

Living in Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I'm sure you may have guessed by now that I love wearing my home clothes. If you don't know what I'm talking about, home clothes are what you get into once you're home. You get out of your work clothes, your going out clothes, and into your really comfortable home clothes. Perhaps it's your pajamas that you go to bed in each night. And once you're in them, you can finally relax. You can literally feel the stress of the day seeping from you. And yes, these Qantas pajamas are my favorite home clothes. Alyssa kindly decided to get extra large when she was flying for work one day and gave them to me. They're very comfortable, I have to say. The cotton is so soft and smooth. It always guarantees a good night's sleep. And so keen am I to wear my home clothes that, much to Alyssa's horror, I have been known to duck out to the shops in them.
- [1 : 0 9] You know that late night run for milk and bread? After all, I mean, who am I going to meet at that time of night anyway? Except other people in their home clothes. And it doesn't make sense, does it? Why get into a whole new set of clothes for just 10 minutes and then when you get home, you're going to go straight to bed? Well, in our series on Colossians, Paul has been telling us that as Christians, we now belong to the new creation. As God's people in Christ, our eternal home is the new creation. We still live in this old one, but home is now the new creation. And so in our passage today, Paul exhorts us to put on our home clothes, to put off our old earthly attire and put on our eternal home clothes. He exhorts us to dress in a manner which befits our new status as citizens of Christ's kingdom. Now, Paul's not talking, of course, of physical clothes, but spiritual ones. And to begin with, this putting on and putting off is an attitude of the mind and a desire of the heart. So in verse 1 of Colossians 3, if you look there again, we read, Since then we have been raised with Christ.
- [2 : 3 0] Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. You see, as Christians, we are united with Christ. All that Christ is, is somehow related to us as well. It isn't just that Christ has died for us. We too have died to our old life. And like Christ, we too are raised into the new creation. And so our lives are bound up with this new creation. Yes, our sins are forgiven and we enjoy a relationship with God. But it's much, much more. Because we now belong to a new world, which is eternal and never fading. We're free from the old creation where death is the only and certain end.

[3 : 34] And we belong to one which will never fade or pass away. It's fantastic, isn't it? And yet on the surface, as we look at each other, this doesn't appear to be the case, does it?

We don't feel physically invincible. We fall sick. Some of us very sick. And as we get older, our body weakens and things start to fall apart.

That's why Paul says that our eternal destiny is still hidden with Christ in God. Just as Christ's eternal reign isn't yet visible to the naked eye, so also our life in Him.

Outwardly, we might not look very different to everyone else. So I don't see halos on your heads. I don't see radiant glows on your faces, although some of you do have some of that.

But our glory will be revealed one day, won't it? When Christ Jesus comes again. And yet, even though that's in the future, we're called to live now according to this new creation.

[4 : 41] Being in Christ's kingdom ought to make a world of difference to us. It should shape how we look at life, the choices we make. Our hearts and minds, Paul says, should be set on things above.

Now, I know none of you watch this show, but The Bachelor just ended on TV recently. I can't even remember the name of the... Who's the winner? Was it Chelsea? No one wants to admit.

I think it was Chelsea. Anyway. So if you know this show, it's all about this bachelor trying to choose from this whole bevy of women, and finally he chooses the one. But the thing is, putting the morality of that show aside, don't focus on that.

But the thing is, the winner, for months after she has won, but while the TV show is still on air, would have had to keep her winning a secret, wouldn't she?

They couldn't be seen in public. Shouldn't be posting Instagram photos of themselves. Probably couldn't even tell their closest friends or family. And yet, all this time, I'm pretty sure her heart and mind would have been set on this relationship, this future relationship.

[5 : 55] She's probably imagining what life would be like once this is all out in the open. Making plans. Hopefully taking herself off the dating scene. Perhaps planning to move cities.

You know, he lives in Sydney, she in Melbourne. And working out what all that means for work. Well, that's sort of similar for us as well, except that we don't have to keep our faith a secret. But like her, even though our new creation identity is hidden, it should shape everything that we do.

We should be living for eternity. Not for just now. I wonder if you think about your life, how much of it is focused on the here and now only, instead of things for eternity.

As we go about living our lives, what do we actually focus on that has eternal value? Jesus himself did say, where your heart is, there also is your treasure.

And so our focus should be to store up treasure in this new creation. We should be preparing for it by living like new creation citizens now. Now, this doesn't mean that we just, you know, forget about this world and neglect everything in it.

[7 : 15] You know, some people say Christians are so heavenly minded, they are no longer any earthly good. That's not what Paul is advocating here. Instead, as we look on from verse 5, Paul says that we set our minds and hearts above primarily by living godly and holy lives.

So Paul goes on to say, put off the attire of sin, which belongs to our earthly nature, and put on the clothes of the new creation. So in verse 5, we read, put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived, but now you must also rid yourself of all such things as these, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge of, in the image of its creator.

