

Health care is up for debate, again. It's happened before. Teddy Roosevelt in 1912. Truman in 1949. 1965 and Lyndon Johnson. The Clintons in 1993. And now Obama in 2009. The names are different, but the debate seems like the same old story. One side has a government run program. The other side says reform should happen, but without the wholesale changes. It's your health, your country, and your choice which side of the debate you're on.

Turn on the 24 hour news channels and it seems like the same old story there too. Some famous sports star is back from rehab looking to make it big again. Famous actresses pregnant or getting a divorce or both. Natural disasters somewhere in the world threatening thousands of lives. Innocent lives lost too soon either accidentally or purposefully. Life always seems like the same old story.

Individually the same seems true. If it's the same old story, the majority of people are doing the same things, and their influence is strong then maybe we should do the same things too. Fighting the faults, scars, and sins of this world seems hopeless. So we resemble those around us. Less friction that way, less conflict, and less to worry about. We give in to sinful behavior. Our lives are the same old story then too. The world's sinful, we're sinful. Tragic if our story ended there, but it doesn't. Paul explains in his letter to the Ephesians and to us that...

Christian life isn't the same old story
Put off the old person outside of Christ
Put on the new person in Christ

I have been accused of being stubborn at times. I don't like printing out maps to get where I'm going even if I don't know where that is. But it's not why you think. I have directions right on my phone, so I figure why print something out. The problem is on more than one occasion the phone has led us wrong. For that my wife gets frustrated with me. Still I stubbornly punch in the address fully expecting it to take me where I want to go, only to end up in the wrong place.

The unbelievers Paul was warning about were just as stubborn. Paul called their hearts hard. They wanted to get somewhere and they thought they could find it themselves. But they concentrated on their desires, their own abilities. Jesus was left out. Their hard hearts didn't even think about Jesus. **"They were darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."** Hard hearts, ignorant, darkened understanding, and separated from the life of God. These unbelievers were lost without Jesus. It was the same old story.

At the end of a losing season the coach might tell a team to go out and just have fun. They can play hard because they've got nothing to lose. Paul recognized the same kind of attitude in these unbelievers. They didn't have Jesus, had nothing to lose, so they played hard. **"Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."** They were like calloused skin. At first it was sensitive, but now it's lost all feeling. Sin came so easy and they were so dead to any feeling of shame over it. They did whatever made them happy. And when that wasn't enough, they greedily wanted more.

Yours is not the same old story. It started out similar. You were born with the same sinful old person, the same natural inclination to sin as everyone else. But your sinful old person was put off for good. When? Putting off the sinful old person takes something violent, decisive. Crucifixion is just that. Christ's violent decisive death on the cross broke our ties with our sinful nature. Once and for all Christ put off that old person. God isn't overlooking sinfulness in us. Rather he looks at the Savior who took all our sins on himself and suffered death in our place. God looks at us but doesn't see our sin; he sees Christ and the forgiveness he won.

So you can be sure your Christian life isn't the same old story. Your sins are forgiven in Christ. The sinful old person inside of you that didn't want anything to do with Jesus has been put off. So why do you still stumble into sins? Why are there times when you can't stop yourself from gambling away another \$1000 dollars? Why is it that sometimes you struggle with confidence in the face of politics? Why is it that there are times when you feel more like staying away from church than coming because of how another Christian hurt you?

I encourage you, Paul tells you, and God commands you. **"You must no longer live as the Gentiles do...you were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires."** The truth is Christ did put off the sinful old person inside each one of you. His resurrection is proof that the sinful nature you carry can't harm you eternally. But the sinful nature can sure make life difficult physically. Putting off the sinful old person is something we must do every single day. Repentance, hearing the Word of God, receiving the sacraments, these are the ways we put that old person off. Staying connected to the only thing that saves, Jesus. We're Christians whose lives aren't the same old story. We are putting off the sinful old person that exists without Christ.

My mother went to work all dressed up for her office job. But the first thing she would do when she got home was change clothes. My father worked all day in a factory, his first thing was to change clothes. Something about getting out of work clothes and into everyday clothes that feels good. Every day we walk around with our sinful nature, our old person. That trickster is keeping us dirty with sin. But we're part of Christ now and that means a change is necessary. Put off the old person that exists outside Christ and put on the new person in Christ.

Christians are constantly alert for sin. Do you ever get tired of trying so hard not to sin, trying to always follow God's will? It's hard to say no to things we really want to do and that others are doing. Would it really be so bad if everyone takes a swig of the liquor bottle for me to do it too? What's wrong with getting a cell phone even if my parents said not till I was older? A lot of people curse, it can't be that bad. The darkness of our still sinful minds can cloud our judgment.

It's time for a wakeup call; time to remember what you've heard. **"Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus."** The only saving truth is found in Jesus. You came to know the saving truth about Jesus through instruction in the Word of God. Through that same Word you came to know that Christ gave you the perfection he earned during his perfect life so that you would be considered righteous before God. Through that Word you learned that Christ paid for your sins, took them away so that you would be considered holy. Through that Word you learned that you are saved because you are free from sin and you are clothed in righteousness.

That's a garment to be putting on your whole life. At times it seems too difficult, but in Christ it's done. Christians know Christ, know what he did, know what he gave, and know what they are. Christ breaks us free from the empty way of life that unbelievers follow. Christ gives us the strength to put off the old person that is corrupted and corrupts. Christ gives us the strength to **"put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."** Put on the new person in Christ.

Former Secretary General of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld once said, "He who wants to keep his garden tidy doesn't reserve a plot for weeds." Our lives are like a garden free of weeds when connected to Christ. Don't reserve a small place there for the weeds of sin like unbelievers do. God our Father commands that our lives can't be the same old story. We're connected to Christ now and that changes us. Now we continually put off the sinful old person that destroys us, and continually put on the new person created in Christ Jesus. Our Christian life of putting off and putting on isn't easy, but it's done in Christ. Connected to his Word and saved by his life and death our Christian life isn't the same old story.