

“The Christian’s New Wardrobe”

Colossians 3:12-17

Turn with me in your Bible this morning to the third chapter of Colossians, and we will read in a minute beginning with verse 12. I heard the story about a minister who died and was waiting in line at the Pearly Gates. Ahead of him was a scruffy looking guy in a beat up leather jacket, worn out jeans. St. Peter said to the fellow, “Who are you?” The man said, “I’m Joe Schmo, taxi-driver from New York City.” Peter looked at his list and then smiled and said, “Hello, Joe. Go ahead and take this silk robe and golden scepter and welcome to Heaven.” And so the man walked into heaven with his fancy robe and solid gold staff. Then it was the minister’s turn. Peter asks, “And who might you be?” He says, “I am Jim So-and-So, pastor for more than 40 years.” Peter looked at his list and says, “Hello, Pastor. Go ahead and take this cotton robe and wooden staff and go on in.” The minister says, “Now just a minute, Peter. That man ahead of me was a NYC taxi cab driver, and he got a silk robe and golden staff. But I get a cotton robe and an old wooden stick. I demand an explanation!” Peter said, “Well, it’s quite simple, really. While he drove, people prayed. While you preached, people slept!”

Now, I’m glad that’s not how it will be when we get to glory. You may sleep on me this morning, but in no way does that determine my future reward! But neither is it that way now. When it comes to the Christian’s spiritual wardrobe, we are dressed in the righteousness of God’s own Son. Having put off the old man and put on the new man, Paul explains here in Colossians 3 what this looks like practically in the believer’s life. The Christian has been given a brand new suit of clothes to wear. The rags of the old self are to be put off, and the robes of our new life in Christ are now to be on display.

Let me point out four things that are involved:

1—Putting on the CHARACTER of Christ (3:12-14)

“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.”

Notice the way verse 12 begins, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved.” Isn’t that a wonderful way to describe these believers? Chosen, holy, and beloved. Now, don’t let the word ‘chosen’ confuse you. This doesn’t mean that God had chosen them because of anything they had done to merit His love. To say believers are chosen is not to say that some people can be saved and other people cannot be saved, or that some are in a select group. No, there is no respect of persons with God. The Bible says the Lord is not willing that any should perish. If a lost man goes to hell, it breaks God’s heart. Hell was not created for man, but for the devil and his angels. And when it comes to those made in His image, the Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. God desires for all men in all places to be saved, but gives them the choice. God’s ‘chosen ones’ are those who’ve placed their faith in Jesus. And to say that they are holy is to say that they’ve been set apart by God, and they are the object of His saving love. As such, we are to put on the character of the One who has saved us.

Paul is saying, “Having put off the old man and put on the new man through your union with Christ, here’s what that now means practically speaking.” Paul mentions several Christ-like character traits that are produced and cultivated in our lives. Each of these traits adorned the life of Jesus, and are now to be seen

in the lives of His followers. We looked at these last time, but I want to quickly go through these again:

Goodness

- “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.”*

Graciousness

- “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 in all our faults and imperfections.

- “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.”

Godliness

- “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. We can have some of these other traits without love, but we can’t truly have love without demonstrating the others. That’s why he says ‘and above all these.’ Love is the outer garment that binds all the other virtues together and presents them to the world. It is possible to do acts of mercy, to show forbearance, and even go through the motions of forgiveness in a way that is formal and cold. But when we do so in a spirit of love, then we have truly ‘put on’ Christ before a watching world.

Titus 2:10—“that in everything we may adorn (κοσμέω) the doctrine of God our Savior.”

Love for God and love for one another. Jesus said, “By it the world will know you are My disciples.” It adorns the entire wardrobe and makes it truly attractive to those who do not know the Lord.

Before I move on, one other interesting thing to point out about these character traits is that they can only be shown in close proximity with others, or in our relationships. They are not isolated virtues practiced apart from others. Kent Hughes says of this that it would be tempting to think that these ‘grace garments’ would be much easier to wear if we did not have to wear them among other people. It is much easier to think about compassion than to show compassion and to think about patience and forbearance or forgiveness without actually having to show them to others. That’s not the way it works. We become better Christians when we’re living close to other Christians, which is why the church is essential to a believer’s health and spiritual growth. Notice a second thing that is involved with our new wardrobe:

2—Submitting to the PEACE of Christ (3:15)

