

## "New Attitudes for the New Year - Be Different"

Romans 12:1-2

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If you're joining us for the first time this morning, we are in the middle of a new sermon series called: *"New Attitudes for the New Year."*

We started the series a few weeks ago to coincide with the new year, and instead of preaching on "New Year's Resolutions," I wanted to encourage our congregation to have "new attitudes" this year!

And so we started this sermon series by looking at Jesus' Sermon on Mount where He talked about the Beatitudes, and although the Beatitudes are not "attitudes" technically speaking, Jesus listed eight different be-attitudes, that to challenge the way people thought about themselves, about the world and their identity as God's people.

Then in last Sunday's sermon, I was trying to stay with the "Be-Attitudes" theme and the attitude I talked about and the BE-attitude I tried to encourage, was to be in awe of God. Be awestruck and be filled with wonder.

Well, the new "be-attitude" for this morning and my encouragement to you this week is to be **different**. To be different and to have a different attitude!

Quotes on being Different.
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Let me share a few quotes/illustrations that talk about being different.

There's a quote from Robert F. Kennedy, who once said: ***"Some [people] see things as they are and ask 'Why?' I dream of things that never were and ask 'Why not?'"***

When I first heard that quote, I was impressed by the play on words, but that quote challenged me to think differently. Instead of looking at the world as it is, to look at the world and dream of possibilities and ask "why not?"



Here's a picture of the proverbial half-cup of water where someone asks the question: *"Is the glass half full or half empty?"*

I suppose there are different ways to look at it cup - depending on your perspective.

If you're an optimist, you would say: *"The glass is half full."*

If you're a pessimist, you would say: *"The glass is half empty."*

Actually, did you know that there are more different ways to look at this glass of water?

An engineer would look at this glass of water and they wouldn't say it was half full or half empty, because an engineer would see this and say: *"That glass cup is twice as big as it needs to be."*

A narcissist would also see the cup differently. A narcissist would look at the cup and say: *"Hey, who drank my water?"*

A spouse would also see the cup differently. A spouse would look at the cup and say: *"Honey, make sure you put a coaster under that cup! You don't want to ruin the coffee table!"*

A Christian, too, would also see the cup differently. A Christian would look see the cup and say: *"You look like you need a refill. Can I pour some more water into your cup?"* (Did you like that last one? I made that one up!)

So there's a lot of different ways of looking at a glass of water, and as Christians, what I'd like to encourage you to do and be, is to be "different" in the way you look at the world and to be different in your attitudes.

Our Scripture passage for today comes from Romans 12:1-2.

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

The book of Romans is a little bit different than some of the other books Paul wrote. For starters, Paul didn't write this letter to a particular church or person like some of the other letters he wrote, he wrote this letter according to Ch 1:7 "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints."

In other words, Paul wrote this letter to all the believers and followers of Jesus Christ who lived in the city of Rome. Paul wrote this letter to all the Christians in that city, and in chapter 12, he strongly urged them, "*not to conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds.*" In other words - "Don't be like everyone else in Rome!"

Listen to how the MSG translation renders this verse.

*"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking."*

The Apostle Paul said something similar to Christians in other cities. To the church in Corinth he talked about being "unique" and to the church in Thessalonica he talked about being "sanctified" or being set apart, but only to the Christians in Rome does Paul say to them: "*do not conform, do not mold into the same shape, or the same size or the same color of those around you, but stand out, stand apart - be different!*"

Have any of you heard of the phrase: "*When in Rome?*"  
The full phrase is "*When in Rome, do as the Romans do.*"

When in Rome - *walk* as the Romans walk.

When in Rome - *talk* as the Romans talk.

When in Rome, don't try to do your own thing, "DO" as they do in Rome.

Apparently there must have been a lot of societal pressure to conform and blend in - in terms of lifestyle and behavior, maybe even in terms of attitudes.

This is exactly what Paul was warning the Christians to be very careful about:  
*"Do not conform. Don't fit in so perfectly so that people can not tell you apart from non-believers."*

About being different.

