

Dress for Heaven

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[0 : 00] He ended the night undressed. Now, for those who weren't here, that wasn't a scandal, and you'll see tonight what I mean. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray tonight that you may clothe us with the clothes of heaven.

We pray that we may live lives honoring, loving, and exalting the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is all and is in all.

And in his name we pray. Amen. I remember the day that I got my secondary school uniform. I was 11.

I was about to start high school. I was virtually an adult. And I remember with my mother picking up all the school uniform bits and pieces, socks and trousers and shorts and shirts and ties and jumpers and blazer.

And then we went down to my grandmother's house. And, of course, I had to put it all on again, having worn it in the shop to make sure that it all fitted. And I had to parade around in my new uniform because very soon, a few days later, a week or two, whatever it was, I was about to start high school.

[1 : 19] A uniform reflects what you belong to. I couldn't really wear that uniform if I wasn't a member of that school. A couple of weeks ago, we had here a very large military funeral of a young man, 40, who died.

He was in the army and died of natural causes of cancer. And so there were all these people with different uniforms on and stars and stripes and all these sorts of things.

And there were blues and khakis. And they all understood it. I didn't. I just called them all by their first name. But they used all these titles with each other. So the uniform marked their belonging, not only whether they belong to the Air Force or the Army, but which core within those sorts of those forces.

It's a bit like clergy robes as well. Apart from actors on TV or fancy dress, if you're a member of the clergy, then you're entitled to wear those robes. They're like a uniform of office.

It's like official ties that people might wear to show which clubs they belong to or whatever it is. And football shirts, the same thing. You see, dress codes matter. They may not be strictly uniform, as in the sense of ties and so on, but there are senses of uniform to show what you belong to.

[2 : 33] You imagine today, as I hinted at last week, as Richmond went out to play yet another losing match, Ben Cousins went amongst them wearing an Eagles shirt. It's ludicrous.

He doesn't play for them anymore. Presumably, I can't be bothered ever watching anymore, and it's why I'm leaving the country, presumably he wore yellow and black, because that's now the team to which he belongs.

So clothes and uniforms reflect those to whom we belong, or the organisation or institution or whatever. Now, remember that the purpose of Paul writing this letter to the Colossians, a church that he'd not been to and never met, probably most of them, was that they may live a worthy life. He said that at the very opening of the letter, when he gave thanks for them and prayed for them, and he said what he prayed and why he prayed. So back in chapter 1, verse 9, a verse hopefully by now is being etched in your mind, because I've referred to it, I think, every single week, and probably there's two more to go.

He says, That's the purpose of the letter.

[3 : 55] Why is Paul so fussed about leading a life worthy of the Lord? Because the Lord Jesus Christ is supreme, supreme over all, over the whole creation which he made and for whom it was made.

He is Lord not only of the old creation, but of the new creation, the firstborn from the dead, head over the body, the church, the new creation living in Christ.

And that's what we saw in that great hymn, in the middle part of chapter 1. That's why it's important to live a life worthy of the Lord, because of who the Lord is as supreme.

But why does that matter for the people to whom Paul writes this letter? Because they are identified in and with this Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we've seen over the last two or three weeks, the language of being in Christ, buried with Christ, dead in Christ, raised with Christ, especially through chapter 2 and into the beginning of chapter 3.

[4 : 57] So for example, in verse 20 of chapter 2, if with Christ you died, etc. We belong, or Christians belong, in Christ.

We're identified in him and with him. And then Paul draws out the implications of that. He said in chapter 2, verse 6, as you therefore have received Jesus Christ as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.

So if this is true that you're in Christ and with Christ, as indeed it is true, live your lives worthy of him. He drew out a negative implication and then a positive one later on.

Chapter 2, verse 20, as I said, if you died with Christ, why do you live as if you belong to the world? That's the negative implication. And then the positive one at the beginning of chapter 3, if you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.

Where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

[6 : 07] We saw last week, that part of that ethical implication, of if you belong in Christ, then shed the old life and put on the new, Paul uses the clothing analogy.

We saw last week in chapter 3, verse 5, put to death a list of sins, five sins. Chapter 3, verse 8, get rid of all such things.

Five sins followed that list as well. Paul is, in a sense, urging, taking it all off, like clothes that you take off, an old uniform. And now tonight, we turn to what we're to put on.

Now it's time to get properly dressed. So I hope you haven't been too cold, undressed all week.

Now's the time to get dressed. When you think about it, our world spends an inordinate amount of time and money on clothes.

People are besotted by them, enraptured by the latest fashions and styles and colours and so on. Let me say to you at the front tonight, the clothes that are on parade in this letter are far, far more important than anything that is on parade in Myers or DJs or the boutiques of Collins Street.