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

Our new wardrobe involves putting on the character of the Lord Jesus, and it also means we let His peace rule in our hearts. When we look around at our world, it would seem that peace is nowhere to be found. Conflict is raging on nearly every continent. Wars and rumors of war dominate the headlines, whether it be in places like Ukraine or in the Middle East. Politicians call for a cease fire, only to see the conflict flare right back up. Then there is the conflict on a smaller scale, such as within our own homes and families. Conflict among relatives and former friends who are now bitter foes. Or, there is the conflict within our own hearts and minds. Fear of what might be lurking just around the corner. We wonder if there is any peace to be found? Paul reminds us here that there is, for the peace of Christ is the Christian’s possession. But because it isn’t automatic, he says to us in verse 15, ‘Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,’ which is to

say ‘let this happen.’ You and I have a responsibility in the matter. What is this peace?

“Peace” — *εἰρήνη; to bind together; serenity of heart which comes from knowing that our times are in the hands of God*

We think of peace as being the absence of war or conflict. But peace isn’t so much the absence of problems as much as it is the presence of Jesus. When Paul says that the peace of Christ must ‘rule’ in our hearts, he is speaking to the fact that our hearts are the source, the wellspring of our lives, the place where we make decisions, where motives are hidden. Proverbs says we are to guard our heart, for out of it flow all the issues of life. Left to itself, your heart is unruly and seeks to go its own way. That’s why you cannot follow your heart, but must submit it to the rule of Jesus. A mind that is set on things above will be ruled by His peace.

“Rule” — *the word is βραβεύω and means to arbitrate; to decide what is right in a given situation; to umpire*

Verse 15 is saying, “Let the peace that comes from Christ act as umpire deep within your life.” That’s important when you want to do the will of God. This peace of Christ is both a gift that is received, a grace that is produced, and a goal that is pursued.

Peace is a gift from God in Christ

On the night before He went to the cross, Jesus talked about peace. And it was not something external. Peace was a subject of conversation with His disciples there in the Upper Room. He gathered with them to keep the Passover and He mentioned peace multiple times. And to calm their troubled hearts, Jesus said:

John 14:27—“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

John 16:33—“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Matthew Henry — *“When Christ was about to leave the world, He made His will. His soul He bequeathed to His Father; His body He bequeathed to Joseph, to be decently interred; His clothes fell to the soldiers; His mother He left to the care of John; but what should He leave to His poor disciples, that had left all for Him? Silver and gold He had none; but He left them what was infinitely better, His peace.”*

Jesus said that it is only through Him that we can have true peace. It is peace that surpasses all human understanding which means it has no earthly explanation. This peace is a gift. It is the peace that comes from being right with God!

Romans 5:1—“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That’s why the letters of the New Testament always begin with the greeting, “Grace and peace.” The order there is so very important. It doesn’t say peace and grace. No, before there can be an experience of peace, there must first of all be an experience of grace. Through His own death in the sinner’s place, Jesus took the hand of both man and God and made peace through the blood of His cross. It means that He reconciles us to God, so that those of us who were under wrath have now experienced His mercy. Ephesians 2:14 says that Jesus

is our peace. Sin resulted in hostility between God and man. And because man is not right with God, the world is under a curse. Sin is the disruptive factor that makes you and me God's enemies. The only way for the hostility to cease is for the wrath of God to be satisfied.

That's why the gospel is the greatest news the world could ever hear! The angels announced the news to shepherds:

Luke 2:10-14—“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

This news announced by heaven's angels means that the peace Jesus has come to bring was not in a sentimental sense. It is peace between a holy God and sinful man, peace toward those who accept the sacrifice of His perfect Passover Lamb. It means that through the grace of God and the gift of His Son, peace with God is now available for sinners. And when you are truly at peace with God, you can then make peace with everybody else. Paul has said this already back in the first chapter:

Colossians 1:19-20—“For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.”

Friend, peace is a gift from God which came at the price of God's only Son.

Isaiah 9:6-7—“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end.”

The Prince of Peace is coming to reign and will one day blanket the earth with His peace. He will forever remove the curse of sin and death from creation, and those things which terrify and trouble our hearts will be no more. And He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and as God’s children you and I will live in the light of His peace for all eternity. It is in this hope that we now live, and the sweet peace of God is ours to experience even now in the midst of life’s struggles.

Peace is a grace produced by the Spirit

Peace is a gift, and it is also a grace. Peace is listed with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. To experience God’s peace, the Bible says that our minds as Christians must be set on the Spirit.