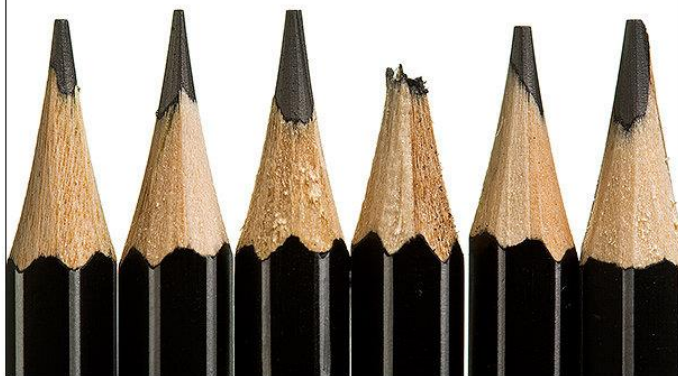
It needs to be said that Paul isn't saying we should be different just for the sake of being different, but being different in such a way that our difference brings attention and glory more to God than onto ourselves. Because being different just for the sake of being different sometimes isn't helpful.

For example, take a look at this picture.



See the fork (third one from the left?) It sure is "different" but it isn't useful is it?

# INDIVIDUALITY



Just because you are different doesn't mean you are useful.

Or how about this picture? It's a picture of a row of pencils, but the 4<sup>th</sup> pencil has a broken tip. It's "different" all right, but it's not useful.

So to be clear, we're not talking about being "different" just to be "different" anyone could do that, but rather, we are talking about being "different" and having a different attitude, where the difference in the way we think or act, will bring glory and honor to God! Or as Paul would say, in way that is "good and pleasing" and carries out the will of God.

Be Different in the way you THINK.

Here's my first encouragement to you today.

Be Different in the way you think. Be Different in your minds.  
Paul said it this way: "*Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.*"

One way we are supposed to be able to tell a Christian apart from a non believer, is the way we think. And "how" is a Christian supposed to think?

We are to think about,  
*whatever is true, whatever is noble,  
whatever is right, whatever is pure,  
whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable,  
and whatever is excellent and praiseworthy* (Phil. 4:8)

Sounds a little bit "abstract" though doesn't it? *"Think "nobly" - think "admirably"*

Do you need a few examples?

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, after He talked about the "be-attitudes" Jesus launched into a whole bunch of topics with very concrete examples.

On the topic of murder, Jesus said:

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago: 'Do not murder,' but I say unto you, "Anyone who is angry w/a brother or sister will be subject to judgement."*

You know how sometimes we can get so angry at someone, so angry that we say or think *"I could \_\_\_\_ you!"* We don't really mean it, but Jesus said: *"Don't even think that way."*

On the topic of retribution and revenge, Jesus said:

*"You have heard that it was said: 'Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth' but I say unto you: "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek."*

Don't even think about getting revenge or getting even! Instead, think about restoring the relationship.

If they slap you on this side, instead of wanting to strike back, let them slap the other side, because that will make them pause and think about what they're doing. Is that concrete enough? is that noble enough?

Then on the topic of enemies, (God forbid we have any enemies) Jesus said:

*"You have heard that it was said: "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy" but I say unto you: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons and daughters of your Father in heaven."*

How's that for an example of how Christians is supposed to think about the people all around us.?

Having a different attitude and the way we think about others is how we can stand apart and stand out as Christians.

The Disciples learned this in a very practical way when they were travelling with Jesus. One day scripture tells us Jesus and the disciples came upon a man sitting on the side of the road who was born with a handicap.

The man was blind, and in those days if you were blind, well the popular opinion was you were a sinner. And, if you were born blind, meaning you were blind since the womb, well - that was because your mom or your dad did something wrong. (That was the popular idea and how people thought.)

But Jesus challenged the way the disciples thought and He wanted His disciples to think differently about the man and instead of looking at the man from the perspective of sin, to start looking at the man from the perspective of Heaven.

