

Session 6 : Colossians 3:1-17 Clothed in Christ

Introduction

Did you ever play “Dress Up” when you were little? Maybe you dressed up as a superhero, or you put on your parents’ clothes to play a game of make-believe, pretending you were all grown up. Maybe you put on a costume for Halloween, or to act out your part in the Christmas play? For me, I was always involved in School musicals because I was a singer. My two biggest parts were Mr Bumble in Oliver, and then I played a main part in a spoof version of Star Wars called Star Floss. In both cases I remember arriving into school for the performances, having my costume put on, and then having the makeup done. And then you came home and took the makeup off before going to bed.

When you dressed up, it gave you permission to be someone different for a short time, to pretend you had more power than you actually possessed. You could be someone new.

Maybe this is why Paul chooses to use clothing as a metaphor in his letter to the Colossians. Paul writes about taking off the old self and clothing ourselves in the new life in Christ.

So here’s the aims of today’s teaching

Main Idea: This session dives into some specific ways we apply the supremacy of Christ in our lives—by taking off the old self and putting on the new. Like changing into a new outfit, we put on a whole new identity when we follow Jesus.

Head Change: That we know what it means to put on the new self so that we can identify the things that are of Christ and that are of the world in our lives.

Heart Change: that we feel certain of the new life God gives us to replace our life of sin.

Life Change: that we daily put on the new self by putting sin to death through confession and repentance, and embracing the actions and characteristics of Christ both corporately and individually.

Read Colossians 3:1-17

Watch video from 00:34

Let's look at this passage in sections.

Verses 1-4

So if we are to set our minds on things, then we have to immediately acknowledge that they are being set on things above where Christ is at the right hand of God. Without an acknowledgment of God in this, all of this is pointless. In Paul's days there would have been plenty of religious folks who would have done the religion thing, ticking the box, but it was all pretend. And so today this can very much happen. There are plenty of people today who believe in the idea of God, they believe in the power of myth. So as long as it doesn't interrupt the Monday to Saturday routine then they are fine. That's why when I complete funding applications I have to talk about what we do brings about benefits into the community around social cohesion, or improves issues of loneliness and establishes between community spirit. But as soon as you mention that what we are doing is to win people's souls for the Kingdom of God, that they would come in repentance as they recognise the Saviour of the World, it's then that it's crossed over the line.

Also it must be recognised here that we have died already (verse 3). It is behind you. It has already happened. And your life is not what the world thinks it is.

Remember Colossians 2:12. [You have] been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him *through faith* in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Baptism signifies by immersion in water and the coming up out of the water that we died and were buried and rose with Christ. In ancient times, the process of baptism would sometimes involve taking off the old garments and as you were raised from the water you would be given new white clothes to signify that new birth.

And so from that point onwards we are required to set our minds on things above. Therefore the things that are on the earth are any ideas or behaviours or institutions in this world not rooted in and shaped by God.

They are not necessarily bad things Even things harmless in themselves become harmful if permitted to take the place that should be reserved for the things above.

But here’s the problem with translating Paul’s language with “Set your minds on” in verse 2. You can set your mind on something and disagree with it. You can set your mind on something and dislike it. Therefore it must have a foundation of knowing Christ in order that you are aligned to it.

Paul is saying, “Be shaped in your way of thinking, your emotional life, your pattern of attitudes and responses, your preferences in friendships, in what you watch, in how you spend your time — in this total set of your mind and heart, be formed by the realities that are above — the realities of God, and Christ seated at the right hand of God.

Let your way of seeing the world, thinking about the world, feeling about the world be shaped and governed by these realities.

Verse 1 says ‘set your minds’. It can also be translated as seeking. Therefore neither of these translations anything that is passive. Seek them. Find them. Meditate on them. Treasure them. Until your whole way of thinking and feeling and responding and acting is shaped by them.

What things do you do to keep your heart and mind focused on God?

As we look at verse 3, notice that Paul says our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. Paul uses the Greek word *krupto*—the word we translate as “hidden”—to describe this life we have in Christ. Paul wants the believers to know that though they’ve died with Christ, their new source of life is now found in Christ. Rather than it being a visible life source, the life Christ gives us is hidden and it goes beyond what the world could ever give us.

So let’s read the next section Verse 5 – 9

Now that we’re in Christ, we take off the old self and put on the new self.

How would you describe your old self, or who you were before Jesus?

Putting these things to death suggests that we are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes. We are to wipe them out, completely exterminate the old way of life. NT Wright describes the earthly nature as vermin. He says they must not be allowed into the house in case they poison the food or the water supply. They are not to be pitied. They are to be killed off and put to death.

The danger is that many Christians will focus on what they consider as the big sins from verse 5 but not consider the sins in verse 8 & 9 '*But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other*'. We may overlook these, but we are to put off the old self in every area of our lives. So Paul shows two high priorities in Christian living: sexual morality connected with a right attitude towards material things, *and* simply getting along in love with one another. Paul insisted that they *both* have a high place in Christian practice.