Romans 8:5-6—“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Isaiah 26:3—“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”

The Holy Spirit works to produce the fruit of peace in our lives. If peace means to bring together, the opposite would be worry which speaks of a divided mind.

Worry pulls us apart. It is a recipe for internal conflict. That's why we are told by Paul in Philippians 4 to be anxious for nothing, and to pray about everything.

Philippians 4:6-7—“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The Spirit of God produces the peace of God that 'guards' our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The word used there means 'garrison' so that the idea is God's peace acts as a guard at the door of your mind to provide security. When we pray and think and do as God has instructed us to, His peace then becomes the guard that is standing watch at the door and keeps anxiety from wreaking its havoc. This gives us an advantage as we deal with the pressures of the day. The storm may be raging around me, but my mind is fortified. For when we keep our eyes fixed on the promise of Jesus, our minds will be fortified by His peace. So that even in the midst of life's storms, there is a calm assurance that is ours. The hymn writer said it best:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, It is well, with my soul!*

The fruit of the Spirit is peace, and when we're looking in faith to the presence of Jesus rather in fear at the problems of life, we are mentally and spiritually fortified. Peace is a gift and grace. But then notice:

Peace is a goal in our relationships

As someone who is at peace with God through faith in the Lord Jesus, and as someone in whom the Holy Spirit is at work producing the fruit of peace, I ought

to be at peace in my relationships with other people. Peace should be the goal in a Christian's relationships. That's what Paul means here when he says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." Let it umpire, let it call the shots.

Romans 12:17-18—“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Romans 14:19—“So then let us pursue what makes for peace.”

Hebrews 12:14—“Strive for peace with everyone.”

Charles Swindoll—*“When the peace of Christ, the peace He gives to us, governs how we interpret our experiences and respond to our challenges, two things will happen. First, our relationships with others in the body of Christ will be healthier as we refuse to let minor things bother us. We'll infuse our relationships with peace. Second, we'll have gratitude even in the midst of challenging circumstances. When our natural tendency might be to complain about things that happen to us, we'll 'be thankful,' knowing that God is in control. In fact, thankfulness will become an abiding characteristic at the core of our lives.”*

We can have peace with God because Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins. We can have peace with ourselves because He removes the stain of guilt settles our troubled heart. And we can outwardly have peace with others when inwardly the peace of Jesus is ruling in us.

3—Dwelling on the WORD of Christ (3:16)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

The Christian's brand new wardrobe involves putting on the character of Christ, submitting to the peace of Christ, and notice how it also involves dwelling on the word of Christ. Word translates the Greek term λογος (logos) which is the same word used in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The term λογος was used by the Greeks in the first century to refer to the fundamental principle behind the universe, the 'logic' or rationale behind the universe. It is significant that John used this term to refer to Christ. He is the One who is the explanation for it all! And aside from Him, nothing else makes sense. He is the communication of God to man. He is God's Word to man. A word is a visible expression of an invisible thought or idea. As the Word made flesh Jesus Christ is the visible Word of the invisible God. Paul uses it now to refer to the 'message' of Christ. The Bible is the 'word of Christ' because He is its author and chief subject.

Jesus explained it to two followers on the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:27—“Beginning with Moses and the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scripture the things concerning Himself.”

And so notice how Paul says that believers should let the word of Christ 'richly dwell' within us. I like how Eugene Peterson renders verse 16 in the Message: "Let the Word of Christ have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives." Which is to say that we don't approach it as if it were merely a houseguest who periodically comes and goes, but instead we surrender to it the whole house. We let it move in and redecorate, and give it access to every square inch of our lives. The Word in all its richness must fill every facet of our lives. We are to think on it, we are to read it, listen to it as it is taught, cherish it, pour over it and make a careful study of it, memorize portions of it, so that it affects the way

we think and becomes a regular part of our vocabulary. It is the attitude of the psalmist reflected in that wonderful text of Scripture we find in Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:11—“I have stored up Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”

Psalm 119:49—“Remember Your word to Your servant, in which You have made me hope.”

Psalm 119:105—“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Psalm 119:130—“The unfolding of Your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”

Let the ‘word of Christ’ dwell in you richly. And to do this, notice the words in verse 16 which end with the suffix ‘-ing.’ You might remember from grammar that these are known as participles. These are words formed from verbs which are used as adjectives. They specify the actions required and provide the practical ‘how-to’ for the instruction. Just how exactly do we let the word of Christ dwell richly within us? Notice that it involves:

Teaching

The word here is διδάσκω (didasko) and means to give instructions. The word of Christ dwells richly in us when we receive its instruction in our lives. Keep in mind that Paul is speaking not to an individual, but to the entire congregation. He is encouraging them to make the Word of God central in the life of their fellowship. That’s a very important thing for a church that was being threatened by false teaching. They needed the instruction from God’s Word to combat the false ideas which were being spread among them.

