

The Christian's New Clothes

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our reading, and Fraser is going to be preaching to us from the book of Colossians. So please turn in your Bibles. We have visitor Bibles at the back and at the side if you'd like to grab a Bible.

And we're in Colossians chapter 3 this morning, page 984, if you have a visitor Bible, 984. Colossians 3, and we are picking up the reading there at verse 5.

So Colossians 3 and verse 5. The Apostle Paul writes, Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these, you too once walked when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away.

Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

[1 : 25] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

Put on, then, as God's chosen one, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which, indeed, you are called in one body.

And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 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.

[2 : 44] Amen. May God bless his word to us this morning. Well, good morning, everyone, and good morning to those at Queen's Park and Bath Street as well.

Please do grab a Bible and open it again to Colossians chapter 3. Now, our church here has a uniform.

If you're new or visiting with us, you might have already picked up on that. If you look around you or if you're paying attention and observing people at the end, I think you'll be able to work it out.

As I look out on the platform here, I think pretty much everyone has their uniform on today. And I'm confident those at Bath Street and Queen's Park will as well. And if you're new to church and maybe not yet Christian, I hope that in time you too will come to start wearing this uniform, because this is what all Christians should be wearing.

Now, you might be relieved at this point to know that I'm not talking about chinos or quarter zips. But actually, this uniform is not about our physical clothing. It's about our spiritual clothing.

[3 : 55] In our passage this morning, Paul, the apostle who wrote this, uses language of putting off and putting on. He's teaching the church in Colossae that as Christians, they need to be properly dressed.

They need to take off their filthy, stinking clothes that belong to their former life of sin and instead put on the beautiful garments and adornments that are in keeping with their new life in Christ.

So it's off with the immorality, the impurity and the evil desire. And it's on with compassion, patience and love. As people who have been filled in Christ, as people who have died with Christ and been raised to new life in him, we need to be clothed with that which is fitting with our new identity.

And this is what real Christian growth and maturity looks like. We've seen previously in Colossians that there were those in Colossae who were seeking to divide the church, trying to convince

ordinary Christian believers that in order to grow, they needed to move past the so-called basic doctrines of Christ.

They needed to transcend these basics and start having visions and attain to a higher spiritual level. But Paul says that's not what real Christian growth looks like at all.

[5 : 17] Real Christian growth and maturity grows up into Christ, not away from him and not beyond him. Now we've got to be careful here. As Christians, we're not saved by our works.

We don't get into heaven on the basis of doing good things or tidying up our act a bit. Our forgiveness is based entirely on the work of Jesus and on the promise of God to forgive those who trust in him.

But as those who have been raised with Christ, our life should look different to how they looked before. So this isn't about earning salvation, but about living it out.

And that's why you'll see throughout this passage statements which may at first appear contradictory. Because Paul says in one breath that the Colossians have put off the old self and in the next that they must put off.

But both things are true. Look back at chapter 2 verse 20 quickly. As Christians, we have died to the elemental spirits of the world. And chapter 3 verse 1, we have been raised with Christ.

[6 : 21] If you are a Christian here today, that is definitely true of you. But because it's true of you, because of that fact, you now need to live out that salvation with fear and trembling.

Not in a way which is wavering or uncertain, thinking that you're topping up your salvation, but standing on the solid rock of Christ, who is your Savior, and following his example.

So we're going to look at the passage in two sections. And firstly, let's look at verses 5 to 11, where Paul teaches us that we need to put sin to death. Depending on the grace of God, we must, as Paul puts it, put to death what is earthly in us, or put off the old self.

Now, for starters, this is good sartorial advice. If you've been out working in the garden, for example, and you come in ready to go out for dinner at a restaurant somewhere, you can't just stick a jacket on top of your muddy old clothes.

No, you've got to take off your muddy old clothes and maybe have a nice hot shower as well. But more than being good sartorial advice, this is also good spiritual advice. We can't just put on a little bit of compassion, a little bit of forgiveness here and there, and hope that it'll mask the stench of sin which lies beneath.