[7 : 33] And what's more, we all will look good in them. All of us. Without exception. We are to wear the uniform, the clothes, the dress of being in Christ.

So Paul begins this section saying in verse 12, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. They're Old Testament terms in their origin.

Now it's applied to Jew and Gentile, not merely to Jew, as was the case in the Old Testament. They are chosen, holy and beloved. The word behind holy is to be set apart and in a sense that theme captures all three terms together.

They're set apart. They're distinctive. In the Old Testament, the people of God, Israel, was to be distinctive living in the promised land.

Paul is in effect saying here that believers in Christ are now to be distinctive living in Christ. Yes, in the world, but with our minds set on the world to come.

[8 : 50] We are living now in Christ. We are to be distinctive in Him, distinctive from the world in which we live. So what are we to wear? Five things.

Maybe to balance the two lists of five we saw last week that are to be taken off. Five things in verse 12. Compassion. It's actually a very strong word.

It was tied up in their thinking with the bowels. We probably think it's a bit of an ugly idea, but that was where in a sense in the anatomy people thought compassion came from.

It arose out of the bowels deep down. It's a very strong term. Kindness. Like compassion, other person centered. thinking of somebody else, looking for their interests and so on.

Humility. Considering another above yourself. We often misunderstand humility and think it's like a sort of false modesty, a putting down of ourself.

[9 : 54] No, it's actually a right view of ourself, but thinking of others even more highly. Now one of the things that Paul had had a go at for the false teachers who have arrived in Colossae to where this letter is addressed was their emphasis on ascetic living.

That is self-denial and what he called in a sense a self-imposed humility or a false humility.

Something that they might even boast about ironically.

Like as I've said Uriah Heep in David Copperfield. This is true humility. Putting others higher than ourselves. Fourthly, meekness.

We often associate meekness with weakness. We think that being meek is a bit wimpish. It's not asserting yourself. But actually meekness is a strength.

Meekness is not being overly impressed with your own self-importance. That was someone's definition of meekness. It's quite cute in the way that it describes it. Not being overly impressed with your own self-importance.

[11 : 04] It's again related to humility. It's again other people centred. And there is a strength about being meek. Blessed are the meek, Jesus said.

And lastly, patience. Again, an idea that we sometimes mix up in our thinking. We sometimes think that we can be patient, but what we really mean is that we're indifferent.

We don't actually care, so therefore we're not anxious or worried or looking at our clock. But patience has got an eagerness about an outcome.

But it will wait and wait. Patience in the end will run out. God's does. But it's a patience that endures and endures beyond what you might expect for the sake of another.

All five of those things are other person focused or other person centred. Now it's very crucial that we keep the context in mind here.

[12 : 07] Paul is not giving another set of rules and regulations. He's not saying the false teachers, these are their rules. Don't touch, don't handle, make sure you keep the Sabbath, etc.

Well, put them aside and here are my rules. No, that's not what he's going on about. He's not interchanging false rules with new rules. The false teaching, he said back in chapter 2, was according to human tradition, and chapter 2 verse 8 said at the end, and not according to Christ. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.

Then, chapter 2 verse 19, at the end of that paragraph, again speaking of the false teaching, he says, it doesn't hold fast to the head, from whom the whole body nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews grows with a growth that is from God.

That is, the false teaching is not holding fast to the head who is Christ. And then, in chapter 2, verse 6, as I've mentioned already, positively Paul says, as you've received Christ, continue to live in him.

[13 : 37] And then, the beginning of chapter 3, if you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is. And then, finally, by way of getting this context so, that is so important, getting it right, chapter 3, verse 10, clothe yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator, Christ.

Do you see what the context is telling us? The worthy life, the right clothes, the way to live, is about Jesus.

It's about Christ. It's about holding fast to Christ. It is about living a life that is worthy of Christ, continuing to live in him.

It is seeking the things that are above where Christ is. It's about being renewed in the new self who is in fact Christ. So whose clothes are they?

Christ's. It's not merely a new rule or regulation about how we're to be. It's a saying, it is saying, be like Jesus. Be like Jesus Christ.

[14 : 58] They're his clothes. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Jesus is the one who time and again we're told is compassionate, beyond perfectly.

He's the one who is meek and humble when he comes into Jerusalem on a donkey. He's the one who's kind, the one who invites people to come to him when they're weary and heavy laden.

He's the patient one. Jesus perfectly is this list of five things. They are Christ's clothes. We're not to live according to human tradition, severed from the headship of Christ and looking at the things below.

