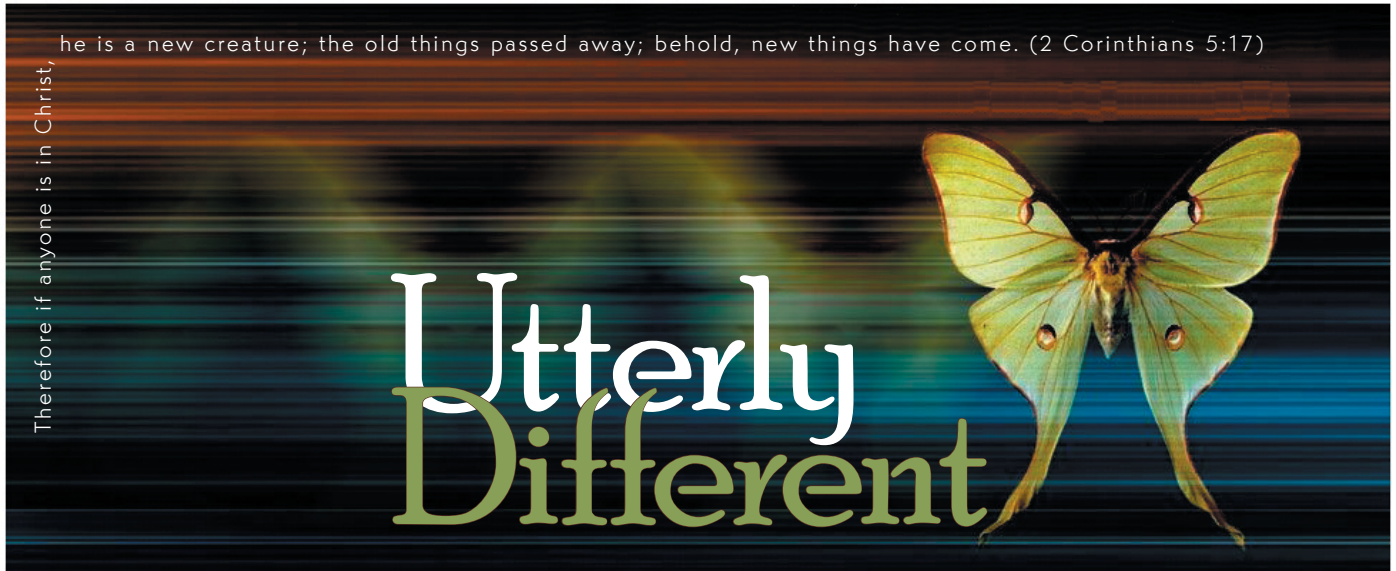


The chains that have bound me are flung to the wind,
By the mercy of God the poor slave is set free;
And the strong grace of heaven breathes fresh o'er the mind,
Like the bright winds of summer that gladden the sea.



There was nought in God's world half so dark or so vile
As the sin and the bondage that fettered my soul;
There was nought half so base as the malice and guile
Of my own sordid passions, or Satan's control...

This has been a banner week in the seemingly never-ending process of renovating our kitchen. Shortly after the first of the year the contractor began tearing out the old cabinets and appliances. He and his workmen tore out the old ceiling, replastered the walls, added a new floor. In a relatively short period of time we had a clean, primed, rectangular room waiting to become a new kitchen. Then they delivered the new cabinets, filling the garage with large cardboard boxes. Next the appliance store delivered the new appliances, adding them into the warehouse that had once housed only our vehicles.

Gradually the new cabinets were uncrated and installed, one at a time, in the new rectangular room, which slowly began to look like a kitchen once again. Once the lower cabinets were installed, the new tile floor could be put down.

By the end of the day Tuesday all the new appliances were in. The contractor had finished the crown molding atop the cabinets, and finished up the electrical connections. On Wednesday afternoon new workers brought and installed the new countertop and sink. Thursday and Friday the contractor returned to finish the plumbing for the sink and dishwasher, and install all the remaining trim for the

cabinets. On Monday the tile guy comes to install the wall tile between the counter and the upper cabinets.

If everything goes as planned, by the end of this week we will be back in business.

From the beginning this project has been not a refinishing of the old, or just another new-paint job. The new kitchen will be utterly different, in practically every way, from the old. The old cabinets were dark; the new are light. The old counters were light Formica; the new will be dark quartz. The old floor was carpet; the new is tile. The light fixtures are different, and in different places. The new

kitchen has a different traffic pattern from the old; everything is arranged differently.

By the end of this process, the room will be utterly new.

Walking the Walk

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

(Romans 6:1-4)

Long ago, in a different time and place, I was painfully confronted with the hypocrisy of my life. Leaving my house one day, a friend and colleague spied a collection of sermon tapes my mom had sent me from her church back home. My friend's off-hand remark cut into my gut like a dagger: "Oh, are you a Christian?"

Mercifully, I can no longer remember my stuttering reply. But I *can* remember to this day my feeling of shame and remorse. Here was someone I saw on a regular basis. We were of the same profession, we shared thoughts and ideas, on occasion our families socialized together. Yet it came as a surprise to him that I was a believer in Christ. In fact, I had been a Christian since the tender age of eight, but how would he have known? My lifestyle at the time was not in any substantial way different from everyone around me. I did not attend church, and my words and habits were only marginally dissimilar from any unbeliever.

But, of course, now I realize that my friend's departing remark was orchestrated from above, for it became a catalyst for my eventual return to the fold.

Not Who We Were

Just as in our new kitchen there are still scattered remnants of the old lying hidden inside walls and beneath the new tile, remnants of our old life still lie buried within us. So long as our feet tread the soil of earth, the process of our sanctification will remain incomplete. We have been changed

For years I have borne about hell in my breast;
When I thought of my God it was nothing but gloom;
Day brought me no pleasure, night gave me no rest,
There was still the grim shadow of horrible doom.

It seemed as if nothing less likely could be
Than that light should break in on a dungeon so deep;
To create a new world were less hard than to free
The slave from his bondage, the soul from its sleep.

But the word had gone forth, and said, Let there be light,
And it flashed through my soul like a sharp passing smart;
One look to my Saviour, and all the dark night,
Like a dream scarce remembered, was gone from my heart.

I cried out for mercy, and fell on my knees,
And confessed, while my heart with keen sorrow was wrung;
'Twas the labor of minutes, and years of disease
Fell as fast from my soul as the words from my tongue.
And now, blest be God and the sweet Lord who died!
No deer on the mountain, no bird in the sky
No bright wave that leaps on the dark bounding tide,
Is a creature so free or so happy as I.

All hail, then, all hail, to the dear Precious Blood,
That hath worked these sweet wonders of mercy in me;
May each day countless numbers throng down to its flood,
And God have His glory, and sinners go free.

(Frederick William Faber)

into a new, justified person, but remnants of the old have not been eradicated. Thus it is necessary for us to be ever vigilant, to flee the siren song of the old flesh—not for salvation, but for our on-going, maturing relationship with the Father.

...[that] you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has

been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

(Ephesians 4:22b-24)

We are not what we were. A change has occurred in our life. Someone who knew us before might approach us, cautiously, with a quizzical expression on their face: "Are you *really* so-and-so?"

And the correct answer would be, "No. I'm not. I am not who I used to be."