

Being Different

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If you aren't different than you were before coming to Christ, Paul's question to the twelve men in Ephesus might apply to you: *"Into what were you baptized?"* (Acts 12:3). The very word "conversion" denotes change; a converted person cannot remain the same!

We're not talking about being different merely for the sake of being different. Some religions require drab clothing or peculiarly designed garments unique to their adherents. But Christians are to be known for being clothed with Christ, and their beliefs and behavior will show it.

From ancient times God has wanted His people to be different as compared to those who don't know Him. He warned His people Israel to be different religiously from the Canaanites whose land He would give them. *"Do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise'"* (Deuteronomy 12:29). He also commanded them to be different morally, shunning the gross fornication of the pagans, *"for by all these things the nations are defiled which I am casting out before you"* (Leviticus 18:24).

In principle these still apply to Christians. Christ's gospel permits no alterations or substitutions; purveyors of any perverted gospel are accursed (Galatians 1:8-9). Moral purity remains mandatory: *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality"* (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Being different may feel uncomfortable and draw the world's disdain. You may be called a "holy Joe" or "goody two-shoes." But God will be pleased, and you might just influence someone to give the gospel a fair hearing.

Giving Grace

"This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matthew 18:35).

Two years ago, the college where I work inaugurated a new president by the name of Orinthia Montague. The first lady to ever hold the post, "Dr. O" (as she was known by the college community) could be best described as a breath of fresh air, as she was a very friendly and outgoing individual. In September, I learned of her untimely passing, and like the rest of the college community, I found myself stunned with disbelief. Things have not been the same since.

A phrase often used by Dr. O is "always give people grace." Many define grace as "unlimited and unmerited favor," but what does it mean to give grace? In a college atmosphere, giving grace is all about forgiveness and granting people second chances. As an instructor, I have found myself extending grace to those who needed a second chance, a third chance, or sometimes even more. It's about overlooking past mistakes or histories and helping the student to find success. Time after time, the additional chance given made all the difference.

What so many do not understand – Christians included – is that giving grace directly relates to one's eternal salvation and extending grace through forgiveness is essential to pleasing God. In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus gives the example of a man forgiven an unpayable debt but then later refused to show grace. As a result, the man received severe punishment. The lesson? As God's children, we MUST forgive because we have been forgiven. Through forgiveness, we not only free others from their mistakes but also ourselves, becoming who God intended for us to be.

Always give people grace! It's not that difficult.

--Kenny Westmoreland (Celina, TN)

Vocational Ministry

President Mitch Henry of Faulkner University wants every student and employee to be a vocational minister; however they make their living, they will be ministers of Jesus, helping the needy, leading everyone they can to be closer to Jesus.

Preachers generally consider themselves to be "called to preach." However one makes a living, he or she may also be "called." *"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him . . . Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ"* (Colossians 3:17, 23-24).

Since Jesus is our "employer," our work is a vocation done to please Jesus and not some man. That transforms the way we look at our job; now it is a vocation serving the Lord. That surely makes every Christian work in such a way as to be the best possible employee, serving joyfully. If we are the CEO of a large company, we will conduct ourselves with integrity and honesty. If our job is picking up litter, we will be sure not to miss even one piece. Every job is ultimately designed to help someone or to make the world a better place for all. As you work at it, remember that your "boss" is Jesus.

The concept of vocational ministry impacts us in two ways: 1) While we do our make-a-living job, we will use every opportunity to help someone in need or to draw someone to Christ. 2) It will transform our job into a vocation, a calling, as we work for Jesus and not for man.

--Cecil May, Jr. (Montgomery, AL) via *Preacher Talk*