

Are you kidding? Putting off and putting on is necessary to my salvation?

The Bible claims to answer all of life's needs, but how do I find those answers?

Our subject is the Biblical concept of *putting off and putting on*. Judging from the space the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul devoted to the subject, we must conclude that it is very important.

Generally, a journey started is useless unless completed. When a believer puts on Christ by repentance and immersion in water, the journey has only just begun. The old life is past. Accountability for all past sins is gone, but what of the habitual sins that will plague tomorrow? Christians, new and older, are admonished to “...seek those things which are above, where Christ is...” (Colossians 3:1) Paul stated this another way when he wrote, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

How are we transformed? Does it happen simply because we profess belief in the Savior and claim to be His disciple? Surely, there is more. Am I transformed because I am faithful in attendance at the worship services of the church and listen carefully to the sermons? Perhaps to a degree, but it seems none of these activities, though important, directly addresses changing ungodly habits into godly ones.



Life: A journey in Christ

Putting Off and Putting On

Enter the process of putting off and putting on. Paul said, “...if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning the your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:21-24)

The journey embarked upon by a disciple of Christ is a day by day transformation into the image of Jesus Christ by the purposeful and systematic uprooting of sinful habits and implanting and nourishing godly habits in their place.

Paul challenged his readers to refrain from the world’s pressures to conform, and be transformed by renewing their thinking with the pure Word of God (Romans 12:1, 2). He spoke of crucifying the flesh and its passions and desires and living and walking in the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25). He seemed certain when he affirmed that those who listened to his teaching would know how to conduct themselves in the church of God (1 Timothy 3:15), and he was unapologetic in asking early Christians to put off the old man and “put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

To whom must we go for guidance in improving behavior? Some go to professionally trained psychologists and psycho-

therapists with no thought for how they will advise regarding unrighteous thinking, moral misbehavior and the disposition of guilt. Where should a Christian go? Of course, there are a few Christians who are professionally trained in psychology. If they carefully follow Biblical principles rather than some of the generally accepted therapeutic methods, they would be a valuable source of help. But there are very few. Besides, I believe it can be successfully argued that God’s plan for godly living can be mastered by responsible, common folks who respect the authority of Scripture and diligently strive to live as Jesus lived.

So, to whom should we go? The apostle Paul answers: “*These things I write to you... that you may know how you ought to conduct (behave – KJV & ESV) yourself in the house of God,...*” (1 Tim. 3:14, 15) We must first go to Holy Scripture. But saying this assumes we are capable of mining the principles needed and can effectively apply them to the circumstances of life at hand. Sometimes changing behavior is difficult. In any case, it requires diligent study and persistent application to root out the sinful and put on the godly. You can be certain that in every case it is worthwhile for the disciple of Christ to consider God’s word the first line of defense against misbehavior. It is hoped that this course of study will help us all do a better job of putting off sin and putting on the image of our Savior.

Guide to Living

Were early Christians more capable of changing behavior on their own than we? Did Paul expect them to seek professional help? Clearly no! Paul lay down his challenges confidently because they rested in the revelation of God through His Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who guided Paul's pen to write, *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."* (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Did you catch the all-inclusive nature of that claim – sufficient for *every* good work, by anyone, anytime? I believe so.

We have easy access to the book of God, which is able to completely and thoroughly equip us for this life, a guide for overcoming all ungodly behavior. Do we understand the practicality of its solutions? Can we analyze our personal needs and apply Biblical answers to life's problems? Do we? That is the point of this course, to uncover the Bible's view of human psychology and practical ways to apply it.

What is the Bible?

The Bible is first and foremost a book of religion, which argues for change in human behavior from a religious per-

spective and as a natural result of belief in the faith it presents. Because of belief in the Bible, millions of people, even whole societies, have been changed for good despite the harm done when Bible teaching has been twisted or distorted out of context. It is a book which deserves the careful consideration of any proponent of responsible behavior in the human family. Since the Bible is a book that argues for faith in God, its psychology cannot be separated. In fact, any adopted view of psychology will interweave with one's faith, that collection of convictions which necessarily guides thoughts and actions. They cannot be separated. Our purpose in this course will be to evaluate Bible teaching from the perspective of human psychology with an eye to that which is true to the body of Divine faith.

The Bible is the world's oldest historical record of human behavior. Year after year, it remains the world's best selling book. Though widely received, there are many different views of what the Bible is and how it came into being. Some call it folklore preserved by word-of-mouth tradition and finally written down in its present form. Some believe it to be the writings of good men, philosophers of their time, who recorded lessons in living which may have value today. Some believe it to be outdated and of no current value. Some believe it is God's mes-

Putting Off and Putting On

sage to mankind but in mythical terms, therefore, not to be taken literally. Others believe every word is from God and should be carefully heeded.

Especially in the latter group, many believe in the inspiration of the Bible by a powerful, personal God. Regarding inspiration, there are basically two positions: (1) that God gave men the ideas to write, and men wrote from their own understanding, by their own intelligence and creativity, and in their own words, and (2) that God dictated His book using men as scribes who wrote down, word for word under His control, all that God said, adding nothing of their own. The first view makes the Bible the product of men; consequently, it cannot rise above the knowledge and wisdom of the men who wrote it. The second view makes the Bible “super human,” a product of the supernatural. Of course, what one believes of the Bible will dramatically affect what one believes of the psychology it teaches. We will treat the Bible as a word for word inspired revelation of a supernatural God, Creator of all mankind, a book offering a way of life which is mentally healthy and morally wholesome.

About This Course

The primary thrust of this course will be to examine what the Bible claims for itself. We will consider what the Bible

has to say about its source, authority, and application, especially as it relates to the human mind and behavior. We will try to present the Bible’s view as practical and workable, since the Bible claims its teachings to be both. Our approach will not be to “sell” its view, but rather to let the Bible speak for itself and show how what it says is practical and capable of application in the average person’s daily life. Participants in this study are encouraged to question and critically consider whether or not the Bible’s approach to mental and behavioral health is workable.

Some Bible terms necessary to understanding its view of human behavior and how behavior is changed were more common in earlier times and cultures. These must be understood if we are to understand the Bible’s approach to living. It would be impossible to understand the Bible’s message without using its language. In other words, we will need to understand that message as it was first written. Our task will be to piece together from modern translations of the original languages the elements of what we are calling *the Bible’s view of human psychology*. Occasionally, when definitions of original words will help our investigation, dictionaries of respected Hebrew and Greek scholars will be consulted.

Lesson 1 Discussion:

1. List and be prepared to discuss some views of what the Bible is that you may have encountered.
2. What, if anything, is wrong with seeking the counsel of formally trained and certified psychotherapists?
3. When should the counsel of professionals be sought?
4. Can you name any book that rivals or surpasses the Bible's thoroughness on instructing how to live life?
5. Be prepared to discuss the notion that the Bible has a particular, useful view of human psychology. Is it appropriate to label Bible teaching in this way?

Putting Off and Putting On

6. List some reasons why studying how to improve behavior is particularly good at this time.