[7 : 37] And Paul doesn't mince his words here, does he? He says, we've got to put sin to death. Not just to try and manage it, but to mortify it. Paul includes in these verses two lists of things which must be put to death.

Verse five, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. And verse eight, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene, or perhaps better translated, abusive talk, and lying to one another.

Now this isn't a comprehensive list of all the possible sins that we might commit. It's not a checklist of things that if we tick them all off, we'll be in God's good books.

No, Paul here isn't just thinking about the individual particular sins, but about sin as a whole way of life. Of course, these are sinful things, things which we ought not to do.

But the point here is that these things belong to a way of life, a way of life which is set against God, the old self, the earthly self, a life which is lived for self and not for God.

[8 : 44] And notice too that all of these things which Paul lists are things which are both symptoms and causes of broken and disordered relationships, things which divide people from one another and damage our relationships.

And that's what sin does, isn't it? Sin divides us from God and divides us from one another. Well, Paul begins in verse five with sexual immorality, impurity and passion.

And there's perhaps a prevailing view in our society today that in the realms of sex and relationships, we should just live and let live. As long as everyone's consenting, then it's no business of anyone else what's going on.

It doesn't affect anyone else. It doesn't divide us. But friends, that's just not true, is it? So much pain and heartbreak is caused by misbehavior in this realm.

Even where perhaps it might seem like a private or individual issue, it always affects others too.

Take pornography as an example. The pornography industry today is booming like never before, feeding on these very things which Paul lists, sexual immorality, impurity, uncontrolled passions.

[10:00] Over 50% of men and 20% of women in the UK regularly watch online pornography. And the average age of first exposure is only 12. And this isn't just a problem out there in the world for us as Christians to tut at on our high horses because this is a problem within the church today as well.

A recent study found that 75% of Christian men and over 40% of Christian women had reported using pornography at some point. And over half of them said they were comfortable with their use of it.

Friends, we need to be realistic about these things. Just as it was in Paul's day in Colossae, sexual immorality, impurity, and passion are real problems within the church as well as outside of it. Pornography promises satisfaction and pleasure. And it might deliver in small fleeting doses, but the pleasure will soon give way to shame and dissatisfaction. And it's not just a private sense of shame.

The problems don't end there because what is this pornography epidemic doing to our ability to love, to form relationships? What's it doing to the desire to marry and to have families?

[11:15] What is it doing to the health of those relationships when they are formed? Friends, these are serious and painful issues. This is just one example. But there are issues on every level, individually, in our networks of relationships, and on a societal level.

But Paul says the response as Christians is that we must put these things to death. These sorts of behaviors should have no part within the life of the Christian and the life of the church.

And so too with the other things in Paul's list in verse 5. Evil desire, covetousness, which is idolatry. It would be a foolish church which thought it had no problem with these things.

Isn't that right? Our hearts can make an idol of almost anything. It could be that you covet someone else's relationship. You look at their marriage and their family and idolize having that for yourself. you see that as the answer to your loneliness. Perhaps as an answer to your problem with lust. Or it could be that you covet and desire a particular lifestyle.

[12:25] You want the job and the money that allows you to travel the world whenever you want. Even if it means taking you away from church for large chunks of the year. It could even be a role within church.

You've got your eye on serving in a particular way. You feel you're gifted there but you're not given the opportunity to do it. Indeed, perhaps these sorts of attitudes could lead to some of the problems that Paul goes on to speak about in verse 8.

It could be anger towards your boss because you're not given that promotion you think you deserve or because you think you're giving an unfair workload. It could be abusive language which hurts and belittles someone else that you're jealous of.

So you might resort to malicious and slanderous gossip, spreading lies about someone, seeking to bring them down or to divide them from their networks of friends. See, these things are not disconnected.

They're not isolated issues. And this is Paul's point. When it comes to sin, it's never disconnected. It's never merely individual.

[13:28] It's always interconnected. Our sin affects not only us but the whole body of Christ. Look at how Paul ends this section in verse 11 with these words.

