

The Christians' New Clothes

Series: Seeing the Invisible

Colossians 3:5-14

Introduction: Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, once said, **'The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.'** I find that hard to argue with because at the end of the day, every single part of our lives involves relationships.

Just think about it. Your spiritual life is determined by your relationship with God. Your Christian life is determined by your relationship with fellow believers. Your vocational life is determined by your relationship with your employees, your boss and your fellow workers. Your social life is determined by your relationship with your friends. Your family life is determined by your relationship with your spouse and kids. At the end of the day, life is about making those relationships work.

It doesn't take you long, even as a child, to realize it is hard work. As you go through life it doesn't get easier. Relationships are difficult, because we are all different in so many ways. Like one bad apple can spoil the whole barrel, one bad relationship encounter can spoil your day.

There is an old poem that says it all perfectly.

To live there above with those that we love
Won't that be heaven's glory?
But to live here below with those we know
That's another story.

There is nothing as beautiful as a harmonious relationship and there is nothing as burdensome as a hurtful relationship.

In this part of Colossians, chapter 3, we get to a more practical aspect of the Christian life and Paul's basic message is: **'you have received new life in Christ, so now get rid of those sinful things that were part of your old life.'**

Let's read Colossians 3:5-11

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” [NIV]

Let's

PRAY

Title of today's message is: The Christians' New Clothes

So first let's look at the command to get rid of the sinful things in your life. Paul uses two metaphors to describe getting rid of sin. He talks about putting to death and taking off clothes.

I. Get Rid of the Sinful Things in Your Life

A. Put Them to Death

Look at verse 5: Paul says, ***“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”***

“Whatever belongs to your earthly nature” refers to the sinful practices and tendencies that reside in your body.

Now ***“put to death”*** may sound extreme, and it is. But that's because sin is an extreme situation. **Sin defies God, it defiles the person, and it destroys human relationships.** And so, the proper response to sin is not to treat it casually but to kill it. You don't trick it, train it or tame it; you terminate it. You don't ignore it or put it aside, you put it to death!

It makes it sound like you can kill it off and then that's it! It's all gone. I killed it! I put lust and greed to death and never again shall I ever have to worry about them! It sounds wonderful but 'Death' and 'kill' in this passage doesn't mean

without life or ceasing to exist. When you look this word up in the Greek it is '***used metaphorically meaning to deaden, to deprive of force and vigor.***'

How is it deadened or deprived of force and power? This can only be done with the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not within our power.

Once again this relates back to the new life you received in Christ. You need to connect verse 5 – ***“Put to death”*** back to verse 3 – ***“You died.”*** You died with Christ, but still fight a battle against sin. You died, so put sinful things to death.

We read in Romans 8:13: ***“For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”***

John Owen was a pastor in 1600's, and he had a famous saying: ***“Be killing sin, or it will be killing you!”*** We are to be merciful to sinners but ruthless with sin.

It is interesting to see the types of things that were present and causing issues back when Paul wrote this is still happening today: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, greed or covetousness... Just so you know, this passage is addressed to Christians. Because of the sinful nature and the flood of these things in the world, no one should consider themselves immune to such things.

So that's the first image Paul uses: “putting to death.” And then the second image is that of taking off clothes.

B. Remove them like clothing (8-9)

Paul starts with the outward acts and then moves to the inward motives. ***“But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices...”***

The ***“but now”*** at the beginning of verse 8 indicates something has changed. You are a new creation in Christ. All things have become new.

The word translated ***“rid yourselves”*** in verse 8 is a word that means ***“to put off or to lay something aside.”*** It is the same word that is translated “taken off” in verse 9. Paul used this same word twice in chapter two. We saw it back in Colossians 2:11 which talked about “the putting off of the sinful nature.”

And then we saw it again in Colossians 2:15 where we read that at the cross Christ “disarmed” or stripped the powers and authorities.

The common idea behind all these verses is removing something like clothing. Since you have already taken off your old self – literally “the old man,” that is, who you were before Christ – now you must also take off the sinful practices that accompanied your old life.

As a believer in Christ what do you do with the sinful things in your life? God says, get rid of them. Put them to death and remove them like an old piece of clothing. So that’s the command from this section of Scripture. Next Paul gives us specific examples of sinful things we should get rid of.

II. Examples of Sinful Things We Should Get Rid of

Paul gives us ten examples in two lists of five, each of the types of sin we should be getting rid of in our lives. The first list emphasizes sexual sins. The second list emphasizes social sins.