That little lesson on the side of the road revolutionized the way they started to look at people. Instead of looking at people through the lens of sin, instead of thinking about the world and who's going to hell, Jesus made them think about the man and made them see him - with and thru the eyes of God.

I once heard a story about a Hummingbird vs a Vulture.

Consider the hummingbird and the vulture. Both are birds that fly in the sky, scanning for what is on the ground below.

The vulture as it flies above looks down below for rotting meat. That's what vultures look for and they thrive on that diet.

But the hummingbird, as it flies above, doesn't look for rotting meat or the smelly flesh of dead animals, instead, the hummingbird looks for colorful blossoms and the sweet smell of flowers.

The vulture lives on what was. The vulture lives on the past and they fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But the hummingbird lives on what is and always seeks new life and to fill itself with what is fresh and full of life.

Each bird finds what they are looking for, but they are looking for different things.

Isn't that a great story? Think like a hummingbird (float like a bee!)  
Think from above and not from below.

See people from the other side of heaven. See people from the Kingdom of God, and when we do, our attitudes about them will be completely different.

Jesus wanted His followers to be different than those who didn't follow Him. Different in the way we think about all kinds of topics.

He wanted us to think about God - not in fearful way, but to think about God in a loving and gentle way. He wanted us to think of others, (esp. those who were "sinners") not with judgement, not with condemnation, but with the hopes that people deserve 2<sup>nd</sup> chances to make things right with God.

He challenged the way we thought about priorities. He challenged the way we thought about struggles. He even challenged the way we think about the poor, the imprisoned and those who lacked food and clothing.

Be Different in the way you ACT.
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My second encouragement to you this morning is to be different in the way you act.

Jesus challenged us to be different, not just in the way we think, but also in the way we act - and by our actions, it should be so evident that we are followers of Jesus Christ.

Well, this is not as easy as it sounds. A well known magazine called Christianity Today published an article back in 1991, where they quoted a study done by The Princeton Religion Research Center that measured the impact of religion on people's day to day behavior.

The study compared people who were "churched" vs. people who were "un-churched" on a wide range of behaviors, and what they found out was that there wasn't too much difference between the two.



For example, people who go to church took home office supplies from work just as much as people who don't go to church. (ie: paper clips, staples, copy paper!)

People who go to church also overstated their tax deductions just as much as people who don't go to church. They called in sick - even though they weren't, just like everybody else, they embellished on their resumes - even though a few details weren't true, and the study came to the conclusion that whatever differences there were between church and un-church were very marginal.

This is an area we have to work on. To be different in the way we act.

Jesus challenged His followers to be different than others on this very topic. But the distinction back then wasn't between those who go to church and those who don't, it was between Christians (who believed in God) and pagans (who believed in false gods.)

In Matt. 5:43-47, Jesus was talking about Love.

*"You have heard that it was said: "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy," but I say unto you - "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be called sons and daughters of your Father in heaven."*

Then He added:

*"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"*

And so Jesus challenged His followers to be different than pagans, especially in the area of how we love and the way we treat our enemies.

Question.

*"If your neighbor, or your co-worker or your classmate were to look at you, your life, your lifestyle, your behavior, would they be able to notice that you believed in God and followed Jesus Christ?"*

If not, then there's room for improvement and we have a lot of work to do.

Right before this verse about loving our enemies, Jesus was talking about our actions. He wanted us to be different. He wanted us to turn the other cheek, and instead of getting even, He wanted us to get it right.