But we're to live in Christ, clothed with the new self, seeking the things that are above where Christ is. That is in effect seeking Christ who is above. Paul could actually say here, as he does in

Romans 13, clothe yourselves with Christ.

Christ. But there's a bit more about it than that. This is not just about you the individual and me the individual becoming more like Jesus.

[16:09] There's a corporate image here. It's addressed to the church at Colossae. They, as a church, as a community, are to be clothed with Christ. All these characteristics here are about interpersonal relationships, about strong relationships within the community of the church of the body of Christ.

Indeed, several times already, Paul in this letter has talked about the church being the body of Christ, a very strong notion of unity. So what Paul is saying here is not just about the individual being clothed with Christ.

It's about the church being clothed with Christ and growing together in maturity and towards perfection. Well, those five attitudes that we are to be clothed with, in verse 12, flow into action in verse 13.

What will that look like in practice? Bear with one another. Verse 13. Bear with one another.

That is, put up with one another. In one sense, it's not quite the ideal. That's coming. But there is a sense in which belonging within the church, within the community of God's people, we have to bear with one another.

[17:26] We have to put up with one another. We, looking around, may not be the people we might want to associate with all the time. There are things about you and me and each other that might irritate us at times.

We have to put up with that. We have to bear with that. We don't have the freedom to get rid of somebody because they irritate us or to remove ourselves from them because they irritate us. We are the body of Christ. And so the attitudes of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience will mean that we bear with one another.

We put up with one another. That will be uncomfortable. Jesus used the same word when he said about the faithless generations, how long must I put up with you?

It's not easy to put up with someone. We have no choice in the community of God's people. But then it moves on. Not only must we bear with one another, verse 13 goes on to say, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other.

[18:34] Now we bear with one another when it may not be that somebody has wronged us, but somebody just sort of grates against us, irritates us in some way. But what if you've got a complaint?

Against another. Forgive each other. Again, notice in both these commands, the church context. You see, it's not just about me, the individual, in my own isolation of my study or something, putting on the clothes of Christ.

If you have nothing to do with other Christians, well, bearing with one another and forgiving another makes little sense. It's in the church context that these attitudes and virtues are practiced.

And yet so often have I met people who have basically left church or fellowship because they've been wronged or maybe actually have just been irritated by somebody and they don't forgive.

forgive. It may be that somebody really was rude to them. It may be that somebody was just an irritation and they left over a trivial matter in one sense.

[19:47] What do the clothes of Christ look like in that case? Forgive. It's not easy.

Forgive. What if they're unrepentant for their sin? Forgive. What if they keep doing it against me?

Forgive. Forgive. What if they keep being rude to me or ignoring me? Forgive. How many times have I got to keep on putting up with that and forgiving?

Seventy times seven? But don't keep count. Forgive. How can I forgive? How can I forgive if I'm really hurt?

If I'm really wronged? If it really pains me deep down? Jesus forgave. So can you. How can I forgive if it means they get away with doing something that's sinful or wrong?

[20:54] Because of Jesus. Forgive. Forgiveness is not easy. It's easier to carry grudges.

It's easier to let irritation at somebody breed into broken fellowship. Bear with and forgive each other.

This is serious. We say it in the Lord's Prayer. We ask God to forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us.

And yet in my experience in ministry, many times can I think of people who have ignored that basic command at the heart of the Lord's Prayer.

The clothes of Christ are very distinctive. They are not our world's clothes at all. The clothes of Christ are hard, uncomfortable, costly.

[22 : 01] It is not easy to forgive a church brother or sister. Someone who might criticise you because you led the prayers or sang or preached or something badly or wrongly or forgot their name.

I've had people offended at me because I've forgotten their name. Forgive. Maybe that someone in church fellowship forgot to tell you about something.

Forgot to invite you to a meeting. You felt left out. Forgive. It may be that you thought that you should have been elected to a committee or been asked to lead a Bible study group but weren't.

Forgive. It might be that you think that you could do a better job than somebody else, playing music or looking after children forgive or something. Forgive. Forgive. Forgive. Forgive. And keep on forgiving.