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly love, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

[8 : 44] Bear with each other, and forgive one another, if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive, as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Now, in this passage or section, the controlling image is found in verses 10 and 11, which I've summarized in my second point. One of taking off or shedding the old self like clothes, and the practice of sin that goes with it, and in turn, putting on or suiting up, I'm trying to keep with the S words here, suiting up with Christ's character, as we are renewed in knowledge, in the image of its creator.

Everything before verse 10 relates to the shedding of sinful practices. Lust, evil desires, filthy language, all that sort of thing. These are the things that the Colossians and us used to live, when all we had was this world.

We had to satisfy our fleshly desires now, and therefore we indulged in these things. But the result is, as many of you will know, ugly and distasteful, isn't it?

It doesn't really satisfy at all. So Paul says, get rid of them now that you're a Christian. The words rid yourself actually has the idea of shedding, like a snake shedding its dead skin.

[10 : 12] So the command to put to death isn't so much trying to kill something that's alive, but getting rid of something that's already dead. It's like when someone kills an insect, you know, sometimes it's dead, you know, and yet its legs are still twitching.

And then you keep hammering on it, right? Just to make sure it's dead, even though you know it's dead. Well, that's what sin is like in our lives. We actually belong to the new creation.

Our selfish desires and sin no longer master us. And so Paul says, cast them off from our lives. You know, God's spirit doesn't work, you know, like magically with the snap of a figure, and when you become a Christian, all of a sudden you're perfect and you no longer sin.

No, the way God works is to ask us to live a life of discipline, of putting off these sinful habits that we have and putting on the new clothes of the new creation.

The words old self and new self in verse 10 literally means the old man or Adam and versus the new man or Adam. And what Paul is saying is that whilst we used to belong to the old Adam, now we are in Christ, the new Adam.

[11 : 34] And so we ought to live in Christ, in the new self or the new man. We're part of this new humanity now. And Paul says that in this new humanity, there's no division by race or status.

He's reinforcing again what he said earlier in the letter, neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free. And so the idea is that as we put off greed and anger and all this other stuff, we replace it with virtues such as compassion, humility, kindness, and the like.

I don't think this is an exhaustive list, but rather a sample of what it means to be Christ-like, to have Christ's character, and to reflect the image of God.

But I wonder whether you notice as well how Paul emphasizes the virtues that are related to community and to relationships. You see, these virtues are not self-focused, are they?

They're not about making us feel like we're such a much better Christian. Unlike the vices, which is all about self, the virtues are about putting others before self.

[12 : 48] And that's a key part of living in Christ. It is to live with God's people. And notice how the virtues, instead of talking about building up your own strength, is more about putting up with the weaknesses of others.

So things like bearing with one another, forgiving when someone has a grievance against you, it's all about not holding people's faults against them, just as the Lord has done for us.

It's funny, isn't it? Because a lot of times we think, oh, we want to have a perfect church. As Christians, we need to be straining for perfection. And what we think is, oh, we all need to be better as people.

And so when we look around, you know, then we start to be unhappy with church because we think, oh, I'm so sick and tired, I'm so and so, because they're so inconsiderate. Or people are just so unfriendly in this church, they never come up to talk to me.

But Paul, if you read these verses, is actually pointing the finger back at us, isn't it, when we grumble? Sure, others may be inconsiderate or unfriendly, but are you suited up with Christ's character to bear with their weakness?

[14 : 05] They may be selfish, but would you forgive them? Because if you don't, then actually you're not reflecting what the new creation is all about.

Now, according to our passage today, the true mark of Christian community is one of forgiveness and forbearance. It's not how good we are, but rather how we treat others when actually they're not good.

If you recall back in chapter 1 and verse 6, the gospel helped us to truly understand God's grace. That's how we become a Christian. Well, if we truly understand God's grace, that means we need to be a community of grace as well, don't we?

Otherwise, we can do all manner of good deeds in this church, you know, help the poor, feed the hungry, and all that kind of stuff, but they will only be done out of pride, wouldn't they? And not out of true love and grace.

And that's why Paul ends with the saying that over all these things, put on love, which binds everything together in unity. I don't know whether you've seen these, but it's a bit like those wearable blankets.

[15 : 16] Have you seen those? I've got a slide of it. Yeah? Even the dog's got one. Can you see? It's that thing that you wear, that you, you know, it's really nice, and then you, you know, sit in a lounge without having to have a blanket and you can watch TV and all that kind of stuff.

But it's that thing which covers all your other clothes, your home clothes in particular. So, love is the same thing. Love is the thing that ought to permeate all these other virtues.

So that when we show patience, we do it from the heart, not grudgingly. When we bear with one another, it's not through gritted teeth that says, oh, I need to put up with that person.