In Matt 5:41 Jesus said:

*"If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."*

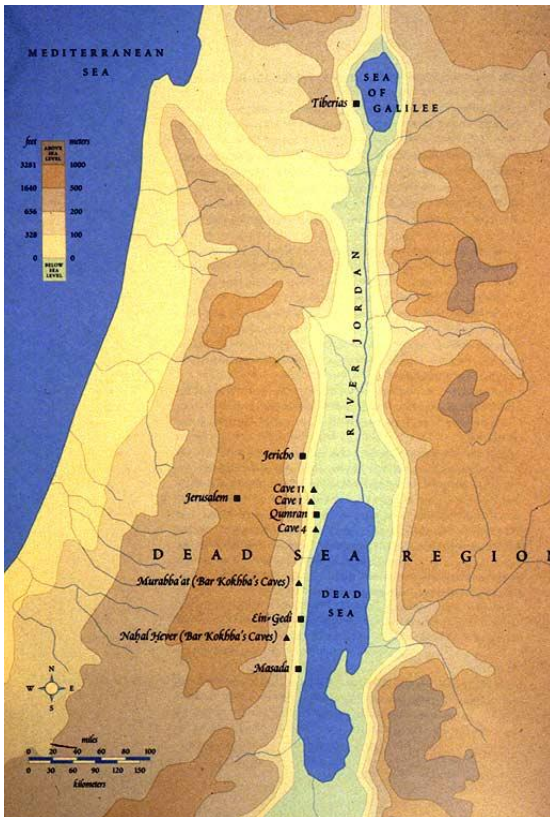
Do you know about that verse? To understand that verse where Jesus talked about "going the extra mile" there was a law that all the Jews had to obey, that if a Roman soldier asked a Jew to carry all of their gear (which was rather very heavy) by law - they were required to carry it for a distance of one mile.

The law applied to Jewish men and boys 12 years and older, and if you refused, you could be arrested.

So the words that Jesus said wasn't just about "going for a walk," it was about having to carry a very heavy load which everyone was required to do, but instead of just going that one mile, to go the extra mile, because it's in that 2<sup>nd</sup> mile that will cause him to notice you didn't carry it just for him, that 2<sup>nd</sup> mile - you carried it for God.

Jesus was saying: *"Everyone walks that first mile. But it's the second mile that sets you apart."*

That's how we are to be different. By going that extra mile and by going above and beyond others.



Some of you may have seen this picture - it's a simplified map of where much of the N.T. took place.

I don't know if you can make it out, but there two bodies of water, the smaller one to the north is the Sea of Galilee, and the larger one to the south is the Dead Sea, and they are connected by the Jordan River.

The Sea of Galilee is the one you hear about a lot. That's the one where Jesus called the first disciples. It's the one that Peter/Andrew and James/John were fisherman.

The Sea of Galilee is teeming with life, all kinds of fish, birds and plants call it home.

The much bigger sea to the south - the Dead Sea, gets its name from the fact that nothing can live in its water because the water is too salty. No fish can live in its waters, no plants can stand the salinity, no birds drink the water.

Well, both of these two bodies of water are connected by the Jordan River, but they are very different. One is life giving, life sustaining, while the other one is nothing but a stagnant pool of water.

What's the reason for the difference?

Well, the Sea of Galilee is constantly receiving and giving water, constantly moving, receiving fresh water from the mountains above and sending that water down into the Jordan river, while the Dead Sea only takes and takes and takes - but the water doesn't go anywhere.

All that water that collects in the Dead Sea doesn't empty out into any river, it just sits there, it doesn't do anything, but gets saltier and saltier.

The difference between the two seas are like night and day. One has many outlets while the other has none; one is constantly giving out while the other just takes.

Be like the Sea of Galilee and not like the Dead Sea!  
Don't be salty -be fresh! Don't be selfish - be generous!

This week, I encourage you to have a different attitude.  
To be different in way that glorifies God.  
To be different in the way you think and in the way you act,  
that brings glory to God and honors Jesus Christ.

A closing prayer.

*Heavenly Father, you call us to be in the world but not of the world.  
You call us to be in the world and yet set apart.  
To be pure and holy - to be righteous and without fault.*

*You call us to take the narrow path when others choose the easier one.  
You challenge us to walk the extra mile you encourage us to turn the other  
cheek, you correct us to think of others not as our enemies but as brothers and  
sisters in the family of God.*

*Heavenly Father, may our thoughts become more and more like your thoughts,  
and may our actions become more and more like yours. That the words we speak  
and the actions we take - mirror the One whom we worship. Amen.*