

The second part of the compound word is the word that means, "To fight, to struggle-- to strive to do something with great intensity and effort-- to make every effort, to do everything possible, to strain oneself."⁵

Compounded together these words emphasize Paul's relentless personal effort and struggle.

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 514.

⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 662.

But, notice, what fuels this strenuous contending? “The energy” Christ “works” = “energizes” in me. Add to this, the word powerfully which is the word we get our word “dynamite” from. So, Paul is piling up the power words to try and declare, “My persistent efforts are energized by all the energy Christ explodes in me.”

Why am I pointing all this out?

As we step into Freedom’s new opportunity to live like free people and leave the old, outgrown prison of our sinful lives—putting off the old ways of being and putting on the new—we don’t simply discipline ourselves into this with our own strength of will. We don’t do this in our own power. Instead, we must learn to cooperate with and yield to the transforming power of Jesus IN us which is the Holy Spirit. Friends...you don’t make this happen in you from the outside in. God is working it in you from the inside out and your call is to cooperate with it.

[Illustration] - Think about it this way. Did you know a caterpillar has the DNA of a butterfly long before they actually can fly? Christians are like that—through the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we are becoming in real time, what we already are IN CHRIST. Caterpillars become Butterflies because of the DNA in them. Christians become more like Christ because of the Spirit of God in us. But we must cooperate with the metamorphous.

Hope for Flowers is a long-loved children’s book. In it one older caterpillar is talking with a younger caterpillar changing into what you were meant to be. **Read excerpts.**

[Transition] - Now, over the last two weeks Dillon and Doug began to unpack specifics about this freedom to change that the Spirit is empowering in us. **And our text today**, drills down on this even more, teaching us that Freedom’s new lifestyle is not simply to be practiced at church—with one’s spiritual family—but also with one’s earthly family, around the house, with those closest to us in and around our families.

I wonder if Paul focuses on the family or relationships in the household because it is so common for us to treat those outside our family, better than we treat those inside our family. We often put on our best behavior in public, when we're away from home, but when we're home, we let down. Your family sees the real you, when you are tired, and off guard. I wonder if Paul believes that if he can get us to relate with those around our house with Jesus in mind, he knows we'll relate with others outside the home with Jesus in mind.

I'm calling this message today, **Freedom at Home** because that's the common theme in his very specific coaching in the various relationship roles around the house. In each of the roles we might be in at home—He's calling us to **always relate with others with Jesus in mind!** In other words, you and I are to relate with others always mindful of how Jesus has treated us and freed us to treat others. Let's take these three pairs of relationship roles one at a time. Let's read Colossians 3:18-19.

How wives and husbands are to relate at home.

Now, wives, I need you to take a breath here. Because this call to submit starts out sounding like, "Ladies get in line." It sounds like he's laying down the hierarchical power structure. But in reality, it is an emphasis on mutuality in the marriage relationship. Let me show you what I mean!

While Paul does argue in other places in the New Testament, that God has given the husband the chief and sober responsibility for leading the health and wellbeing of his family,⁶ he has also repeatedly made the case that IN CHRIST:

- There is equality and mutuality between all people—Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female—all are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11).
- In addition, Paul frequently calls "those IN CHRIST" to submit to one another, and to practice an attitude of humility towards God and others just as Jesus did when he willingly left all the glory and power

⁶ Eph. 5:23, 1 Cor. 11:3, 1 Tim. 2:13.

of heaven and made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant and becoming obedient even to death (Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:1-11).

At one point or another, Paul calls everyone to submit or “put ones self under” the authority or direction of another—all believers to God, his law, to Christ. Humans to governing authorities. Christians to their leaders. Slaves to masters. Young men to older men. Children to parents. Wives to husbands, and spouses to one another.^{7,8}

- Even, the immediate context of these specific instructions is a call for all relationships to be marked by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, unity, and peace.

Add to all this, Paul’s call in these verses for husbands to love their wives and not be harsh with them. “The word for “love” here is *agapaō*, the distinctly Christian word for the kind of sacrificial, self-giving love whose model is Christ himself”⁹ It calls men to not be harsh. That means not treating your wife in a way that cultivates bitterness and resentment because of an abuse of power, or authority. You see, when husbands treat their wives with humble, loving leadership, trusting and submitting is easy and even enjoyable.¹⁰

So, far from being a statement that gives husbands the right to lord power and authority over a woman or to say, “God says I rule, so you do as I say,” Freedom’s new lifestyle “around the house” in the marriage relationship is mutual respect and honor. It’s a partnership that works together and maximizes strengths and minimizes weaknesses.

⁷ Heb. 12:9; Rom. 8:7; 13:1, 5, 1 Cor. 16:16, 1 Pet. 5:5, Col. 3:18.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 299–300.

⁹ *Ibid.* 303.

¹⁰ Pao, David W., *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Colossians and Philemon*, Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor. (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2013). 280.

All this, Paul says, “is fitting in the Lord,” in other words it makes sense for those in Christ. You see, as we relate with each other we must always keep Jesus in mind—how he’s treated us and freed us to treat others—in this case our spouse.