Rather, we do it out of deep love for one another, don't we? Verse 12, we are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved by God. And so, if God loves us enough to save us, then how much more should we love one another?

Now, you may hear all this and think, you know what, Mark, that all sounds good and I actually buy into that. I want to be like that.

[16 : 27] And you know what, maybe for those people that I like, I hang out with, yeah, I can be loving towards them, but I still find it so hard, you know, with that other person over there.

I just can't put away that earthly nature when it comes to that person. How can I do this? It doesn't seem possible. Well, if that's your struggle, then we get to the final section where Paul gives us an idea of how we may start to do that.

So, if our hearts and minds are to be set on things above, point one, and that should translate to a life of shedding sin and suiting up in Christ's character, point two, then point three, verses 15 to 17, we get there by saturating or soaking ourselves in Christ's word and with thanksgiving.

So, Paul writes, let the peace of Christ rule in your heart since as members of one body you will call to peace and be thankful. Let the message or word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

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. You see, we don't really develop virtue by concentrating on it.

[17 : 55] I mean, if you don't think you're patient, just telling yourself, I need to be patient, I need to be patient, sort of doesn't really work. But it's very similar to a fruit, isn't it?

You know, you don't grow juicier and tastier fruit on the plant by focusing on the fruit, do you? Instead, you concentrate on the nutrients that go in the soil that then produce the juicier and tastier fruit.

And that's the same with us. Last week, in chapter 2, in verse 6, Paul says, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving.

Well, I think Paul's sort of saying the same thing here. He says that to be rooted in Christ is to be soaked in Christ's word and thankfulness. Those two things are, as it were, the nutrients from which the virtues will come.

We are to saturate ourselves with the message of Christ, so meditate on the riches of the gospel that it changes our heart to want to be virtuous. We work hard at being wise in God's word and we teach, we admonish one another to do the same.

[19 : 16] And then we sing psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit because when we do, as I said, I think, a few weeks ago with Exodus 15, we inject God's truth directly into our hearts and our souls.

Incidentally, I actually worked really hard this week to make sure we had a psalm reading, responsive. We sung some spiritual songs and straight after this I've chosen a hymn.

So, you know, we've actually applied this verse tonight, so that's very good. But the thing is that when we do this and, you know, that's what we do week in, week out, don't we? We come to church and we hear God's Word and we respond, don't we, with hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs.

And the effect of that should be that we become thankful people because as we remember what God has done for us, that great salvation for us that is laid out for us in the Gospel, then we can't help but be thankful.

And Paul emphasizes this because three times in just these three verses he talks about being thankful. Verse 15, Be thankful. Verse 16, Singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

[20 : 23] And verse 17, Whatever you say and do, do it in the Lord's name, giving thanks to God the Father. It's so important, isn't it, to be thankful in life. Be thankful to God in particular.

And if we truly understand the Gospel, then you know what? We really can't help but be thankful, can we? You know, sometimes we may come to church and we've had a tough week and we've got a particular frustration still.

And you know, maybe we hope that when we come, God might give us an answer from His Word or something to help us make that problem go away. And maybe we find that He doesn't and we're disappointed.

That's fair enough. But perhaps we shouldn't be because if we've been reminded of the Gospel about God's great love for us in Christ, then we should be moved to be thankful anyway.

maybe that's God's way of trying to put your problem into its rightful perspective. Sure, He'll probably help you solve that problem somehow in due course.

[21 : 31] But more importantly, actually, He wants to remind you that your home belongs in the new creation. You've got more important things to enjoy than the problems that you've got.

not to trivialize it or anything, but to put it into perspective. That no matter how much we might be suffering or finding life difficult now, that you know what?

We're members of the new creation. We belong there. You know what? I think as a church, there's really no better testimony. We preach the word, but there's also the aspect of if we are thankful when life is tough, that is a powerful testimony, isn't it?

It says to people that come amongst us or still having doubts about the gospel that, you know what? We know this new creation is real. And that's what allows us to be thankful even when life is tough right now.

Because our eyes, our hope, our hearts, our minds are set on things above, not just on earthly things. So, brothers and sisters, you don't have to be like me and love to wear your physical home clothes all the time.

[22 : 50] Although if you do, there's no shame in admitting that. Your pastor has just preached a sermon in his. But please, develop a deep desire to always wear your heavenly home clothes filled with grace and over that to put on your wearable blanket of love saturated with Christ's word and thanksgiving.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that as your dearly loved people, we are holy because of Christ's death for us. Help us to set our minds and hearts on your kingdom, the new creation, and to shed our life of sin and suit up with Christ's character of love.

Give us the discipline to saturate our lives with Christ's word, overflowing with thanksgiving in life because of Christ in us. In his name we pray.

Amen.