Do you think today's Church has focused more on one area of sin i.e. sexual immorality and not on every area of sin? Have we allowed areas such as how we speak to each other to creep into church life?

Verse 10 – 14

So we take off the old clothes and put on new ones. Verse 10 – '*and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator*'.

And so having put on the new self, the person is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. In other words they are hungry to know what *God* says in His Word. And the reference to the image of its creator, takes us back to Genesis 1:27 – '*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.*'

Big question - How do we consider this picture of the change in a person against a rising tide of folks who are part of Church but who do not appear to actively study God's Word or seek to go deeper, or people who are part of Church but never actually come to

worship? Does this mean they are not demonstrating what a Christian is? Without judging, does it mean we actually need to evangelise to them so that they discover the true transformation that takes place when they discover Jesus? When Paul says to the Church in Rome in Romans 12:2 ‘Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind’, can we bold like Paul was to consider that their religion is only a practice and not real?

Following Christ will destroy the barriers that exist in society. The ancient world was full of barriers. The Greek looked down on the barbarian; and to the Greek any man who did not speak Greek was a barbarian (someone who was uncultured and uncivilised). The Greek was the aristocrat of the ancient world and he knew it. The Jew looked down on every other nation. He belonged to God's chosen people and the other nations were effectively going to face the wrath of God. The Scythian was notorious as the lowest of the barbarians; more barbarian than the barbarians, the Greeks called him; little short of being a wild beast, Josephus calls him. The slave was not even classified in ancient law as a human being; he was merely a tool to be used, with no rights of his own. And so Paul is saying that in Christ all these barriers are gone – they are destroyed.

And so it is in that context that Paul goes into verse 12 with the word, ‘Therefore’. This is very important, because the next series of characteristics that we are to clothe ourselves with come from a place of there being no barriers. We cannot clothe ourselves with these virtues if we cannot speak with anyone. In Christ we are all united.

Paul in verse 12 begins with words that would have very much related to the Jewish nation – ‘as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved’. They were the chosen people; they were the dedicated nation, they were the beloved of God. Paul takes these three precious words which had once been the possession of Israel and gives them to the Gentiles. Thereby he shows that God's love and grace have gone out to the ends of the earth, and that there is no "most favoured nation" clause in his economy.

In verse 14, Paul says that over all virtues put on love. Why do you think Paul places this with such importance?

The love of Jesus enables us to take off the old self and put on the new self. As we saw in verses 11 and 14, His love unites all believers. Everything we do should flow from Jesus's love for us to the people in our lives, which includes putting sin to death, caring for the other Christians in our lives. The absence of love will soon pull a community apart.

Let's finish with verses 15 – 17

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”.

When Paul talks about it ruling our hearts, the Greek word he used referred to an Umpire at a sporting event. The umpire settles disputes on the pitch. If the peace of Jesus Christ is the umpire in any person's heart, then, when feelings clash and we are pulled in two directions at the same time, the decision of Christ will keep us in the way of love and the Church will remain the one body it is meant to be. The way to right action is to appoint Jesus Christ as the authority between the conflicting emotions in our hearts; and if we accept his decisions, we cannot go wrong.

Can you think of a situation you have been in or a situation you are going through currently, where we have got to allow Christ to be the authority in it in order that the decision and outcome made is governed by him?

Paul encouraged the Colossian church to let the gospel—the message of Christ—dwell among them. He told them to do so through teaching through psalms, hymns, and songs.

Finally, Paul gives the great principle for living that everything we do or say should be done and said in the name of Jesus. One of the best tests of any action is: "Can we do it, calling upon the name of Jesus? Can we do it, asking for his help?" One of the best tests of any word is: "Can we speak it and in the same breath name the name of Jesus?" If a person

brings every word and deed to the test of the presence of Jesus Christ, they won't go wrong.

What do you think it would look like for you to do everything in Jesus's name this week?

Final thought

Taking off the old self and putting on the new isn't something we're meant to do alone. It can seem like an overwhelming—maybe even impossible—task on our own. But we know that not only do we have the power of Christ in us through the Spirit, but we also have a community of believers to encourage us forward. However remember that in order for the community of believers to help us, we need to be far more transparent.

This week, look back through these verses and ask God to show you one thing He wants you to put to death and one thing He wants you to put on.

Living it out

So finally, let's look at ways in which we can put on new clothes in this week ahead :

Pray: Ask God to show you what you need to put to death and what you need to put on and ask Him for the strength to obey.

Memorize: Commit Colossians 3:1–3 to memory this week. *'Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God'.* Use these verses to remind yourself to keep your mind on Christ and not on the things of this world.

Reflect: Every time you get dressed or change clothes this week, reflect on what it means to take off the old self and put on the new self.

Worship: The next time you're in corporate worship or listen to a worship song, pause to consider the words you're singing. Let the truths

of the song settle in as you praise God for who He is and what He's done.

Thank: Make a list of things you're grateful to God for. Consider going back through your story of coming to know Jesus and making note of the things God's done for you. Take a few minutes to thank Him for how He's brought you from death to life.