He says, Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave free, but Christ is all and in all. And on first reading it might seem like a bit of a digression, an odd way to end this section on putting off the old self, on dealing with sin.

Why would Paul bring this up now? But it actually makes perfect sense because Paul is not writing this letter to any individual but to the church. And brothers and sisters, we need to reckon with the fact that, well, we are just that.

We are brothers and sisters. In church, we are a family. We are a body united together under Christ's headship and lordship. He is all and in all.

If something major happens to one member of your family, a diagnosis or a divorce or a death, it has an effect on the whole family, doesn't it?

[14:39] And the same is true here. Damage done to one member of the family of Christ has an impact on the whole family. So we need to be careful not to over-individualize our sin.

We are individually responsible but we need to reckon with the impact on the body as a whole. And so perhaps we once walked in these sorts of things. Perhaps pornography has been a struggle or

even a guilty pleasure for you.

Perhaps you had a short fuse and you were prone to outbursts of anger. Perhaps you indulge in gossip and slander. Well, that's got to go. All of it.

This sort of behavior has no part in the life of the church because we have died to the old self. We have been raised with Christ. That's not who we are anymore. Our identity is now in Christ.

He is all and he is in all and together as one body we are being renewed after the image of our creator. As I know these are difficult and painful issues.

[15 : 43] It's not comfortable to be confronted with your own sin. It's not easy to fight it. It's a battle. It always will be. But because it's not easy we need to help and encourage one another as we do this.

We need to help each other daily to put off the old self and put on the new. There are numerous ways we could do that. It could be building good friendships. Friendships where we can turn in times of struggle and difficulty.

And good friendships won't just spring out of thin air. We need to work at them. We need to be intentional about it. Having good friendships is a vital way for us to keep going in the fight against sin and to help one another as we do that.

Or it could be in your growth group. Our new term begins this week. So why not think about how you could help one another in this way? And it will also happen as we gather together on Sundays and as the preaching of the word confronts us with our sin that's still in our hearts and we can talk through the implications with our brothers and sisters after the service.

We don't all have the same struggles but we do all struggle. So let's help one another in whatever way we can to battle sin and to put it to death.

[17 : 05] Let's look on now to verses 12 to 17 where Paul teaches us that having put off the old self we must now put on the new self put on Christ's likeness. Now Paul's not done with his sartorial advice because his advice isn't just to strip off your old clothes and stand naked and ashamed of what you've done.

No, in verse 12 to 16 he tells the church they need to put on their new clothes. We need to get properly dressed. It's not just that we need to try hard to avoid behavior which might divide us and do damage to our relationships but we also need to actively and intentionally cultivate good relationships healthy relationships.

And again before we jump into the detail notice how Paul addresses the believers in Colossae here. He says they are God's chosen ones holy and beloved. And it's not by putting on these things exhibiting these things in our lives which makes us holy and beloved or loved by God.

He's already done that. He loved us while we were weak while we were enemies of God and died to make us holy. We are none of these things because of what we do but because we are all of these things we need to live accordingly.

So this isn't a fancy dress costume we're putting on. We're not dressing up as something that we're not. We're simply putting on the clothing and the adornments which are fitting with what Christ has already done for us with what we have already been made in him.

[18 : 39] In essence Paul's command is to be what you are. Just scan over verses 12 to 16 again and look at the description which Paul gives. It's a beautiful picture of what the Christian life is like isn't it?

Wouldn't you love to be friends with this sort of person? Wouldn't you love to be part of a community which lived like this? Wouldn't you yourself like to become more like this?

Well this shouldn't surprise us because these descriptors are pointing to what a Christ-like life looks like. Indeed they're pointing to what Christ himself looks like. And so as Christians who are being remade in his image this is what we should be exhibiting in our lives.

This is the uniform that we need to be wearing. Now it isn't going to happen overnight and in this age we're never going to be able to do it perfectly. It's going to take time.

There will be many ups and downs along the way. But the response to that shouldn't be just to wallow in self-pity and declare it impossible. Instead we should keep going and depending on the grace of God day by day we should seek to put off the old self and put on the new.