And keep on forgiving. And keep on forgiving. Because that is the clothing of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 10] the five attitudes of verse 12 are a bit like the underwear they're the things that get expressed in action but in a sense they as attitudes are within us verse 13 is a bit like the next outer layer if you like the shirt and trousers bear with one another and forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive but the outer layer the coat over the top is love above all over all clothe yourselves with love which binds everything together in perfect harmony a love of course that is defined by Christ not the world a love that is sacrificial costly and other person centred

Christ's love and it binds everything together in perfect harmony because there's a sense in which the virtues of compassion and kindness and humility and meekness and patience make little sense without love in fact without love they're probably not even generated at all bearing with one another and forgiving one another will be nothing without love love is the virtue that is in a sense the crowning virtue that is overall that holds them all together that creates the unity of virtues that gives them energy and drive love it binds them together in perfect harmony harmony Paul's already used the word perfect in this letter when he said that the goal of his ministry back in chapter 1 verse 28 is to present everyone perfect in Christ mature is the translation here but it's the same word perfect in Christ what will perfect in Christ look like what is the goal of Paul's ministry that on the final day standing before the judgment seat of Christ there will be the Colossian Christians the Ephesian Christians the Corinthian Christians and all those to whom Paul for whom he has laboured to whom he has written to whom he has preached the gospel standing clothed with these clothes crowned with love that binds it all together in perfect harmony that's what perfection looks like being clothed with Christ's clothes above all love if the clothes of Christ are then to cover us the peace of Christ is to rule our hearts verse 15 and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you are called in the one body notice that it's not speaking about the peace of Christ being in our heart which we sometimes think about and to an extent there is truth in that but rather here Paul says let the peace of Christ rule your hearts govern your hearts be the arbiter within your heart and the end of the verse gives us perhaps a clue to what he's driving at to which indeed you are called in the one body the emphasis on the unity of God's people

Paul here is saying that if you are wearing the clothes of Christ then you will see the peace of Christ ruling in your relationships within the one body within unity peace of Christ not enmity not faction not division within the one body but peace what Paul I think is saying here is that the peace of Christ will promote the unity of the body of Christ the church that is the peace of Christ will mean if it's governing our hearts that we act peaceably with each other we'll see that of course if there's compassion kindness humility meekness and patience we will act peaceably with each other we won't be asserting our own rights we won't be insisting on our own way we'll be living at peace with one another even if it means putting aside some of our own preferences or desires without compromising I guess high gospel principles it's not peace at any cost it's not saying the unity of the church is the fundamental goal and whatever is taught no, no because Paul of course is putting aside those false teachers as often he does it's the peace of Christ within the gospel fellowship of God's people that will promote and drive unity and we are to be peacemakers and peaceable people within the fellowship and the unity of the people of God and then almost as a throwaway line at the end of verse 15 he says and be thankful he keeps coming back to that he'll come back to it in

the next two verses as well and we've already seen the importance of thanks back in chapter 1 the last of the four features that define what a worthy life is in verse 12 he says giving thanks with joy to the Father and then he lists why we give thanks to God because the Father has transferred us from the darkness of the world into the kingdom of his Son here I think the connection is because the peace of Christ is what we've been called to in the one body

Paul is alluding back to that transfer redemption grace of God that has transferred us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God into his body the church of which now Jesus is the head that's an act of grace and Paul says and be thankful because as we said in the first week without thanks our lives will go quickly astray quickly astray well this Christ centered worthy life continues in the next verse verse 15 was let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts now let the word of Christ dwell in you richly and here again is the engine room for the worthy life the word of Christ in you not merely on a page but in our hearts a powerful word applied by God's powerful spirit into our hearts it's why this is not just another rule and regulation that we in our own efforts have to achieve but rather here is the energy the dynamo to create and renew within us the worthy life the Christ clothed life that's why in this letter of course

Paul has focused so much on the glorious supremacy of Jesus because there is the word of Christ of Christ supreme over all that in itself as Paul preaches it writes it and we read it is fuel within us for the worthy life and he said back in chapter 3 verse 10 as we saw last week having clothed yourselves with the new self which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator what knowledge the word of Christ if the word of Christ is in you it's renewing you you're growing into the Christ like clothes that's where the energy comes from that is driving us to be perfectly in the image of Christ on the final day it's a work of God's word applied by God's spirit Paul famously put it this way at the end of 2 Corinthians chapter 3 speaking of the ministry of God's spirit applying God's word in the hearts the ministry of the new covenant

[31 : 25] Paul looks forward to all of us with unveiled faces seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror and we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord the Spirit in essence that's what Paul is speaking of here being renewed by the word of Christ in our hearts so that we are daily living more and more into the clothing of Christ so that on that final day we'll see the glory of Christ as if reflected in a mirror what Paul has in mind is that we might look in a mirror on that final day and see Christ because we are so Christ like on that day brothers and sisters never you see underestimate the power of the word of God to transform us into the likeness of Christ this word of Christ is to dwell in us richly deeply we might say not something that we merely just have a quick verse open it up in the morning quick