A. Sexual sins – sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed/which is idolatry

The first list appears in verse 5. Once again, this list emphasizes primarily sexual sins. Paul says these are some of the things you must put to death in your life: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” (Colossians 3:5)

1. The word translated **“sexual immorality”** in this verse is a general word that refers to any sexual activity apart from marriage between a man and a woman. This would include premarital sexual relations, extra-marital sexual relations, homosexual relations, and even such things as pornography. Paul says as a believer in Jesus Christ you must put these things to death.
2. The word translated **“impurity”** is a general word for uncleanness. It reminds us that any sexual activity outside of marriage is unclean in God’s sight. Sex within marriage is holy and sanctified. But any sexual activity

outside of marriage is unclean and defiles the persons involved.

3. **Lust** is the passion or desire for sexual activity outside of marriage.
4. **Evil desires** refer to wrong desires which lead to wrong actions.
5. And **greed** refers to covetousness or the desire to have more than what is rightfully yours.

Now **greed** is a broad term. It can be the desire to have more money, have more things, the desire to have more power, the desire to have more fame. But it can also refer to the desire to have more sexually than is rightfully yours. That's why when the tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet," it specifically includes, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." (Exodus 20:17)

Also notice that **greed is further identified with idolatry**. Greed is desiring that which is not lawfully yours. It means that you are not content with God or with what God has given you. It means that you are seeking what you desire instead of what God desires. Idolatry is setting your hearts and minds on earthly things rather than things above.

Now the Bible also connects sexual immorality with idolatry. We read in Romans 1: ***"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen."*** (Romans 1:24-25)

The Bible says sexual sin is an example of worshiping and serving created things rather than the creator. And isn't that the very definition of idolatry?

God says put it death. Get rid of it. Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.

B. Social sins – anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, lying

And then Paul moves on from this list of sexual sins to a list of social sins. These are sins which we often consider not so bad, more socially acceptable, everyone

does them. We think, "They're not really sins, are they? I mean would these things really keep a person out of heaven?" And God says, Sin is sin, and we must get rid of all such things.

Anger and rage are similar, but the word anger here refers more to a settled attitude of anger whereas rage refers more to sudden outbursts.

Malice is the intention to hurt another person. It is the attitude of ill-will that either wishes or does harm to another. Malice is glad when the other person is hurting and sorry when they do well. It is the opposite of Romans 12 which tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Slander is speech which brings injury to another's reputation.

And **filthy language** can refer either to dirty speech or abusive language. The two are often combined, especially when you're angry.

And then Paul adds **lying** to the list. This is another major sin of speech which Paul singles out as a particularly bad for the community of Christ.

These are all interpersonal sins which damage relationships and disrupt Christian community. God says get rid of them. Don't wear them anymore.

We find similar instructions in Ephesians 5:3-4 ***"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."***

Someone might say, "It's only words. Jesus said, ***"I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words, you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."*** (Matthew 12:36-37)

Sometimes we enter the new day without feeling overly compassionate, gentle, kind or patient. And that can be before we meet... people! As Albert Einstein apparently said, "The problem with the speed of light is that it comes too early in the morning!"

So how does it work? How can these positive virtues be seen in our lives? The ability to do what the Bible commands here is not possible with the flesh. When we are reading the Bible as a list of commands that we must obey and we don't take God into account then we are setting ourselves up for failure. In fact, there are 6 words that cannot ever be ignored. They are the words of Jesus: ***'Without me you can do nothing.'***

D.L Moody rightly said, ***'Out of one hundred men, one will read the Bible, the other ninety-nine will read the Christian.'***

Paul gets very specific and tells us to put these things to death, and to remove them like old pieces of clothing.

III. Four reasons why we should get rid of these things

A. God's wrath is coming because of these things

That's what we read in verse 6: ***"Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."*** (Colossians 3:6) God's wrath is God's righteous anger against sin. God is holy and will not tolerate sin.

Now what are the two main times where God poured out His wrath and judgment upon the earth in the Old Testament? And, incidentally, they are the same two times that Jesus used as an illustration of what it would be like leading up to the days of His return. What are they? 'As it was in the days of Noah...' and 'as it was in the days of Lot...' So, what characterized those days?

Gen 6:11-12 now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

The days of Noah were characterized by violence and the days of Lot by sexual sin - specifically homosexuality. That's an indication of what things will be like leading up to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Now as God's children we need not fear God's wrath. However, we should also not participate in those things which will provoke his wrath. Ephesians 5:5-7 ***"For of***

this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be partners with them.”

Why should you get rid of these things in your life?

B. These things belong to your old way of life

Look at verse 7: ***“You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.”*** (Colossians 3:7) You already lived this way before you came to Christ. And when you came to Christ, you came asking for forgiveness and deliverance.

Romans 6:21-23 puts it this way: ***“What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

C. God is making you into someone new

Look at verses 9-10: ***“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 knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*** (Colossians 3:9-10)

Once again, Paul uses clothing imagery here. He says you have taken off your old self with its practices and put on the new self. You’ve already changed clothes. Why put on the old self again?