[19 : 56] And so it's worth thinking about the ways which we can put these things into practice in our lives. Maybe someone shares something with you that they're struggling with.

A difficult situation that they're going through perhaps. And actually you're just really tired and weary. You've been up all night with the kids. You've had a long week at work. And the last thing you need is someone else's problems on top of all of that.

Well what would it look like for you in that situation to show compassion and kindness and love? Or maybe you become aware that some sort of gossip about you has been circulating around church and everyone seems to know about it.

Rather than assuming the worst and going on the offensive straight away, what would it look like for you in that situation to respond with humility, patience, and forgiveness like that which you have been shown in the Lord Jesus?

And above all, how can you put on love more and more in your life? Paul says it's love that's like the belt which binds everything together and keeps the rest of our new clothes in place.

[21 : 06] It's no good putting on nice new trousers and a shirt if by the time you're walking out the door your shirt's hanging out and your trousers are closer to your ankles than your waist. Now love doesn't come easy all the time and some people are easier to love than others but nevertheless it's something we must do.

Our love for our brothers and sisters with whom we have been called together in one body is a sign of our love for God. It's a sign of the Spirit's work in our hearts.

In 1 John it says whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love God does not know God because God is love. Now this is a challenge to us all and perhaps you like me feel like you're falling miserably short of this beautiful picture.

But if you are going on prayerfully seeking to do this and asking for the Spirit's power to transform you then over time you will see a change. It can be a wonderfully encouraging thing to look back over a long period of time and to see a change.

Not to look back in pride or self-righteousness at how good you are but humbly to look back with thankfulness at what the Lord has been doing in your life.

[22 : 33] the way he has been at work in your heart renewing you after his likeness. John Newton was a slave trader before he came to faith in the Lord Jesus and his life was transformed and he summed this up when he said I am not what I ought to be I am not what I want to be I am not what I hope to be in another world but still I am not what I once was and by the grace of God I am what I am not what I ought to be not what I want to be not what I hope to be in another world not what I once used to be and by the grace of God I am what I am and it's an amazing thing isn't it when someone you know comes to faith and you begin to see their life changing their habits their language their behavior are all different and you can tangibly see the work of the spirit in their lives or at the other end of the Christian life when you spend time with an older saint who over many years of faithful service and devotion has come more and more to exhibit these new self characteristics and there's a sweetness and a grace to their whole personality a quiet wisdom and a warmth in their voice as they speak words of encouragement to you and friends there are many many examples of this at both ends of the spectrum in our church family here people whose lives have recently been turned around by the gospel and people who are still going and still growing after 70 80 even 90 years walking with the

Lord none of them perfect but all of them living breathing proof that the gospel works and it really does bring people from death to life and perhaps you're here today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian maybe you've been coming for a few weeks and you've noticed something of this in the people that you've spoken to here I know we're far far from perfect but perhaps you have felt something of God's love which binds us together as Christians and maybe you recognize too something of the brokenness in your own heart maybe you recognize some of what Paul was speaking about in verses 5 to 11 of being true of you well if that is you I would urge you today to repent of your sin and to put your trust in the Lord Jesus because he does have the power to change lives and he loves to do it all of us here who are

Christians are in the same boat we're not any better than anyone else but we are all sinners whose lives have been changed forever by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and he could do that for you too well in the final few verses Paul gives us some practical tips things which might help us if we are seeking as a church family to become more Christ-like firstly at the end of verse 15 he says be thankful now we often think about thankfulness as just something that we feel but it's interesting that Paul here gives a command to be thankful he actually does it three times in as many verses here and as Christians we have so much to be thankful for we can often forget I think just how

blessed we are how blessed we are to be brought into relationship with God and how blessed we are to be brought into relationship with one another maybe some of you will know the old hymn which says when upon life's billows you are tempest tossed when you are discouraged thinking all is lost count your many blessings name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done and there's a great truth to that isn't there it's a good exercise to go through when you are feeling discouraged or perhaps weighed down by the weight of your own sinfulness count your blessings count the things that you can give thanks to God for name them one by one and it may well surprise you what the Lord has done so be thankful secondly in verse 16 let the word of Christ dwell richly in you as a church family if we want to grow in Christ likeness we need to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly St.

