

The New Self

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17

Introduction

Today, we are continuing our look at Paul's letter to the Colossians. Chapter three of the letter is a shift from Paul criticizing the false teaching in the church to his appealing the Colossians to live in such a way that is pleasing to God. What Paul wrote in this section of the letter assumed that the Colossians were true believers, that they had a genuine relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. Paul wrote earlier in the letter that "if" you are Christians "then" live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then "set your hearts" and "minds on things above," things that are heavenly, things that are of eternal value and will not perish on this earth. Namely, desire Jesus Christ above all things.

Paul urged the Colossians to put off their old self – those things we do that are not Christ like. Paul wrote that the Colossians were dead to sin, therefore, because they are dead to sin, they ought to *put to death* sinful things. They had turned from sin and had turned to Jesus Christ. They were adopted into God's family and had become His children. They had a new identity. Those worldly things, such as sexual immorality, lust, greed, anger, obscene talk, and lying, no longer defined who they were after accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. Similarly, God is transforming all believers into the image of His Son Jesus. We can work with or against the Holy Spirit. We can hinder the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. We have the ability to disobey God and to do those things that displease Him, and as a result, work against God who is molding us into the image of His Son. It is a process, but there should be evidence of spiritual growth. If we have turned from our former ways, and have turned to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, there will be evidence of God's presence in our lives.

Uniforms of Christ

In speaking of this Christian transformation, that of bringing our actions in line with our new identity in Christ, Paul wrote about clothing. He referred to the way we ought to live out our Christian faith in terms of what we wear. Now, I used to grow up thinking that it mattered how one dressed when going to church on Sunday. I used to hear things like, "You need to wear your best for God" or, "You need to put on your Sunday best." Personally, I do not think God cares as much about what we wear as we sometimes care about it, but I do think clothing is required – no birthday suits! Paul was not literally saying, however, that what we wear has any bearing on how spiritual we are or how right we are with God. Paul referred to clothing in order to help explain our new self and how we ought to "put on" Christian attitudes and behaviors.

In a way, I believe we can understand this passage in terms of school uniforms. Some schools require their students to wear uniforms when attending school. There are many opinions about the subject, but some believe that requiring a certain school uniform helps to prevent gangs from forming on campus, encourages discipline, diminishes economic and social barriers between students, and increases a sense of belonging and school pride. One study concluded that those schools that require students to wear school uniforms improved attendance and graduation rates. Well, Paul is not advocating

school uniforms and neither am I, although I think there could be some positive things about it, but Scripture does indicate that once we join Christ, we are to “clothe ourselves” in things that our like Christ. In a way, we should be wearing *uniforms of Christ*. Christians should be representatives of Jesus Christ, modeling Christ in their behavior and pointing others to Jesus in word and deed.

There are five main points in today’s passage about our new way of living in Christ:

- Clothe Yourself with the Virtues of Christ
- Be Filled with the Peace of Christ
- Always Be Thankful
- Let God’s Word Direct You
- Give Glory to Jesus in Everything

Clothe Yourself with the Virtues of Christ

In today’s passage, Paul wrote the following:

Colossians 3:12 “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved...”

Again, Paul began by reminding the Colossians of who they are in Christ. God has chosen you. You are the elect of God. You have a special relationship with Him. You are also holy, meaning you are dedicated to God, in His service. You are His saints. You are also beloved by God. He cherishes you. This is who you are in Christ – *chosen, holy* and *beloved*. Therefore, because these things are true, put on your new self. This literally means to “clothe yourselves” in these things. Put on the new garment of Christ – the uniform of Christ. Think of being invited to some special occasion, maybe dinner with the President or a King. How might you dress? You would probably put on the best clothes you have. This is probably what Jesus meant in the parable of the wedding feast.

Matthew 22:11–13 “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness.’”

