

“From Old Rags to New Robes”

Colossians 3:5-14

This morning we are in Colossians 3, and I want us to read from verses 5-14.

Clothing is an important part of life. All of us recognize the fact. Each year, Americans spend a substantial amount of their income dressing themselves and their families. I did a little research this week into the clothing industry and found some interesting statistics:

- The global apparel market is valued at about \$2 trillion
- It is estimated that more than 100 billion garments are produced each year around the world
- The most expensive piece of clothing ever sold was a dress belonging to Marilyn Monroe, auctioned in 2016 for \$4.8 million

Americans go through clothes! The average person is said to spend around \$1500 annually, or \$120 per month. You may find this fact to be shocking (not really)—women spend more on apparel than men. And thrift stores have become more popular in recent decades due to the increase in cost of living. So clothes are an important part of life. And you may be surprised by what the Bible has to say about the subject. From beginning to end. For instance:

- In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves after sinning against God; their fig leaves will not do, so God clothes them in animal skins
- Jacob presents Joseph with a robe of many colors
- In Exodus 28, the instructions are provided for Aaron’s garments as Israel’s high priest

- In Psalm 30, David wrote about how God removes our tattered sackcloth and clothes us with gladness
- The gospels record that John the Baptist was dressed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist
- When Jesus was born, He wrapped in swaddling cloths, and at His crucifixion, He was stripped of His robe while the soldiers cast lots
- In Matthew 22, Jesus told a parable about a wedding feast and man who didn't have a wedding garment
- In the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15, Jesus says the father clothes his son who had returned in the best robes
- In Revelation 19, there's a descriptive scene of the marriage supper of the Lamb, and how His bride is clothed with fine linen, bright and pure

The removal of old clothes and putting on new clothes in Scripture represents forgiveness of sin. In the third chapter of Zechariah, the prophet is given a vision in which Joshua the high priest is standing before the Angel of the Lord. He is clothed in filthy garments symbolic of the nation's sin and is facing accusation from Satan who is standing nearby. Its a vivid scene:

Zechariah 3:3-4—“Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to him He said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.’”

The filthy garments of sin are replaced with clean garments of righteousness. It is a picture of ‘imputation’ which says while Adam's sin is imputed to us because

he is our natural federal head, God imputes the righteousness and suffering of Jesus to those who are in Him.

Cade Campbell — *“The storyline of the Bible begins with the tattered attempt to sew a wardrobe out of our own efforts, to piece together fig leaves to undo the damage that we’d done. But the story of the Bible ends with sons and daughters of Adam and Eve living in paradise again, fully in the presence of God, and reigning forever in the wardrobe of redemption. There, the redeemed who live into eternity as those who are ‘clothed in white garments’ whose names will never be blotted out from the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5), because they have ‘washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (Rev. 7:14).”*

The emphasis throughout the Bible is that God clothes us with garments of grace, He dresses us in the robes of His righteousness. As believers, we’re to put on the full armor of God. Or, as Paul now writes to the Colossians, we’re to put off the old clothes associated with the old self and put on the new. (Read)

Belonging to Jesus means we renounce the old loyalties of sin, pride, and self, and to live under the lordship of a new Master. When we come to Christ, the old life still calls out to us too, but loyalty to our Lord leaves no room for divided hearts. A Christian is someone who has died to the old life, and has been raised to new life. And as a way of life, we are to put off the old man and his practices and put on the new man. Like taking off one set of clothes and putting on a new.

In view of the things he has said in the first four verses, Paul now gets specific about certain attitudes and actions that should be done away with, as well as those to now be cultivated in the life of the believer. Everything has been made new for the believer in Christ. We have a new position—died with Christ, raised with Christ, and seated with Christ. And that leads to a new perspective, or a

new way of living—seek the things which are above, set your mind on things above, and not on earthly things. And then Paul follows this up by now saying in verse 5 that we have a new practice. He says, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.” But then he follows that up by saying since we’ve put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, we should be intentional to cultivate certain attitudes and actions that are in keeping with the new man. By means of His grace, God has clothed us in the perfect righteousness of Christ. The believer’s life is to keep in step with the truth. The Christian life is becoming practically who we already are positionally in Christ. Like getting dressed in the morning, we have put on the new man—the Lord Jesus. The headship of Adam no longer defines us. The perfect covering of Christ is ours through faith. God sees us as those united to Christ. That is our position, which results now in daily practice of putting off the old and putting on the new.

1—Putting off the RAGS of the old man (3:5-9)

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.”

The word ‘therefore’ is used in verse 5, which indicates that the instructions now given are the necessary result of what has previously been said. Because we’ve been brought into union with Christ through faith, and because we’ve set our minds on the things above, we must now ‘put to death’ therefore what is earthly in us. The older KJV translates it as ‘mortify.’

