

Ugly Christmas Sweater: Ugly Actions

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, December 18th, 2022. My name is Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor here. So we're continuing today.

We're actually finishing the final week of our sermon series, Ugly Christmas Sweater. So we've, so far in this series, we've wrestled with all the ways that we often live with ugly thoughts, ugly words, and ugly motives.

So this morning we're going to take a look at the ugly actions we often choose. Because we should be aware of and responsible for our actions all year round.

This isn't a Christmas only type of thing we should have on our minds. But Christmas is a season when we can make conscious decisions to bless people. Because of the blessing and the grace that God has shown us by sending his son.

We have the ability to live like Jesus, but we can often end up acting like an ugly Christmas sweater. Something or someone that draws attention to ourselves for all the wrong reasons.

[1 : 1 4] And it's at Christmas time that we often see all at once the best of humanity and the worst of humanity.

We celebrate the birth of our Savior in a dimly lit room with candles and we sing Silent Night and it's beautiful. And then suddenly, over the next few days after that, many of us join in with the rest of the country pushing and fighting for the best deal on something that we don't really need and arguing over all kinds of things.

Have you ever reflected on how quickly the Christmas spirit tends to leave people? It's sad. So the question is, how can these two extremes, the good side and the bad side, happen all at once?

Well, the Bible tells us that we have two natures. And these two natures are constantly at war with one another in us.

One nature inspires us to love people, to love people around us, to live humbly. Well, the other nature constantly calls us to want to look out for ourselves first while pushing other people down.

[2 : 3 3] This battle within us begins, and maybe you can recognize it in yourself, it begins when we are young. And unfortunately, and maybe you can reflect on this too, it doesn't get any easier as we get older.

Sometimes things do, but this is not one of those things. But by the grace of God and his spirit living within us, we can grow to treat others the way God wants us to treat them.

Listen, the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Colossians. And it was a letter to the people living in a city called Colossae.

And the Colossians were a lot like you and me. They were a group of people who were trying to figure out what it looked like to love other people well, in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So that was the early church we're talking about. So the sacrifice of Christ should in some way profoundly impact us if we call ourselves followers of him.

- [3 : 43] And friends, if we aren't transformed by that, if we aren't changed by that, it may be worth asking ourselves if we ever really truly accepted Jesus at all.
- Or if we have ever truly surrendered to him in our lives. Or maybe we've never fully surrendered. So we're holding on to something that we just can't let go of or won't let go of or can't trust him with.
- I've told you before that I'm a worrier, right? I'm an overthinker. So give me a minute to overthink something and I'm your guy. But then I stop. The older I get, the more I'm recognizing I need to let go of that stuff.
- I have a friend who's in her 20s who says, you know what? I don't worry at all because I can't change anything. God has got it. And I just went, wow.
- So she's a very black and white person. She says, if I trust Jesus, then I've got to trust him completely. I've got to let go of everything. So my own self-talk at times, and maybe this will be helpful for you, is, is me overthinking something going to change the outcome?
- [5 : 00] Likely not. Will it make the outcome better or worse? Not unless you ask my cardiologist. So that's the reality, right? Is we cannot control the future.
- You've heard me say before, God has gifted me in many ways as a pastor. My psychic gifting is zero. So if someone doesn't tell me something, I don't know.
- I just don't know. So that's helpful for me to recognize that. So no matter what stage we're at in our lives, it's never too late or too unimportant for us to recognize that our ugly actions need to become godly actions.
- The season of Advent is meant to be a time for us to slow down. It's a time for us to reflect on Christ's birth and the reality of what comes next, his eventual return.
- We need to allow these two truths, the fact that Jesus came and Jesus will return, we need to allow those things to change us.
- [6 : 15] We need to become individuals who love one another well. So this season reminds us of a few pretty important things.
- People do, and I think you'll agree, people do crazy things in the name of Christmas, right? Maybe if you're a YouTube person or you're online at all, you've seen some of the crazy, sometimes really cool, light productions that people do on their homes.
- They're coordinated to music and it's insane and it's very entertaining, but it's crazy. Something about this time of year causes people to reorient their entire lives around the holidays.
- So normally rational human beings will cover their entire homes in lights, partially guilty. I have this really cool spotlight that just shines little sparkles all over the house.
- It's really cool. But people go crazy, right? People buy too many gifts. And there's all sorts of other kinds of Christmas insanity.
- [7 : 26] People change their schedules at the drop of a hat. People's attitudes change, sometimes in good ways, but not always. Our budgets change or get completely nuked for a few months.
- Our diets change, right? How many times have you said or heard someone say, oh, it's Christmas time, the calories don't count as you drink two liters of eggnog or eat a box of turtles?
- This is not confession time. I've done neither yet. So why is that? Why do these things go so crazy in our lives? Well, we justify it all and we say, oh, it's Christmas time, right?
- It's Christmas insanity of some kind. So as Paul is writing to the Colossians, he makes a plea for the followers of God to reorient their lives in the same kind of way.