At first glance, it appears the king, who in the parable is God, was rather harsh to the one guest who was not properly dressed. However, it is believed that the custom at that time was to have special garments for such occasions. Since many of the guests in the parable would most likely not have these special garments (like the guests who were gathered from the highways), the king probably provided the garments for his guests. These “new garments” were often given as presents. Kings would sometimes show their generosity by presenting them. To be invited to the king’s feast, and to be provided the appropriate attire, but refuse to wear it, would certainly invoke the king’s anger. Therefore, we can then imagine God calling us into fellowship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, and then providing us the appropriate attire to wear, the characteristics of His Son, and how we ought to thankfully put them on.

After commanding the Colossian believers to “put away” worldly behaviors, Paul offered several things they were to put on that are fit for God’s people. Paul acknowledged that they had put on the new self. Now he said they were to put on specific characteristics of Christ – characteristics of the new self. The Christian is a new person, but he or she must learn to act like it. The way I understand this is that a follower of Jesus is a new person in Christ; therefore, he or she should now wear the personality that matches the new self. You are now in God’s family; therefore, wear the King’s clothes that match your new life. Dress like royalty because you are now a child of the King. Paul called the Colossians to a holy lifestyle, consistent with their new Christian identity. They were to live up to what they were now in Christ by having the following virtues:

- Compassionate hearts
- Kindness
- Humility
- Meekness
- Patience

The new clothing of the Christian begins with these personal attributes. This list suggests attitudes and behavior we ought to have as the Body of Christ – how we ought to treat one another in the church. Paul then followed up with three more:

- Bearing with one another
- Forgiving each other
- Put on love

Bearing with one another is putting up with each other even when the other fails or acts differently from what is expected. Forgiving each other is based on the forgiveness we each have received. God has bestowed grace on us and forgiven us our sin; therefore, we must forgive each other. If you notice carefully, these two characteristics speak to the one who is offended, not the one who offends us. We are called to take the initiative in bearing with one another and forgiving one another, rather than waiting for the offender to apologize. Anyone can hold grudges, but the mark of the new self, of the follower of Christ, is that we do not. We forgive regardless.

Of these attributes of the new self, Paul singled out one characteristic above all others – love. Like forgiveness, those who have received much love, should also return much love for God, the world, and each other. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so as His disciples, we must love God and love one another. After all, this is the Greatest Commandment. Paul advocated love as the fulfillment of the law. Love is above all other qualities and is the thing that binds them together.

Be Filled with the Peace of Christ

The second thing Paul mentioned in this passage was to call the church to harmony. The peace of Christ was to rule in the believers’ hearts. Peace is a common expression in Paul’s letters. Peace is the quiet disposition that results when people are committed to the lordship of Christ. We have reason to have peace. We have been redeemed and brought back into fellowship with God. The Prince of Peace has purchased our peace by His very own blood. No matter what happens, we can trust God and have peace

regarding our place before God as well as our future life with Him. Although peace is generally an individual matter, in this passage Paul addressed the church. Paul advocated that peace guide all of the church's collective activities. Thus, rather than speak of our personal peace, Paul stressed harmony within the church. The church ought to be filled with the peace that Christ provides. Peace should guide our every thought and deed. We ought to strive for unity and harmony in the church.

Always Be Thankful

At the end of verse fifteen, Paul wrote, "and be thankful." Thankfulness is something Paul repeatedly mentioned throughout the letter, whether it was his thankfulness or the Colossians'. Just in this passage alone, Paul mentioned thankfulness three times in three verses. Might this be important? I think so. Paul ended his exhortation of being filled with the peace of Christ with the command to be thankful. The Colossians were to become thankful persons while having the peace of Christ.

Being thankful and having peace are related. Generally, when the church lacks peace and harmony it probably results from self-seeking or dissatisfaction with things as they are. If you are not happy with the way things are going, or if you want things to be done your way, and it's not being done your way, then it will most likely result in disharmony within the group. Being thankful points one to the realization that all things are provided in Christ. There is little room for ill will or bitterness if thankfulness prevails. If your attitude is that of thankfulness to God for what He has done and continues to do, then you may have little time for dissatisfaction and disharmony.