“Put to Death” — *the Greek word is νεκρώσατε and is the word we get ‘necrosis’ from; aorist active imperative*

You’ve heard of ‘necrosis’ before, which is a condition that is the death of bodily tissue. A venomous snakebite, or a bite from a spider, if left untreated can lead to this condition which means that the injured cells die. Paul is saying here that we need to actively ‘put to death’ those things that are associated with the old way of living. Don’t trifle with them, don’t play around with them, don’t tolerate them. Put them to death. Mortify those sinful tendencies that still remain.

Romans 6:11-14—“So you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

Grace is a greater incentive to put sin to death than law. A believer in Jesus has more incentive, more motivation, and a resident Helper in the person of the Holy Spirit. And it is a misunderstanding of grace on the part of those who try to twist it into a license to sin. They despise holiness while claiming their freedom as an excuse. If legalism is one extreme, then antinomianism (lawlessness) is the other. Those who’ve come from legalistic backgrounds must be very careful to not gravitate to the opposite mistake. If I were to illustrate this, in the mountains where I grew up, there was a ridge on the upper part of our family property. You could walk this ridge for a good ways. In some places, it was very narrow and steep on both sides of the ridge. If you weren’t careful, you could slip off either side into a steep drop down the mountain. As a kid, my cousins and I would

climb that ridge in the fall and find a place where we could slide down on the fresh bed of fallen leaves.

In a lot of ways, our relationship to the law of God is like that. On one side, we can fall into legalism which makes too much of the law. Legalism is preoccupied with our own performance and thinks that we gain a better standing with God by it. On the other side, we can fall into license which makes too little of the law. Grace doesn't make us lawless people. Justification results in sanctification.

What are the things he mentions which we are to 'put to death?' He mentions sins such as "sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." All of these are desires which are associated with the old way of living, things which characterize lost and unregenerate humanity, the things that belong to world. And then in verse 8 he mentions sins of disposition, "Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices." There are three categories of sins that Paul mentions—sensual sins, social sins, and speech sins.

Sensual Sins

Notice the things he mentions in verse 5 which can be best described as twisted and corrupt desires, sins rooted in the heart's craving for self-gratification. They involve the misuse of God-given appetites. By the way, that's how sin works. It distorts and perverts what God has given as good gifts. Paul instructs believers to "put to death what is earthly in you," and then he mentions sins in the area of sensuality, sins such as:

- "Sexual immorality" (πορνεία)

The word refers to illicit physical acts. Its a broad category of sexual sin referring to anything which is outside the marital relationship between husband and wife.

- “Impurity” (ἀκαθαρσία)

This is moral uncleanness in thought or motive. Before the outward act, there is the inward thought.

- “Passion” (πάθος)

The word here means uncontrolled emotion or lust. It is a state of mind that pursues impurity so that the person who cultivates this kind of appetite can always find opportunity to satisfy it.

- “Evil desire” (ἐπιθυμία, κακός)

This is a craving for forbidden things. It is entertaining the ideas in one’s mind for that which is prohibited by God. It means that not all desires are legitimate.

- “Covetousness” (πλεονεξία)

This speaks of a greedy desire for more. Notice that he says, “Which is idolatry” (εἰδωλολατρία). It is the idolatry of self and self-satisfaction. To ‘idolize’ a thing is to make it ultimate, to love and pursue it above all else. At its heart, it is a rejection of God and His provision in our lives.

Warren Wiersbe — *“Covetousness is the sin of always wanting more, whether it be more things or more pleasures. The covetous person is never satisfied with what he has, and he is usually envious of what other people have.”*

As an inward attitude and disposition, covetousness is an enemy to the sufficiency of Christ. It is idolatry because it sets up a rival object of worship which it then enthrones.

Hebrews 13:5—“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

And so to sum it up, these are sins of appetite, or sins in the area of desire, a twisted relationship with things and pleasures which kept in their proper place are good gifts. Which is why Christians need a surrendered, gospel informed view of sex that understands intimacy as a gift given by God within proper boundaries of marriage between a man and a woman. And then notice how there is attached to this list of sins a warning as Paul says, “On account of these the wrath of God is coming.” The word there is ‘anger,’ which Paul will use again in verse 8, but will refer to a sinful anger associated with fallen man. When the Bible refers to God’s wrath, it speaks of God’s settled disposition toward sin. He always meets sin in the fierceness of His wrath. It is God’s holy and just response to sin, not a loss of temper or an impulsive outburst like a man’s rage. It is His settled and righteous opposition to all that is evil. God opposes sin in all its forms. It is an affront to His holiness, such that it must be dealt with.