To be willing to live in a unique and countercultural way because of the love of God. And Paul is very persuasive in Colossians in telling his audience that there can be no more excuses for not living God's way.

[8 : 40] Paul is very direct and very clear. He expects Christians to do this and he says it in this way in chapter three.

So if you want to look, Colossians three, verse 17, if you have your Bible or there's a Bible in front of you, I'll also read it. So Paul says in Colossians 3, 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.

So this verse that we just read there comes after a long discussion that I'll unpack for us briefly in a bit. But Paul shares his final thoughts with his readers in that verse, Colossians 3, 17.

So Paul is saying that everything we do in life, whether words or actions, needs to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. How much of your life?

If you're a negotiator? All of it. All of it. Every aspect of our lives should be lived in the name of Jesus.

[9 : 57] Donna, you're going to make me cry. So how is that going for you? There was my conviction moment personally this week as I put this all down on paper.

How is that going for you, Kent? So if you were to look at the past month, how much of your life is lived based on your relationship with Jesus?

Well, I didn't expect to come to church on a get a Christmas sermon and be made to feel guilty. So what percentage of your words and deeds are centered on Christ?

When I'm behind the wheel, Connor can attest to this because I pick him up from work periodically, I'm not the kindest to other drivers.

So what percentage of my thoughts in that scenario are focused on Christ? Would Jesus have gotten annoyed by bad drivers?

[10 : 59] Probably. But not to the same extent, perhaps. Jesus was a lot more tolerant than I am. I'm living proof of that. But more often than not, our actions do not look like Jesus at all.

Can you recognize that? In fact, they can be awfully selfish and self-serving, can't they? Paul tells us to make sure that our actions reflect the deep gratitude that we feel in response to God's grace at work in our lives.

It's that simple. Our words and actions should reflect the gratitude that we have for God's grace at work in our own lives. And when we give thanks to God for what he has already given us, then I believe we're more likely to treat others with love and respect, all in the name of Jesus.

If we're constantly looking for the next thing, the next opportunity, if I only had, if I could just, all of these things are familiar, right?

Because they are human nature. So the kind of intention it takes to wear a great outfit to do a special occasion, that's the same kind of intention it will take to live as God's people.

[12 : 24] You don't just wake up every day, unless you're really good at it, with godly intentions instead of ugly ones. Do you automatically roll out of bed and say, Lord, I want to bless someone as soon as possible?

Or do you think, get me my coffee and don't talk to me? That's what happens at my house. There's a time, there's a time I will get a glance up from the table which is like, zip it, chatty, because I'm a morning person, Michelle is not.

But that's what it takes, right? It takes intentionality. It's a conscious decision, a conscious choice that we need to make. And so living the way Paul tells us to live in Colossians is a lot like choosing a Christmas sweater because you pick your outfit.

It's a conscious choice. So no matter what kind of crazy sweater someone chooses to use to wear, they picked it, right?

I saved this one, particularly for this Sunday. I said to Myrna, I'm saving my fanciest sweater for the last week because it's potluck Sunday.

[13 : 36] So I wanted to, and she said, I'm looking forward to seeing a tuxedo Christmas sweater. So it's more like a Mr. Rogers Christmas sweater, but I'll be your neighbor.

So Paul wrote to the Colossians and he gave them the insight for the kind of actions their lives needed to exemplify. And so we read about that in Colossians 3, verse 12, and this may be familiar to you, this passage.

Colossians 3, 12, Paul says, therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, hear this, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, I hear people whispering it, humility, gentleness, and patience.

clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. And so the Greek word that is used in the original text for clothe or put on is the word enduo.