Application: Husbands and wives, with this in view, what would your spouse say about your relationship? Maybe that’s a question you should ask them? Remember; “with unveiled face.” There might be words of apology that are in order. Or there might be words of gratitude and thankfulness. If apologies are required, then lean into the Holy Spirit to empower and equip you to offer them and receive them. Keep leaning into him, yielding to the Holy Spirit, learn how to lead, love and/or submit when appropriate or as necessary. Relate with your spouse with Jesus in mind—how he treats you and freed you to treat your spouse.

[**Transition**] - Having addressed husbands and wives, the next pair of relationship roles speaks to how parents and children are to relate. Read 20-21.

How parents and children are to relate at home.

Once again as parents and children relate with one another they are to be mindful of the Lord—how he has treated them as his kids.

Though Paul addresses only fathers in this text because they had ultimate authority over their children, it is totally appropriate to think about this as referring to both parents. Any parent who is in Christ and learning freedom’s new lifestyle at home, is not to embitter their children and discourage them.

The word “embitter” here means to cause someone to take an adversarial posture toward you. Basically, picking a fight and setting up a polarized challenge where two parties are at odds.¹¹

¹¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 307.

Now, obviously at times, we parents have to lead, and choose, and discipline and often this leads our kids to seriously dislike us in the moment. In fact, if you as a parent have as a goal to always be your child's friend and never upset them, you've already forfeited your authority as a parent, because now, your child is in charge.

Paul is not saying, "Don't upset your kids." What he is calling parents to is guarding against patterns or consistent styles of relating with your kids that cause them to lose heart, become discouraged and anxious, and give up even trying because you are riding them so hard, or you're mean spirited or critical.

"What's the point in trying?", they think, "because Mom, or Dad is never satisfied." Parents...we have to pay attention to the demeanor our parenting creates in our kids. And much of this is tone, harsh, shaming tone.

[Illustration] - Sadly, I've seen parents ride their kids hard, shame them publicly, ridicule them in front of friends, coaches, or teachers. At times this borders on verbal and emotional abuse. Kids under that kind of parenting begin to pull in, shut down, and try to protect themselves. Over time all the kid's joy, zest for life, confidence, creativity, and curiosity is suffocated out of self-protection and self-preservation. Then, sadly, when they are older as teenagers or young adults, they often "act out" of that wounding and rebel like crazy.

Paul wants parents to relate with their kids with Jesus in mind—the way the Lord has related to them—with clear boundaries, clear consequences, great grace, and generous love.

And children under this type of parenting, are to be obedient for this is appropriate and pleases the Lord. The command for children to obey their parents goes all the way back to the base of Mt. Sinai when God first

showed the people he had called and freed from slavery how to live, love and relate to one another as free people.

It's probably worth mentioning, by saying, "in everything," it assumes everything that is in alignment with God's heart and desires. So, it's not teaching children are to obey their parents even if it involves breaking God's moral code, or breaks the law of the land, or involves harm or abuse of any kind.

[Transition] - Now, the final relational role pairing is how those in authority, and those under authority are to relate to one another. This is found in verses 22-4:1.

How those in authority and those under authority, are to relate to one another.

Paul addresses slaves and masters because they were part of many of the 1st Century households, but of course, it is a serious misinterpretation to think that Paul approved of the institution of slavery.

In fact, notice that in this letter to the Colossian church, Paul assumes that the slave would be in the fellowship of the gathered church along with the master, and that the slave was a responsible person who needed to choose to practice Freedom's New Lifestyle in how they relate to their master.

Since personal household servants or slaves are not part of our culture in our day, it's probably most helpful to think about this relational pairing as applying to *those in authority and under authority*. A fair parallel of this might be an employee - employer relationship.

Those under authority are to behave the same way when they are not being watched as when they are watched. This is born out of a greater honor and respect for, even reverent fear of the Lord—their heavenly authority—who is always watching. Paul is really calling them to integrity

as a worker or employee. One definition of integrity is, “who you are when no one is looking.” And Paul is reminding them, their master or “heavenly supervisor” is always watching.

And those in authority are to treat those under them justly and with fairness. They are not pride themselves on their position or in any way abuse their power. Instead, Christians in authority must always be mindful that they answer to a higher authority, the Lord Jesus himself.

Conclusion:

You see, in each of these pairs of relationships “at home—around the house”—in the relationships that matter most in our lives, Paul challenges us to ***always relate with each other with Jesus in mind***—remembering how he treated you and freed you to treat others.

That’s the guiding relational principle Paul is using throughout this description of Freedom’s new lifestyle. It’s the guiding relational principle for all our relationships, starting “at home” in our most intimate relationships and spreading out to guide our conduct in all our relationships.

As we close our time this morning...I’d like to lead all of us in a time of Prayer...and reflection!

Let’s take a few moments and think about the relationships that are closest to you...at home or around our house. Let’s see what God might want to say to us about how we’re relating in these relationships.

Prayer:

God...in these moments we ask you to bring to the surface the relationships where we have not been relating to others with you in mind...remembering how you have related with us.

Don't let us deny...don't let us rationalize...or justify. We need you to grow us in this...to make us better at loving and relating as you loved and related with us.

We have seen that you have made it possible for us to change and grow and become better humans. So, we ask you to put your finger on the one area that you want to change most in us right now.

Maybe it is how we're relating with our spouse...might be our kids in whatever phase of life they are in...or it might be with someone in authority over us or one we're in authority over.

Permeate our entire being in this moment and empower us to live, love and relate differently so that in some small way this week...we become more like you. --Amen!