Now, here is the good news! Notice how Paul reminds the Colossians that this was their past. Referring to sexual sin, idolatry, and its various forms, he says in verse 7, “In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.” But a divine rescue had taken place in their lives! No longer did such things define them, as they had been delivered from them. He says something similar to the church in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 —“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor

swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

And the same thing can happen for anyone who will repent of their sins and trust Christ. In addition to sensual sins, notice the second category mentioned in verse 8:

Social Sins

If the first group are sins that reflect twisted desires, then the second are those that reflect twisted attitudes. These are sins of temperament and disposition, those wrong inner attitudes toward others that poison relationships. Verse 8 says, “But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice...”

- “Anger” (ὀργή)

The word means deep-seated resentment or hostility. It is a growing, seething anger within a person.

- “Wrath” (θυμός)

This refers to sudden bursts of rage. If ‘anger’ is a slow burn, ‘wrath’ is an explosion. It is anger boiling over.

- “Malice” (κακία)

This word describes the settled intention to harm another person, what we would call hatred with intent. It rejoices when misery falls upon the one it hates.

And so when you take all three of these together, anger is the emotion that we try to hide below the surface, wrath is when it suddenly bubbles up, and malice is the ongoing resentment that we direct toward others. These are sins of

disposition where sin has twisted and distorted our attitude, which seek to corrupt our social relationships with people. And without the work of God's Spirit in our lives, the 'grave clothes' of anger, wrath, and malice are terribly difficult to remove. Sensual sins, social sins, then notice the third category involves:

Speech Sins

The third group of sins which Paul mentions describe how sin distorts our speech. Twisted desires, twisted attitudes, and now twisted expressions. Verse 8 goes on to mention things such as slander, obscene talk, and then lying in verse 9. These are sins of communication—what proceeds from the mouth, revealing the heart's corruption. I think we could camp out here for a while!

- “Slander” (βλασφημία)

This is a term which refers to defaming speech that injures the reputation of another person. Directed toward God, we call it ‘blasphemy.’ Toward other people it is slander, and it is hard to repair even when things said are disproved.

Matthew 12:36—“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.

- “Obscene talk” (αἰσχρολογία)

It describes filthy, abusive, or degrading words. Crude and degrading jokes, speech laced with profanity. These words are filthy and carry an insulting, demeaning expression.

- “Lying” (ψεύδομαι)

We get the word ‘pseudo’ from this term. It is falsehood, deceit, and dishonesty. Untrue, unfounded words. These are sins of the tongue—a corrupt use of

speech that injures both truth and trust. And the answer to sensual sins, social sins, or speech sins in the Christian's life must always be to put them to death. How do we put sin to death? Allow me to suggest four helpful ways:

- Look to the cross of Jesus
- Deal with motives, not just behaviors
- Make no provision for the flesh
- Depend upon the Spirit's power

Now, Christian living doesn't just stop with putting off the rags of the old life. But notice how it must also involve:

2—Putting on the ROBES of the new man (3:10-14)

“And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

If the negative side involves putting off certain things, then the positive side involves putting on certain things. And the phrase 'put on' in verse 10 is the opposite of 'put off.' We take off the dirty clothes of sinful living, and we put on the beautiful attire of the new man, which is the character of Christ being reproduced in the life of the Christian. That is, cultivating certain habits and behaviors that are in keeping with our new position in Christ.

Randy Alcorn — *“People had only to look at Jesus to see what God is like. People today should only have to look at us to see what Jesus is like.”*

This is the Christian’s new potential. The negative task of putting sin to death will not be accomplished in isolation from the positive call of the gospel to ‘put on’ the new man. The Bible says in:

Romans 13:14—“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Paul spells this out now in verses 12-17. Sweeping the house clean simply leaves us open to a further invasion of sin. The negative has to be replaced by the positive. But when we understand the ‘glorious exchange’ principle of the gospel of grace, then we will begin to make some real progress in holiness. As sinful desires and habits are not only rejected, but exchanged for Christ-like graces (3:12) and actions (3:13), as we are clothed in Christ’s character and His graces are held together by love (3:14), not only in our private life but also in the church fellowship (3:12-16), Christ’s name and glory are manifested and exalted in and among us (3:17).

Our renewal in Christ

Having put off the old self verse 10 says, “And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.” The Christian is someone who is being renewed daily in the knowledge of God through His Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit who works in us.

2 Corinthians 4:16—“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”

The goal of this renewal is conformity to the image of our Creator. Christlikeness is now the goal of the Christian's life. He works in every believer to make us like Jesus.

Our relationships in Christ

Having been brought into one new man in Christ, verse 11 says, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." Old categories which the world deems to be most important have now faded into irrelevance so that what matters is our common bond in Christ.

Ephesians 2:13-15—“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.”

