

## *Before and After*

A sermon by Kevin Bowers

Community Presbyterian Church, Cathedral City

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### **Before**

Have you ever tuned in to one of those home transformation channels? You know, Property Brothers, Chip and Joanna Gains “Flip or Flop?” To celebrate the reformation, there’s always a photo of *Before and After*. It’s always mesmerizing to see the transformation of a property in the After Photo. I have thought to myself many times *how beautiful – how is it possible for such a stunning transformation in such a little time?*

If only our lives could be transformed overnight! That we could be made beautiful in a one-hour episode of Flip or Flop would be so energizing, however. After reading *Capital Gains*, a book authored by Flip or Flop Master, Chip Gains, I saw the time and effort required for such a transformation. The *before* actually determines the outcome of the *after*. Does the home have a suitable framework, and is there an availability of resources?

To help move this message forward today, we need to understand that, on the continuum, there’s right and wrong and good and evil.

If we are to be transformed and saved by grace, *a redemptive ethic first admits that the powers of good and evil are real.\** That there’s a right way or a wrong way to approach our spiritual and physical life. If we deny that the “ruler of the powers of the air” is a figment of our imagination or anything less than what it is, than we diminish and weaken the redemptive powers of the almighty God.

The saving grace begins with God. But while we were still yet sinners, Christ died for us. In Him he gives us fullness of life. The just for the unjust that He might bring us to God.

On Screen - <sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Do you know how Merriam-Webster defines grace?

- a. unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification
- b. a virtue coming from God
- c. a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine assistance

Even in this day and age, there is a timeless reference to God in our dictionary. Some things are undeniable; grace undeniably comes from God.

Once we have accepted Christ as our personal savior and embraced our relationship with Him, we are on a trajectory to become more *Christlike*. This is where the real transformation takes place. The property has been chosen, the framework has been laid, the resources are available and here we are with hammer in hand and shoulder to plow ready to charge into our own reformation. So what does God say about it?

### **After**

<sup>10</sup>For we are what he has made us (framework), created in Christ Jesus (resources) for good works (after), which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

God created us and our framework. Christ is our resource to grow in discipleship and obedience. Our transformation is evidenced by our good works and godly behavior.

Some years ago I was involved in a church plant in Highland, California. I had a remarkable group of band and singers that could perform just about any music that I threw at them. It was necessary because the pastor was notorious for coming up with new ideas on Saturday night that he wanted delivered on Sunday morning.

One of my singers, Becky, went through a season where she was just not feeling well. After missing several rehearsals and Sunday services I paid her and her family a visit. She explained her problem and said the entire family was just feeling blah.

After listening to the conversation, it suddenly dawned on me that another member at the church lived in the same gated community and same model home as she did. I remembered that they had a mold problem in their master bathroom. Coincidentally, the co-founder of Side by Side Humanitarian also lived in the same model. He also had repairs done to the master bathroom. It was evidenced by a scaring in the drywall that faced the main living area downstairs.

To make a long story short, the entire neighborhood was plagued with the same problem; moisture build up in the master bathroom. The cause? The builder didn't use

moisture approved drywall in the wet area. Why? To save money. The result? A substandard living for the residents.

When we don't get the frame work right or take advantage of the appropriate resources, our *after* photograph portrays a substandard life in Christ. Are we living a life of one that reflects the fruit of the Spirit? Are we demonstrating God's love in practical ways?

Paul says it in this way:

Romans 8:28-30 New Living Translation (NLT)

<sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes everything to work together<sup>[a]</sup> for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. <sup>29</sup> For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn<sup>[b]</sup> among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

When our framework is built on the precepts and principles of God's word, we are made righteous. We are called to be like Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become Children of God – even to those who believed on His name (John 1:12).

What does your *after* photograph look like? Is it one that worships the Lord, builds up other believers and brings people to Christ?

I'd like to look at a snapshot of our church. A sort of after photo of our congregation. It is a portrait of a loving and giving congregation who serves the Lord and His children.

We have Pastor Lee, who with multiple degrees could have his pick of a corporate career, but instead he chooses to serve the Lord by leading our congregation.

We have Jeffrey Kramer who, with hesitation, steps up to not only assist the children's ministry, but also directs the choir and provides thoughtful message in pastor Lee's absence.

We have Peggy Bakke who faithfully teaches our children the value of cultivation, nourishment, and harvest (a bold example of before and after).

Mary Karr who keeps our surroundings in the fellowship hall thoughtful and beautiful. Nancy Pryor has served this congregation faithfully organizing recycling, attendance, meals, events and calendars.

We have Nathan Sobers, who in the midst of medical concerns for a loved one keeps pressing on with the mission of Opening Life Fellowship.

Noel White who stepped out in faith with a calling to music is now being courted by multiple churches and is faced with decisions on how to best organize his time.

Patty Valdez who has opened up our hearts and minds to minister beyond the borders of Cathedral City.

Laurie Holk who has been the glue that holds many programs together.

There are so many who make contributions of time, talent and treasure.

I want to close by saying: Thank you for your faithfulness and thank you for living and portraying after photo for Christ.

Kevin Bowers

\*A Pastoral Perspective from Adam E. Eckhart