Let God's Word Direct You

In verse sixteen, Paul wrote the following:

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..."

The word of Christ probably refers to the church's teaching about Christ as well as the words Christ spoke that were passed on to believers after Jesus ascended to heaven. For us today, we can understand this to be the complete Word of God that is the authority for the faith we have. The word of Christ, like the peace of Christ, becomes a measure of church life. Before anything the church does, Christians should answer two questions: Is the peace of Christ present in the congregation at this point? And is what we are doing consistent with, and will it promote knowledge of, the word of Christ?

The word of Christ included that which is taught and admonished among the members of the church. This involves any teaching ministry of the church, whether that is the pastor or other teachers in the church. This also includes the church members teaching each other the ways of God. We ought to all know God's Word, obey God's Word and teach God's Word to each other. Each member ought to encourage and teach one another with God's Word. When you see a brother or sister struggling with their faith, lift him or her up by the word of Christ.

It is interesting how Paul envisioned the teaching and admonishing in the church. One way was through song. When we gather together for worship, music and song have a

teaching function. This was particularly important in Paul's day, as he wrote that the word of Christ should dwell in them through "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Music is a powerful gift of God and we should, and I hope we do, teach God's Word through it. The music, however, must be secondary to the message it conveys. In the church, music and singing is appropriate only when it is pointing to Christ, encouraging believers to live out their Christian faith, and promoting the sharing of the Gospel to unbelievers.

Give Glory to Jesus in Everything

The last point Paul made in this passage regarding the new self was in regards to the purpose and reason for all that we do:

Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

This verse closely resembles another statement Paul wrote to a different church. To the Corinthians, he wrote, "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Whatever we do ought to be done to make much of Jesus Christ. Worship is responding to God in such a way that gives Him the honor that is due to Him. We should gratefully offer to God all the good gifts He has given us, praising Him for who He is, for what He has done for us, and desire for Him to increase in glory. "In the name of the Lord Jesus" also means that the church ought to do nothing apart from God's direction, approval, and purposes. The Church's actions should be in harmony with God's revealed will, under His authority, and in dependence on His power. The Church is the Body of Christ and ought to do everything according to His revealed will and for the purpose of glorifying and making Him known to all nations.

Conclusion

In closing, followers of Jesus Christ should cease doing the old ways of their former self that do not match their new identity in Christ. Instead, they should focus on the new ways that include the virtues of Christ, having peace, being thankful, following God's Word and giving glory to Jesus Christ in all things. We ought to wear the uniform of our King and represent Him well. When our community sees the Church, what do they see? Do they see followers of Jesus Christ where "Christ is all and in all?" and where we do everything in the name of Jesus Christ? Or, do they see lukewarm Christians who are holding on their former ways and really have no distinction from the rest of the world? God's Word says put off the old self and put on Christ – the new self!

The hymn "Just As I Am" is possibly the most well-known invitational hymn. This song became an altar call song in the Billy Graham crusades in the latter half of the twentieth century. The hymn was written by Charlotte Elliott in 1835. Her health was broken and made her bitter. One evening while discussing her condition with a minister, she asked, "What is your cure?" The minister responded, "The faith you are trying to despise." Charlotte finally softened and asked how to become a Christian. The minister said that she should give herself to God "just as you are now," with all her failings. We have to come to God just as we are, but once we trust in His Son as Lord and Savior, God does not leave us just as we are. He works within us to mold us into the image of His Son.

Perhaps you are seeing no evidence of change in your life. Maybe you have never turned from your old self and turned to Christ for salvation. Today can be the day that you become a new person. Today can be the day that you know the joy, hope and peace of a right relationship with God. The good news is that we have a Savior and whosoever believes in Jesus Christ, will be saved and have eternal life. Or, maybe you are frustrated with how slow God seems to be working in your life. Maybe you are hindering God's work in your life. Turn to Him and place your complete trust in Him. Put off the old self and put on the new self – the Christian self. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!