Admonishing

The second way we let the word of Christ dwell richly in our lives includes ‘admonishing one another in all wisdom.’ To admonish means to warn or to exhort. While ‘teaching’ has the impartation of positive truth in mind, ‘admonishing’ is a warning about things that are wrong. We need both in our lives. I need the positive instruction in the truth that comes through teaching, but I also need the corrective admonition that comes through warning.

Singing

A third way that the word of Christ dwells richly in our lives is through ‘singing.’ Paul understands singing to be an extension of the teaching ministry of the church. Singing is one of the ways that we learn truth by repetition. Which means that it isn’t simply emotional, but is to be instructive and edifying. Music is a tool that imprints a message upon our hearts. There’s a reason we teach our children the ABC’s through singing a simple little song. Pay attention to the fact that the instruction here involves singing and not simply being sung to. Which means there is a participatory emphasis in corporate worship. He mentions three forms of singing—psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Psalms are passages of Scripture set to music. Hymns are those wonderful and theological songs that we sing about God. And spiritual songs are those we sing directly to Him. We are to sing them all as an act of worship.

Sometimes, I wonder if our worship services will be much more meaningful if we reverse their order—begin on our knees with prayer, receive instruction from the Word, and then we sing in response! We hear God’s Word and then sing it back to Him in the form of thankful and worshipful praise.

Teaching, admonishing, and singing. These participles are present tense, indicating:

- ongoing teaching
- ongoing admonishing
- ongoing singing

This is not occasional but continual ministry that we must be engaged in if the Word of Christ is to richly dwell within our hearts. And so the Christian's new wardrobe involves putting on the character of Christ, submitting to the peace of Christ, and dwelling on the Word of Christ. There's a final thing that I'll mention:

4—Living for the NAME of Jesus (3:17)

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

A Christian has a new motivation for life! Notice the phrase ‘whatever you do.’ This is Paul's way of describing how the believer's entire life is to be an offering of worship to Christ, word and deed. Every word that we speak, every action that we undertake, he says, “Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” He said it this way back up in chapter 1:

Colossians 1:10—“Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work.”

Our ‘walk’ is our manner of life, the way that we conduct ourselves in the world. I like how the NLT translates what Paul says in verse 17: “And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” When you get up in the morning and step into a brand new day, do it in the name of Jesus! When you go to work and clock in, do it in the name of Jesus! When you gather with your family at the end of the day, do it in the name

of Jesus and for His glory. The words you say and the things you do are an opportunity to magnify His name.

Francis Ridley Havergal wrote about it when she said:

*Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise!*

- Let the grace of Jesus DECORATE your life
- Let the peace of Jesus ARBITRATE your decisions
- Let the word of Jesus PERMEATE your mind
- Let the name of Jesus MOTIVATE your actions

The story is told how years ago, there was a young orphan boy who lived in a village. He was poor, quiet, and went unnoticed by everyone in town. One winter, the king planned a visit to the town, and the town lord prepared the children to greet him. Every child was told to wear their finest coat. The orphan had no coat. He stood in the back of the crowd, shivering, hoping no one would notice. When the king arrived, he stepped out of his carriage and began greeting the children. He stopped when he saw the boy in rags. The king approached him, took off his own royal coat—a garment lined with warmth, embroidered with gold, bearing the insignia of royalty—and wrapped it around the boy. The crowd gasped. The boy protested, “Your Majesty, I can’t...I can’t wear this. I’m not worthy.” The king smiled and said to him, “You will wear it because I have made you worthy. When you put on my coat, you represent me. And wherever you go, people will know who your king is.”

The boy wore the coat from that day on—not because he earned it, not because he felt worthy, but because the king had placed it upon him. And over time, the coat changed the boy. He began to stand taller, walk differently, speak differently. He lived to honor the one who had clothed him.

When it comes to our new wardrobe, we don't always feel worthy. We've not earned it, neither do we deserve it. But we wear the character of Christ because He has placed it on us. And as we live it out, it changes how we walk, speak, and relate to one another. And so friends, as you go from here and into another week, remember—your King has clothed you. Now go, and let the world see Him whose garment you're wearing!