So enduo literally means to sink into a garment. It means to cover yourself. So this is an active word Paul is using here.

[14 : 56] He's not saying, ah, sit back, it might happen, it might not. He's saying, folks, you need to step up and put this on with intention. It's an active word he's using to paint a picture for his readers.

So for us to love people well, to not act like an ugly Christmas sweater, cranky and mean and all those things, we must intentionally put on new and better kinds of actions.

And the kind of intention it takes to put on a great outfit for a special event, to put on your fancy Christmas morning pajamas, some people are onesie people, not me, but it's the same kind of intention it takes to live as God's people.

Because as I said, we choose our outfit, right? Maria's ahead of me, I have to catch up. So you don't just wake up with godly actions and avoid ugly ones.

We have to consciously decide to do it. And every day, if necessary. Because how we treat other people, how we treat our spouses is important.

[16 : 06] How we treat our children is important. How we treat our friends, our neighbors, it's all important. We tend to brush off those relationships or discount them.

I recently, so many of you know that we're going on a trip at the end of January, beginning of February, so we needed passports and the trip planning and all this stuff, and I'm the logistical guy in our sphere, in our world.

So I did all the trip planning. This is not a wah, wah, poor me. We did the trip planning. Then all of our passports have expired. So I needed to coordinate all the passport documents and all of that stuff.

So all of those things took time. All of them took effort. So there's conscious work that has to go into that. And I lost my train of thought there and that's going to be okay.

But Paul gives us this list of important things that the Spirit requires of us. And first he says, as we heard, clothe yourselves with compassion.

[17 : 15] And compassion is there. How do I know? Because it's there. Compassion is the ability to see a situation from someone else's vantage point, from someone else's perspective.

To feel what someone else is feeling. So it's not merely to say, oh, that's too bad. I'm sorry that happened to you. That's part of it, but it's much deeper than that.

Compassion is what leads people to serve others sacrificially, to give sacrificially. Compassion is the key to changing a broken world.

Can you recognize that? Compassion of this kind that Paul is talking about takes a selfless attitude and results in, and this doesn't happen all the time, people actually listening to one another.

Your story is important to me. I need to hear it. Second, Paul tells us to clothe ourselves with kindness. And kindness sounds like a simple word, right?

[18 : 20] I'll be kind to you instead of screaming in your face. But it's harder than that to live it out. Kindness is really what happens when we're always looking for practical ways to serve one another.

Does that sound invigorating and encouraging or exhausting? So mowing a neighbor's lawn. I have a snowblower, like a leaf blower that I use.

So I'll go and do my neighbor's driveways and sidewalks and things. I don't do it all the time. But sometimes, right, it's thinking beyond ourselves. Buying groceries for a family that you know that may be under financial strain.

Writing a letter just because you want to bless someone. And I'm talking about a handwritten letter, not an email or a text. Message for me as well. Kindness means saying the right thing at just the right time.

Well, maybe you're thinking, how the heck do I do that? How do I know what to say and how? Ask the Holy Spirit. Ask God to direct you to the people in your life that need to hear from you, that need to be connected with you, that need good words spoken into their life.

[19 : 35] Kindness is doing the right thing to positively impact those around you. Paul tells us to clothe ourselves with humility. And humility is not, this is, I stole this quote, so listen to this.

humility is not about thinking less of yourself. It's about thinking about yourself less. See the difference?

It's not about thinking, oh, I don't deserve that. Oh, no, I'm a, I should have, I ought to, I, that's thinking less of yourself. Thinking about yourself less means you put other people first.

Humility is taking on the kind of mentality that Jesus taught us and modeled for us. Selfishness is ugly. And it's generally the base of all sinful actions.

You can probably recognize that. When we're tempted to sin, when we're going to sin, when we recognize we have done it, it was a selfish motivation, usually at the core.

[20 : 42] So humility then is the way in which sin is overcome in our lives and the way in which Jesus, the way of Jesus, is made a reality.

Paul tells us to clothe ourselves with gentleness. Gentleness comes from a word in Greek that means controlled strength. Isn't that interesting?

So gentleness, we think, oh, that's the kid that doesn't get picked for the team because he's weak. Right? That's the dark side of the human perception of being gentle.

This word is not about weakness. It's actually about power. Because this power in gentleness comes from the Spirit of God living in us.