Ferguson said on these verses that we can't expect the word of Christ to dwell richly in us if we don't spend time dwelling richly in the word of Christ and that's true too isn't it if we want to be more like Christ we need to spend time dwelling in his word and seeking him where he is to be found so that means spending meaningful time in God's word through the week maybe using our daily bible reading notes from James Philip it means committing to your growth group or release the word group or at Tron youth where we prioritize opening up the word in groups together and most of all it means making the most of our Sunday gatherings this is the main place where we're going to be fed from God's word as it's read and as it's taught for us as we gather together and perhaps it's another blessing which we often don't count but we are so blessed here to be exposed to faithful bible teaching week after week and I'm doing my best to keep that up just now but we need to receive that with thankfulness we need to let it dwell richly within us we need to let God's word get deep into our pores so that it fills our thinking and our acting it's interesting the way Paul puts it in verse 16 isn't it let the word of Christ dwell in you richly suggests that there is a way to sit under faithful bible teaching week after week and yet to resist it to harden your heart and reject it but we mustn't do that we need to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly as we come humbly and prayerfully to hear it and let the spirit do his work of transformation as the word is preached to us and then thirdly verse 16 teach and admonish one another in all wisdom singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in our hearts to

[29 : 04] God they were not only to be passive receivers in church and the man in the pulpit whoever he is is not the only one who is teaching Paul is saying here that actually our singing in church is a means by which we teach and admonish one another it's common and perhaps tempting to think of our singing primarily on a vertical plane about us and God and of course we are doing that we are singing to God worshipping him praising him praying to him responding to him in song all of these are true but we should also think of it on a horizontal plane we're singing to one another we are teaching and admonishing one another as we sing and this is one of the reasons why we try to choose hymns which are sound and substantial hymns which tie in with the message of the passage so that as we sing together we are teaching and encouraging and admonishing one another in line with what we're hearing from God's word and notice it's not only what we sing that's important our attitude when we sing is important too

Paul says sing with thankfulness in our hearts to God and I might add if you can manage to connect the thankfulness in your heart to the muscles which make your face smile all the better it's so encouraging standing up here as we're singing and seeing people who are clearly moved and impacted by what we're singing a couple of years ago I went to see Borussia Dortmund play Manchester City and I was in the stand which is nicknamed the yellow wall and let me tell you these guys sing with passion they were singing in German so I couldn't tell you what they were singing but I could tell that they were passionate about it there was something powerful about being there in that stadium and wouldn't it be great if our singing had the same effect wouldn't it be great if visitors came amongst!

us and even if they didn't quite understand everything that we were singing that they could see and hear what it means to us as we sing it as Christians our God is so much greater than any football team the things we have to sing about are so much better than what they have to sing about so we should be able to put even the yellow wall to shame with our singing well in closing just look again at verse 17 in all the battling that we do with sin with all our efforts in loving one another this is how Paul sums up what our new life in Christ should look whatever you do in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him and isn't that a delightful thing there is no part no aspect of our life which is untouched by the gospel there's not one square

inch of our life over which

Christ is not Lord nothing that doesn't matter to him nothing he doesn't care about Christ died to bring our whole lives into submission under his rule he died to bring us into relationship with God he ascended to heaven where he reigns and he has sent the spirit upon us to work in our hearts and shape us and change us to be more like him until he comes again in glory so brothers and sisters whatever you do in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ giving thanks to God the Father through him amen let's pray living and eternal God how we thank you for the wonderful thing you have done in bringing us from death to life and bringing us together as one body help us we pray as we seek to do battle with sin give us the strength to put off our old self and to fight temptation give us the grace to love each other and to live lives which follow the pattern of your son the

Lord Jesus shape us by your spirit more into his likeness and bring every aspect of our life into submission to his lordship this day and every day until he comes again in glory!

[33 : 30] Amen!