

The Right Clothes

Colossians 3:12-17

Last time we looked at how our minds should be set on heaven and that our real life is Christ and when he appears, then we too will appear with him and share his glory, then we should get rid of the things that belong to the old man. That was both in relation to our personal selves and our relationships. Because we have died to the old man and in Christ we have been made clean. We do not put out the dirty old clothes back on.

So we had the challenge that we needed to do some spring cleaning. To confess our sins because we have been cleansed – we've taken our dirty clothes off.

We thought of similar this morning when we considered what we should be like as outposts of heaven – we should look and sound like heaven.

So what should our behaviour and lifestyle be like? Well, the first phrase in verse 12 indicates it: You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own.

We are the people of God; loved and chosen. If we are the people of God, we should look and act like what He wants us to be because we are made alive, destined for glory.

So we need to put on the right clothes. It's reminiscent of the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt 22:11 onwards) where each attending the wedding feast had special clothes to wear. Someone wearing the wrong clothes didn't belong. We are the Lord's people; we don't wear any old clothes, we wear the right ones. We saw last time what we need to take off – both personal and in our relationships. Paul now tells us in tonight's passage, as the people of God; loved and chosen, what we should clothe ourselves with.

As Paul presents it, what we should clothe ourselves with is a mirror of what we take off. There are both personal qualities and ways in which we relate to one another.

Verse 12: *You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*

It reminds me of Galatians 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* Actually the list we had last time correspond to what the fruit of human nature, the old man is all about in Galatians 5.

I always find this refreshing. To many in this world, the Christian faith is just a set of rules you must keep to. But there is no law in relation to these things. You can do as much of them as you like, when you like, how you like. Doing these at any time are inherently a good thing. They are all agape qualities, love being mentioned a couple of verses down. A person whose mind is motivated in the same way as God's does all these things. If we reflect our Lord, then we will be like this. These are inherently things that characterise what the Holy Spirit is like. They are His fruit.

But there's more to it than these things as Paul addresses something a bit more specific. *13 Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you.*

I don't know if there was anything specific in the relationships at Colosse that Paul is referring to here but he mentions two must dos. Firstly be tolerant – forebear. Then forgive. They are two keys to healthy relationships. One is to be patient with one another. We find that in life there are people who we always seem to get on and agree with, then there are those that try even the patience of Job.

Our God is gracious with us. He's our example. Think of what He's got to put up with. All those good intentions we don't deliver on. Those promises to Him we don't keep. Those things we do that make Him angry. All those habits. All our selfishness. All our bad thoughts. He forebears with us.

And we must do the same – be tolerant, be patient. We all have our ways, our culture, our foibles, our failings. There's none stranger than folk as they say up north. Understand and respect differences. Understand and respect weakness – we have our own too. Some of the biggest problems in church result in people not understanding that other people are just not like ourselves. Differences often have no moral issues so things that may annoy us may be nothing more than just that. Some people are fastidious, some scruffy. Some are easy going, some not. Some are quick of the mark, others take a while with change. I takes patience to walk in step with the Lord and with one another. It's an important skill to learn.

That being said, I don't think Paul means ignoring sin, or really poor behaviour in people. That isn't what being patient is all about. Paul has already mentioned the sin bit in the previous verses. This is more positive in recognising that we are all different and there are things in each of us that we need to both show and be shown grace in.

Likewise, be ready to forgive when things do go wrong. If we struggle with unforgiveness, just remember what we've been forgiven and that puts it into perspective. I've spoken about unforgiveness before and it is always something that gnaws away and destroys people. We must be quick to forgive.

Verse 14 And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity. Agape binds all these things together and it binds the church together. It is the motive that underpins God's relationship with us and which underpins everything in verses 12 and 13. If our lives are characterised by a self-sacrificial attitude to others, it will transform our life as a church. But we know that don't we? We should do as we have had plenty of sermons on it! This is another one of those reminders in scripture that demand we stop and take a rain check about.

But that's not all. We know all these are qualities we should have but how do we make sure they are properly rooted in our lives as they are statements of what we are or should be, not of what we can do?

The three things in the next three verses are key to how well we clothed we are in these things. Interestingly, they are all things we do together. Right from verse 13, the church at Colosse is being addressed not just individual believers. It's all relational. If we want to have the right lifestyle and attitudes as God's people, they are found in the encouragement and growing environment of church.

That's a challenge to us as God's church to make sure we are that environment for encouragement and growth.

15 The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body. And be thankful.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. What is peace in this context. In terms of relationships it's all about that fact that in Christ, we now live in peace with God. There is no enmity now as a result of being justified (Rom 5:1). If His peace rules, then the peace with God that we found in Christ should enable us to enjoy peace in their relationships with others.

Don Carson observes that Paul's use of the word "rule" implies that peace was to act as the umpire within the body, keeping control of all attitudes, words, and accompanying actions. In concert with a "thankful" spirit pervading the fellowship, the members of the church would more fully enjoy the oneness and authentic body-life to which they were "called" by God.

How often are we thankful to one another for the relationship God had brought each of us into in Christ. It's the difference between church being a family, a fellowship than any old club or society. We have been given each other as people to grow with – how grateful are we to God and to one another?

So often it can be the reverse can't it? We see the worst in people, become critical of others, think how bad things are. What we have learned in the last 6 months is to celebrate the positive things that God has given us as a church and those positive things have been wrought through people God is using. So be thankful – to God and one another. Never be slow in saying "thank you."

16 Christ's message in all its richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct one another with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. This takes us to a next step. I think "word" here isn't just the Bible, although that is embraced here. It's what Christ is saying to us (TEV uses message which gives us the sense)– it's something we should know and incorporate into our hearts. Are we listening?

But His word isn't about keeping it all to ourselves – it's about sharing: each and instruct one another with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts.

Our life as God's people is about shared knowledge and experience. We teach and encourage one another. That's why studying the word together is important. Listening to preaching is one way. But there is listening and learning from one another. The reason is that learning isn't just about gaining knowledge, but it's our experience of walking with Christ. If you are part of a small group I encourage you to share your experiences – learn from one another. If you're not part of one, now would be a good time to join!

What's also interesting is that we do not just learn about God from talking together, but worshipping Him together and we see the importance of sung worship. That's why we do it. There's something about music that allows words to sink into our hearts. That's why it is important to sing memorable hymns and particularly stuff firmly based on scripture. That's why it's important that they must speak truths rather than using poetic licence to

take liberties with truth.

All of this is only acquired by meeting together. I've said this many times – there's no such thing as lone ranger Christians. Christians who walk away from the habit of meeting together don't grow, don't have assurance of faith and are usually unbalanced in their knowledge and experience of God. Encourage lone rangers to return to meeting with God's people.

17 Everything you do or say, then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through him to God the Father.

Finally, something to sum up. Is what I'm doing, we're doing done in the name of the Lord Jesus - really? Do we know it's His will? Have we spent time with Him? Is His peace guiding us in the decisions we are making. Does His word dwell in our hearts. Is it *everything*? Or just what suits? If it is we are doing the right thing so be thankful because what's done in His will is powerful and significant in our lives and in the lives of others.

If we're not then – oh dear!

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