Let’s say you are working in the garden all morning and then you have a wedding to go to in the afternoon. You wouldn’t put your wedding clothes on over your dirty clothes. You would take the dirty clothes off first.

God is making you into someone new. That’s what verse 10 is saying: ***“You have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*** (Colossians 3:10)

Notice the importance of knowledge in this verse. There is no spiritual growth without knowledge of God. And where do we get this knowledge? From the word of God. **As you grow in your knowledge of God through his word, you are being renewed in the image of God.** We learned earlier in Colossians that Jesus is the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15), and so this means you are growing to be more like Jesus.

We read in Ephesians 4:22-24 ***“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”***

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, ***“We ... are being transformed into his likeness.”***

Four reasons why we should get rid of these things

- A. *God’s wrath is coming because of these things*
- B. *These things belong to your old way of life*
- C. *God is making you into someone new*

D. In Christ all the man-made barriers have been removed

Look at verse 11 with me where Paul writes: ***“Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”*** (Colossians 3:11)

Getting rid of the sexual sins in your life is all about holiness.
Getting rid of the social sins is all about harmony.

The new self in Christ is not just the transformation of the individual but also of our relationships with each other. It’s not just doing away with sinful patterns or habits but also with the man-made barriers that divide us.

So what are these man-made barriers that have been removed in Christ? Paul names four of them: ***racial, religious, cultural and social barriers.***

1. First, Paul says, ***“there is no Greek or Jew.”*** This refers to racial barriers. In Christ all racial barriers have been removed. We are all one human race,

and we are not to discriminate against anyone based on race.

2. Next Paul says, “there is no **circumcised or uncircumcised.**” This refers to religious barriers within Christianity. It doesn’t mean that all religions in the world are valid. We know that’s not true because Jesus is the only way to God. Rather it means we should not cause divisions in the body of Christ over religious traditions or preferences.
3. Thirdly Paul says, “there is no **barbarian or Scythian.**” This refers to cultural barriers. Barbarian is what the Greeks called anyone who was not a Greek. The Scythians, who came from what is now Russia and Siberia, were viewed as the lowest and worst barbarians of them all.
4. And then fourthly Paul says, **“there is no slave or free.”** This refers to social barriers – things like social or economic status, what we often call “class divisions” today.

Paul says in Christ these barriers have all been removed. They have no bearing or relevance on your new life in Christ, but Christ is all and is in all. “Christ is all” means Christ is all that matters. “Christ is in all” means that Christ is in each of these as believers, so how can you discriminate against them?

It’s interesting, this passage in Colossians takes place in the wider context of your union with Christ as symbolized by your baptism in Christ.

We read in Galatians 3: ***“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*** (Galatians 3:26-28)

Or again in 1 Corinthians 12:13: ***“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”***

We were all baptized into one body. Christ is the head of one body, and the body of Christ takes precedence over all man-made barriers and divisions.

TRANSITION: *You have been given new life in Christ. You died with Christ; you have been raised with Christ; now Christ tells you to get rid of the sinful things in your life. So now here we are standing around like the emperor with no clothes, so we need to put something on.*

IV. The Clothes We Wear

One of the biggest decisions we have to make almost every day of our lives is what we are going to wear. It doesn't matter whether you are going to work, to the grocery store, or to the doctor.

Paul begins by saying that if you truly are a follower of Jesus, if you truly love Jesus, you are going to live for Jesus and look like Jesus. You've got to wear His clothes, so he says, ***“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”*** (Colossians 3:12, NIV)

From the military, to government, to education, many institutions have a dress code. You must look a certain way. God has a dress code for us, and it never changes. I know for you ladies to wear the same thing two days in a row is unthinkable.

God has even gone to the trouble to lay out our clothes for us every single day. We don't have to wash them or iron them. All we have to do is put them on. What makes these so valuable is they are tailored made to perfectly fit you by God himself.

- A. He says, 'Clothe yourselves with compassion...' (Colossians 3:12, NIV) This was radical for that day. Compassion and mercy were NOT in abundant supply in the ancient world if you were maimed, sick, old, physically deformed, or mentally ill you were pretty much discarded, humiliated and left to die. The things that set the Christian faith apart immediately from everybody else was that Christianity brought compassion for the aged, the sick, the weak in body and mind, children, women and even animals. If you put on the clothes of Jesus, you will always see people first through the eyes of compassion.
- B. Then he says we are to be clothed with kindness. We are to be kind in the

way we talk to people, the way we treat people.

