



Colossians 3:12-17

You've heard the song before by the Kinks. You can guess from what I look like that I'm not exactly a follower of the latest fashion! But there are plenty of people that must have the latest fashion. They look for the in thing – what this season throws up. For the younger generation, they want to look cool. For others looking glamorous or handsome is all important.

HOW WE DRESS tells others quite a lot about us. Burkha, David Cameron and Hoodie, high heels, hippies, bowler hats. Our clothes can make a statement about us – or cause other people to make judgements about our character by what we wear.

Dressing isn't the only thing that makes a statement about us. It may be other possessions we own, our lifestyles and how we behave. The way of the world is to try to copy the latest trend, the latest new idea, the latest gizmo or the latest fad. The same can be true of our behaviour. Last week we met an old friend and her 14 year old daughter. She was telling me all the "in" words she and her friends used in school. If you want to be in with teenagers, you need to wear the right clothes, have the right phone and say the right words.

Of course sometimes, the latest fashion seems a good idea, but is really bad for us. Go into Felixstowe on a winter Saturday night and you will see young ladies balancing precariously in their high heels, wearing very skimpy dresses complaining about how cold it is? Cool outfits? Rather too cool; literally.

The thing about God is that He doesn't change. Our standards may change but he doesn't and as Paul writes to the Colossians he compares their lives, the behaviour and lifestyle of their culture and their morality; that fashion which defined them like a suit of clothes and he says this:

PUT OFF YOUR OLD SELF AND ITS PRACTICES. What seems perfect fashion for our society is like the skimpy outfits worn on a Saturday night. Trendy but can make us very unwell. As God's people we need to wear a different set of clothes. By that I don't mean make ourselves like Christians have in the past, wearing dour clothes, or Sunday bests. He means to live in a way that makes us distinctive and that may be different from the fashion of the people around us.

VERSE Col 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Our behaviour is our clothing. It's what helps define us. It shows the world who we are, who we follow and what we stand for. And what does that mean. I think our art project puts it well. We should be like Jesus in our behaviour. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians:

VERSE Eph 5:1 Since you are God's dear children, you must try to be like him. 2 Your life must be controlled by love, just as Christ loved us and gave his life for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God.

Our lives must be controlled by love – a self-denying putting of the needs of others before our own personal needs.

We live in a world where this is not a characteristic of personal behaviour. Yes, we may be kind and helpful. We may be part of a society that raises tens of millions for Comic relief. We may be part of a society where we have concerns about the poverty, unemployment and disadvantage of others. But we are a society where we say that my needs come before all of these however good they may be – that's the fashion but it's not God's

fashion.

Being like Jesus puts it all the other way around as He was the One who left all the glories of heaven to become a human being and not a rich or privileged one either.

VERSE Col 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

What are the clothes God wants us to wear? The same moral clothes that Jesus wore – the ones that expressed the love of God - compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. He was characterised by compassion for those who were sick whom He healed. He didn't dismiss them because they were losers or insignificant. He showed kindness to those in problems and difficulty, not leaving them to sort themselves out. He showed humility as He allowed Himself to become subject to the beings He created even though He didn't have to. He was gentle in His attitude, patient with His disciples and with a world that had walked away from Him. We are called to be like Jesus.

How does this work in practice? We can talk about these things, but the real difference and distinctiveness of God's people is how these things work out in our lives and make us distinctive.

HOW DO THE RIGHT CLOTHES LOOK?

FORGIVENESS

13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. One thing that really makes Christians stand out in this society is forgiveness. We live in a society where we regard many things as unforgivable. The thing that should make us stand out is when forgiveness is a defining characteristic of our lives and our church.

Unforgiveness lies at the heart of many issues that we have with others. It rarely just involves just the broken relationships, but our ability to trust and interact with others. It's a wound that infects our attitudes to ourselves and others. It's a crack in our armour that allows Satan to wound us continually. Why? It's so basic because right at the heart of God's love was the willingness by a holy God to forgive all our sins and to pay a massive price to do it. So why don't we forgive much less heinous things?

PUT ON LOVE

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Actually forgiveness doesn't work until we realise what love is. Yet love – agape – is what should reflect Christ most. Our ability to put the needs of others first, not last. All these things you see represented on the panels are all practical out-workings of agape.

What do people associate with Church? If we are like Jesus then it should be a place where they will be loved and cherished, cared for. People should see and know we're different to them. You know as well as I do that a Church can be a place of hurt, of division, of unforgiveness. You can see from this that we're not called to be that. We're called to be like Jesus Christ. I believe God is throwing down a question to us this morning as we read this things: *what do people see in MRBC?*

What else?

BE AT PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER
ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

15 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 word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Love is all about relationship. It's not just a case of being at peace with one another, but positively encouraging one another as we worship. It's about trusting one another and respecting one another sufficiently that we can warn one another when things are not right. It's all about encouraging one another as we come to worship.

I've been challenged recently as your Pastor as to how we should be moving in this second decade of the 21st Century. What does God want of us? We often see it in terms of ministries and mission. We have plans to

expand Parish Nursing. We support our relationships with other churches in the town. We look towards the challenges of other ways in reaching out to families and the younger generation. It's looking outwards.

But as much as reaching out beyond our fellowship is important, as a church we can't look out without looking up and looking in. What do I mean? Let me read those verses again.

15 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 word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 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.

In each of the verses the word *thank* featured. Thankfulness is a recognition of who God is and what He has done for us in Christ. I believe that God wants us to rediscover in Him all the amazing riches of His love, His forgiveness, His glory that Jesus represents.

This sermon has so far been one that has said "we need to be different" We need a new set of clothes. But we only get to change our clothes when we realise that we need a change. How do we get that change? It starts when we appreciate what God has done for us. That is something that only the Spirit of God can make us truly appreciate. If we realise that we need it then it's time we asked for it.

God is challenging us as a Church to be more like Jesus. Here are the boards to remind us

SINCE YOU ARE GOD'S DEAR CHILDREN, you must try to be like him.

How does that start. It starts by looking up and asking God to show us more and more of what it really means to be loved by Him.

It continues when we look at each other, and love on another as we have been loved.

Looking outwards will flow after that...

Prayer

Not follow fashion of the world

Lord may your Spirit open our minds to see what Jesus has done for us, love, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience.

By Your Spirit's power may we have an outpouring of your love for one another. May your church here be a place where people are always loved, valued and cherished.

Lord open our hearts and minds to others, that we may love them, put their needs before ours. May we be like Jesus, and be Jesus to them.