It helps us to control our impulses. In gentleness, our actions express themselves in service to the weak and the powerless among us.

[21 : 47] God gives us power to act on behalf of someone else. It's not a word that describes a wimp. It describes someone who is not afraid to step into injustice.

or brokenness and bring about real change. That is gentleness. Finally, Paul tells us to clothe ourselves with patience.

Oh boy, Scottish and Irish, do I have trouble with patience sometimes. Patience can be translated as long suffering. I love that expression because sometimes, for me, trying to be patient feels like I'm suffering a long time.

But it means to put up with something for a long time before getting angry or giving up. See the difference there? It's about whatever your circumstances are, not getting angry as quickly, not giving up or getting discouraged as quickly.

Clothing yourself in patience allows you to love people, hear this, who are difficult to love. Do you know any? It's about being able to serve people who are difficult to serve.

[23 : 10] Patience is the key to becoming someone who looks like Jesus. Because spiritual maturity, as I've said a few times here, doesn't happen overnight.

Right. Discipleship, growth, becoming more Christ-like is a lifelong journey. That is to encourage you, not discourage you.

You don't have to be there yet. So none of these attributes come naturally to us. Maybe you're saying, oh, I'm very patient, I'm very gentle.

Maybe you are, and that's good. That is very good. But are you those things, by the definitions that I just gave you? It's a good way to filter it.

None of these attributes, as I said, come naturally to us. We must choose them. We must, as Paul said in duo, put them on.

[24 : 07] Clothe ourselves in them. Through our sermon series this Advent season, we've been considering ugly Christmas sweaters. And there's one thing that every sweater has in common, and that is, knitters, yarn.

Yarn is interconnected to form a sweater. And a piece of yarn, I can't resist a good pun, a piece of yarn is the thread that holds everything together.

And the same is true for us as Christians. All of the things that Paul said in these verses that we've looked at this morning have a common thread. thread. And that thread is love.

In Colossians 3, verse 14, Paul says, and over all these virtues, which we've just looked at this morning, put on love, which binds them all together, he says, in perfect unity.

Above all else, we are called to put on, to clothe ourselves in love. And it's that action that gives life to all these other ones. All the other attitudes unravel and mean nothing without love.

[25 : 24] This Christmas season is all about a God who loved us enough to send his own son to save us. So does it make sense to you then that love would be the binding attribute for us to love others with godly actions?

Love is, as it says on the slide, a verb. To really love others, we need to put love into action. Because moving from ugly actions to godly actions begins with love.

That's the change. The word Paul uses for love in our Colossians passage is a very specific one. And it's the Greek word, you've heard me use it before, agape, which means sacrificial love.

And agape is a love that will cost us something. The question is, are we willing to pay the cost to live with love? We can't just say we love people.

We must show that we love people through our actions. So if we're going to live with love this Christmas season, it's got to start with God's love. We must first realize that God truly loves us.

[26 : 36] So let's hear the words of John 3, 16 and 17. You can say them with me if you'd like. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Do you see that? That God himself was motivated by love.

And it's that love of God that prompted Jesus to come to earth in the first place. God didn't send Jesus to earth to condemn it. He came to rescue it.

So every action Jesus took through his life and his ministry on earth, you can see it. Even his death and his resurrection was based on love for all of humanity.

1 John 4, 8-12. Here's the connection. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love.

[27 : 41] This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him. This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

My friends, we have this incredible opportunity to love people around us. When we love other people unconditionally, the world is conditional. Can we recognize that?

The world is very conditional. So when we love other people unconditionally, we reflect God to a world that can't see him and so desperately needs him.

I always smile to myself when I open a door for someone or I help someone with a package or someone slips and I say, are you okay? That's just the way I'm wired. People always react so surprised that someone else cares, that someone would take the time to acknowledge them as another human being.

[28 : 57] Isn't that sad? And that's not what Jesus wants. A Christian is someone who should be dedicated to embracing God's love for us and allowing that love to flow out of them into the world.

Finally, love is action. So this Christmas season, this week even, I want to challenge all of us to choose one person or one family to whom we can offer sacrificial love.

To put on compassion and kindness and humility and gentleness and patience in the way we treat them. Maybe that could be a stranger or maybe a neighbor or maybe even a brother or sister in Christ.

Accept this challenge to clothe yourself in something new this Christmas. clothe yourself in Jesus.

Amen.