Bible verse close it off and off we go and do our work but something that is in us deeply and richly in our hearts something on which we meditate and reflect something on which we speak with each other and encourage each other and that's what Paul goes on to say in the rest of this verse but again the context is not simply individual but corporate so the word of Christ dwelling in you richly teach and admonish one another in all wisdom and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms hymns and spiritual songs to God you see it's not about me in my study reading my Bible but about us teaching and admonishing each other urging each other on to be wearing the clothes of Christ as the word of Christ dwells richly in us as a church as a congregation as a community of God's people perhaps perhaps perhaps in this context Paul is specifically thinking of the gathering of God's people on the Lord's day for corporate worship and he's saying that at the heart of your gathering together will be the word of Christ let it dwell in you richly take it seriously in your midst as you gather make sure that you teach and admonish in a sense they're slightly synonyms one more positive the other more negative teaching positively the truth admonishing and warning from error heresy and immorality the word of God is to be central in our music as well

I think is the implication at the end of verse 16 with gratitude in your heart sing psalms hymns spiritual songs to God which is a subset of letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly probably there's not a sharp distinction maybe between psalm a hymn and a spiritual song Paul's probably listing all three to mean in a sense all the types of music that you sing it's the word of Christ dwelling in you richly Paul is saying here how important it is for the corporate life of the church how important it is that we gather together around the word of Christ and are encouraged exhorted and admonished by it as we're taught it as we sing it as we hear it on the whole I reckon we don't take this seriously enough so often over the years I hear of people grumbling about long sermons that's why I'm going to Asia where mine are short so often church services these days have fewer bible

readings than in earlier years so many

Christians actually resist grappling and struggling with the word not wanting to go into it too deeply and so many of our Christian songs are perhaps a bit more self-centered than speaking the word of Christ but also we're often so resistant to church fellowship slipping in late leaving early not engaging with one another you see this is not about a passive listening in this verse it's about an active engagement with the other brothers and sisters in Christ so that we together around the word of Christ are growing more and more like Christ and looking forward to the final day notice how in these verses tonight the one another language occurs so frequently verse 13 bear with one another the end of verse 13 it talks about forgive each other and now in verse 16 teach and admonish one another behind it all is the idea of the one body in verse 15 that is church is not what we attend but what we belong to with others and we do so in order to not only be fueled by but to fuel others towards perfection towards the worthy life so let me urge you to take church membership involvement engagement seriously week by week as a high priority

Paul concludes broadening out from the corporate gathering perhaps of his people which is perhaps the context of verse 16 now to anything and everything in effect he says in verse 17 and whatever you do in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus I think here not just in the community of the church but in your whole life Monday to Saturday as well as Sunday whatever you do in word or deed that is in totality do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus we're to do everything in his name because as we've seen so often in this letter Christ is all is in all over all and made all if Christ is Lord and supreme over all as we've seen so often then all that we do same word everything is to be in his name there is no part of our life or activity that is outside the domain of the Lordship of Jesus so everything we do is to be within that domain under his

[37 : 47] Lordship and in his name our world and so often we spend exorbitant amounts on clothes some change their wardrobes frequently with the fashion stakes that change so often my view is to keep wearing your clothes and the fashion comes back into fashion 20 years later so you save yourself some money but anyway of course the advertising that we're confronted with bombarded with all the time and our society plays on the need to look right to dress right and wherever you go you can find dozens of glamorous catalogues and models and fashion magazines and of course the eyes of our world and us perhaps are agog with looking at what people wear at the Oscars or the Melbourne Cup or the Brownlow or whatever sadly our world is very shallow in the fashion stakes very superficial for fashions are so often fleeting and trends are temporary it's a mere veneer of glitz and glamour brothers and sisters there is a wardrobe that is much much more important in our world's eyes its clothes may not be trendy they may not turn the eye when they're seen walking down the street these clothes are not sold at

Myers or DJ's or in Chapel Street or Collins Street they're not modelled by gorgeous girls usually Melbourne Fashion Week ignores them entirely and they're seldom seen at Flemington but these clothes last they will never wear out and we will never grow out of them they will always fit us and indeed we'll grow into them more and more as Paul said we're being renewed in this new self for these are the clothes of heaven these are the clothes of Christ these are the clothes of the kingdom to which we now belong they're the uniform we are to wear they are our mark of belonging to Christ we're to look not at a cat walk but a cross not for glamour but for true glory modelled not by L but by Christ as you open your wardrobe each morning think take off the clothes of this world and clothe yourself with the clothes of Christ but not just as an individual for us as a church as we are church as we gather together as we interact with each other through the week we are to encourage each other to wear the clothes of Christ why his clothes because we have risen in him if you have been raised with

Christ seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your minds on things that are above not on things that are on earth for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God when Christ who is your life appears then you also will be revealed with him in glory amen