- C. Clothe ourselves with **humility**. Again, this would have raised eyebrows two thousand years ago, because in the ancient world humility was viewed negatively. If you were humble, you were viewed either as a coward or weak. Furthermore, humility is a very difficult thing for people. One thing you can never say about yourself is that you are humble. On the other hand, if you just try to act humble some people will call you out and say you're being sanctimonious. The key to being humble before others is to humble yourself before God.
- D. Then we are to clothe ourselves with **gentleness**. The word for 'gentleness' means 'power under control.' It is used to describe a calm wind, healing medicine, and a wild horse that had been broken. Wind can become storm. Too much medicine can kill, and a horse can break loose, but this is power under control.
- E. Then, we are to put on the clothes of **patience**. This means more than just tolerating red lights, delayed flights and family fights. It means 'long tempered.' There is nothing wrong with getting angry at the right thing at the right time in the right way. A patient person never gets angry at the wrong things at the wrong time for the wrong reason.

Ask yourself this question, if every day we put on clothes of **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, don't you think we would all get along?** This is our Sunday best and we ought to wear it every day.

V. The Commitment We Bear

How do you know that you are wearing these clothes? Paul tells you will... ***'Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.'*** (Colossians 3:13, NIV)

Now if you are going to get along with anybody in any meaningful relationship you are going to have to do two things: you are going to have to bear with them and then you are going to have to forgive them.

- A. Now the verb **'bear with'** means 'to put up with difficult people and difficult problems.'

Everybody's got to do it. Even Jesus had to do it. He got so frustrated one time with the disciples and their lack of faith. He said in Matthew 17:17, ***'And Jesus answered, 'O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.'*** (ESV)

If you want to be friends with somebody, work with somebody, or be married to somebody there are some things you are going to have to put up with. Why do you think the marriage vows say, 'for better or for worse?'

In a Peanuts' cartoon, Lucy said to Snoopy, 'There are times when you really bug me, but there are also times when I feel like giving you a big hug.' Snoopy replied, 'That is the way I am...huggable and bugable.'

Remember, Paul was writing to Christians, and he said even the best of you who love Jesus the most, sometimes you are going to disagree. You are going to get irritated and frustrated to the point where you are almost constipated.

Just so you know, I don't care how hard you work and how good you try to be, people are going to find fault in you.

- B. We are also to **forgive** one another. There is a difference between bearing with someone and forgiving someone. When somebody does something that bothers you or irritates you unintentionally or because they were careless you need to bear with them, but when someone intentionally, provocatively does something wrong against you, that is when forgiveness comes in.

Then Paul tightens the screws. He says, ***'Forgive as the Lord forgave you.'*** (Colossians 3:13, NIV) There are two things universally true about all of us. Hurt people hurt people. Forgiven people forgive people. If you don't understand what Paul meant when he said to forgive as Jesus has forgiven you, just picture Jesus on the cross.

These are the clothes we wear, the commitment we bear, and...

III. The Compassion We Share

Paul wraps it up in a neat bow with this. 'And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.' (Colossians 3:14, NIV) Now when you put on all these clothes they won't stay on you unless you have a belt of love to keep them on. Love is the only thing that will keep your clothes on and keep you from taking any of them off.

1 Co 13:2 *'if I know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.'*

Rom 13:8 *owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.*

Let me put it to you this way. Do you know what compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with others and forgiving others is? It is love in action. Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Illustration: I was reading about the Welsh revival of 1904/05. I read the following: 'Countless numbers of souls were saved. No records were kept of the actual number converted, but 150,000 is a very conservative estimate. Not only were individual lives changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, but whole communities were changed. The crime rate dropped, often to nothing. The police force reported that they had little more to do than supervise the coming and going of the people to the chapel prayer meetings. Men and women who used to waste their money in getting drunk were now saving it, giving it to help their churches, buying clothes and food for their families. Men whose language had been filthy before learned to talk purely. It is related that not only did the coal miner put in a better day's work, but also that the pit ponies turned disobedient! The ponies were so used to being cursed and sworn at, that they just didn't understand when orders were given in kind, clean words!

The dark tunnels underground in the mines echoed with the sounds of prayer and hymns, instead of oaths and nasty jokes and gossip. People who had been careless about paying their bills, or paying back money they had borrowed, paid up all they owed. People who had not been friends because of something that had happened

in the past, forgot their quarrels and were happy again.'

How amazing it is when the Holy Spirit changes lives! We will be changed into His exact image as Colossians says when Jesus returns. But there is an ongoing change that should be shown because of the Spirits' work in our lives. All true Christians are new creations in Christ.

Take-Aways

1. **"Put to death**, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.
2. **Rid yourselves** of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.
3. **Put on the clothing** of the new man: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with and forgiving each other.
4. **Bind them together with love**. This is practical Christianity. This is what the world needs to see. And, to quote DL Moody again, ***'Out of one hundred men, one will read the Bible, the other ninety-nine will read the Christian.'***

Conclusion: If people were to read you, what would they see? Thankfully, as we have seen, this is not about you 'trying harder to be good! It is the work, character and fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life.