So that now, what matters is not Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free. What matters is that we're brought into the same family in Christ. And this has some massive implications for how we relate to people whom we may not otherwise have anything in common with. We are now one in Christ Jesus!

Our riches in Christ

In verses 12-14, Paul will mention at least seven virtues to be intentionally cultivated in our lives. We might think of these as our 'riches' in Christ, as the wealth of Christ-like virtue being produced and cultivated in our lives. Each of

these traits adorned the life of our Lord, and are now to be seen in the lives of His followers.

- “Compassionate hearts” (σπλάγχνα οίκτιρμοῦ)

This is mercy in action, or tender mercies. In other places in the Bible, this describes the attitude of tender mercy that God has toward us. Now, its as if Paul is saying, “We want God to treat us with tender mercy, why not treat others the same way?”

- “Kindness” (χρηστότητα)

This is what compassion looks like in action, which means it is more than simply an emotion. Kindness is the attitude of wanting to bless others, to lift their spirits, to meet their need, and to do so in Jesus’ name.

- “Humility” (ταπεινοφροσύνην)

If we’re not careful, we can overlook this ‘grace garment’ because it calls no attention to itself. It is a quiet virtue, often admired when we see it, but seldom pursued in our own life. It is Paul’s answer to the false humility of those in Colossae who had been making their boastful claims, with a counterfeit version of humility. It is a rebuke to those with a ‘know it all’ mentality.

- “Meekness” (πραΰτητα)

We often confuse this trait with weakness, and yet the only thing they have in common is their pronunciation. The fact of the matter is that meekness is strength under control. It can also be translated as ‘gentleness’ which is a fruit of the Spirit. It is the same word used in the first century to tame a horse with bit and bridle. We live in a world of snarling, irritable people. But the Christian who is surrendered to Christ will be strong and bold, but also gentle.

- “Patience” (μακροθυμίαν)

The word means long-suffering, and it is the idea of having a long fuse. The opposite would be a short temper, which means you easily lose patience and quickly become angry or volatile. There are few things in life more uncomfortable than being the recipient of someone’s temper release.

Warren Wiersbe — *“The short-tempered person speaks and acts impulsively and lacks self-control. When a person is long-suffering, he can put up with provoking people or circumstances without retaliating. It is good to be able to get angry, for this is a sign of holy character. But it is wrong to get angry quickly at the wrong things and for the wrong reasons.”*

- “Bearing with one another” (ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων)

It isn’t easy to do life with other people. Sometimes we will have to deal with difficult people in our lives, whether in the church, or on the job, or in our extended families. But the grace of God enables us to bear with one another.

- “Forgiving one another” (χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς)

We’re to be slow to lash out, and quick to forgive. Slow to lose our cool, and quick to restore our brother or sister. It is even more important when you consider the reason we are to forgive one another. Verse 13 says, “As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” Jesus is both our pattern and power of forgiveness. I read where D.L Moody, in one of his sermons, used to picture the Lord Jesus saying to Peter:

“Go hunt up the man who put the crown of thorns on My head and tell him that I love him. Tell him he can have a crown in My kingdom, one without a thorn. Find the man who spat in My face and preach the gospel to him. Tell him that I forgive

him and that I died to save him. Find the man who thrust the spear into My side and tell him that there is a quicker way into My heart.”

- “Love” (ἀγάπην)

Look at verse 14, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Love is the thing that holds everything together. Love for God and love for one another. Jesus said, “By this the world will know that you are My disciples.”

And so Christian living, according to the apostle Paul, is a matter of putting off the old and putting on the new. We lay aside the grave clothes of the old life, so that now we’re to wrap ourselves up in the garments of grace. Our position is what now determines our practice. And so friends, let me ask you the question, “Have you been dressed in the righteousness of Jesus?” Have you been forgiven by Him? Are your sins nailed to His cross? Are you trusting in Him alone for your salvation? Have you received new life from Him? If not, then why not right now? Why not today? And if you have, how are you getting dressed each morning?

Two coats were before me

An old and a new

I asked my sweet Master

What must I do?

The old coat was ugly

So tattered and torn

The other a new coat

Had never been worn

I tell you the best thing I ever did do

I took off the old coat and put on the new!

*The first man was earthly
And made from the ground*

*We all bore His image
The whole world around
The next was my Savior
From Heaven so fair
He brought me this new coat
You now see me wear*

*Now this coat, it suits me
And it keeps me so warm
It's good in the winter
It's good in the storm
My Savior has dressed me
In a garment so rare
He brought me this new coat
You now see me wear*

*I tell you the best thing I ever did do
I took off the old coat and put on the new
And I'll tell you the best thing you ever will do
Is to lay off the old coat and put on the new!*