

## Colossians 3:12-17

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Continue in Jesus as Lord

At Christmas, we recaptured the mystery of God coming to dwell with humanity as a human, and offered our wonder and worship of the child in the manger. Today we were reminded in Luke's Gospel that the Christ-child becomes a boy, who listens to his heavenly Father's instruction in the Temple, and is a humble son of his earthly parents as well. He is a boy who increases in wisdom and in years, in divine and human favour. It is early days, but we know the baby and the boy will be the man on the cross.

So as believers, we must decide how we will live in light of this knowledge, this history of which we have become a part. We must consider how we will follow Jesus as his disciples after we turn the Christmas lights off and take the tinsel down.

In the Epistle to the Colossians the Apostle describes what this might look like. Paul reminds his friends how they have been planted in Christ, and urges them to put down deep roots for their nourishment and maturity as disciples; to live lives worthy and in imitation of Christ and to let their thankfulness to God overflow.

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The Externals - Clothe yourselves - above all with love

How can this be achieved? To begin he looks at the externals, the things that can easily be seen, he says 'get dressed appropriately.'

There are two steps involved in being dressed properly. In previous verses and throughout his letters, Paul discusses the sort of clothing we need to discard. These items of clothing include characteristics and behaviours like: anger, malice, slander, greed, bad language, abusiveness, indulgence, impurity, lies and the like. These must be removed from our wardrobe: we can't keep them for old times sake, for just in case, because we like them or because they fit comfortably, or they've become a part of who we are. They have to go, they belong to the old life. We cannot claim they are just quirks of personality or cultural traits. Now we are to be characterised by Christlikeness whether we are Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free.

Belonging to Christ, we have been cleansed and forgiven of these old ways, we have, all of us, been fundamentally changed and we are being renewed according to the image of our Creator. In that renewal process, Christ is the benchmark, nothing else, Christlikeness is the goal (Colossians 3:5-11).

Second step. There's a new set of garments, a new set of values and behaviours to be seen on us: items that speak of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, forgiveness, forbearance and patience to name a few. Taking Christ as our model, wearing Christ as our clothing we are ready to live as his ambassadors in the world. We are, if you like,

wearing his label, his brand. But these things are not just a uniform, they have practical use. In combination with the work of the Spirit, they have the power to transform us the more we choose to be clothed in them.

And these traits help to establish a stable community, they prepare us for healthy interactions in our homes, between siblings and partners; in our jobs, between employers and employees; and they provide a good foundation for relationships and abundant life in the wider community as well. And all these virtues working together produce and reflect the supreme virtue of God - love.

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The Internals - Be in harmony, be ruled by peace and instructed by the Word

Having put off the inappropriate outer garments like harsh words and selfish behaviour, and clothing themselves in Christlikeness, a disciple then cooperates with the Spirit who enables them to master their inner being - this is our thought world, our emotional centre and our motives. This is not work for the feint hearted, hypocrisy will not work, only authenticity, all the way through from the inside out, will cut it. The outer garments will only make a difference in our lives, and the lives of our community, if they are backed up by corresponding inner values and practices.

It's also important to note that bearing with one another and practicing non-violent responses to each other is not about putting on a happy face and accentuating the positive, for this denies the real challenges that we face, the hurt that occurs and the problems that pop up in the course of life. Instead we face the real issues occurring around us, and the tumult that goes on inside us as we walk in Christ's footsteps, and seek God's help in aligning our hearts and wills with his.

We learn to exercise inner practices like self-control. We endeavour to withhold judgement and resist lashing out; we assess our motives before we act; we seek wisdom and advice; we put another's needs above our own instead of demanding personal rights; we choose for the long haul, and pathways toward reconciliation, being willing to offer forgiveness even when we don't want to and it is not deserved. Being ruled by the peace of God means persevering through conflict, seeking understanding through listening, overcoming obstacles together, and working for healing and wholeness as allow our character to be developed, as we imitate godliness and deepen our relationships.

This is hard work. But love never exists in a vacuum, it's context is always relationships, and as care is expressed between disciples, as we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and govern our behaviour, we are transformed into his likeness and a harmonious community begins to emerge.

It's not magic, it's worked out in the every day grind of life, in everyday situations at the checkout, in the car, at home, at work, on holiday. And it involves homework. We have to become self-aware, and increase in the knowledge and wisdom of God.

And this is no cerebral, nor academic pursuit. The Word of Christ must take up residence in our lives, dwell in us richly, and become a part of us. The texts of the Bible, are not noble ideas to collect, they are words of wisdom to promote a lifestyle of godliness. They are nutrients to be taken in regular doses, in such a way that they shape our life for optimal health.

We need a regular rhythm of reading and listening to the texts, of incorporating them into prayer and worship; of conversation with God, both speaking and listening; and with each other in spiritual reflection and as we encourage each other in Jesus's ways. As a result the values of God, and the way of Jesus will become become a part of our lives.

What we practice, we get good at.

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And give thanks to the Father

When we dress up for each day's work from Monday to Saturday, and for worship on Sunday, we dress ourselves in Christ. And whatever we do, whenever we do it, we carry it out in a spirit of thankfulness.

I came across an interesting thought this week...what if you woke up tomorrow with only the things you were thankful for today. I found that thought a bit sobering. I think it might be a lean day for me often. I was pulled up for how much more I could be thankful for, in my words but also in my heart.

As believers, let's decide to live in light of the history of which we have become a part, after we turn the Christmas lights off and take the tinsel down.

Let's remember that being dressed for church, being properly clothed as a Christian has little to do with wearing jeans or a suit, being clean shaven or scruffy faced, having earrings or makeup, bare feet or polished shoes. That it has less to do with having formal or informal traditions, loud or peaceful music, sitting on a dirt floor or timber pews.

Being properly clothed is about whether we look like Christ on the inside and the outside. Whether we pursue living like Christ, more and more each day, no matter how hard it is. It's much more challenging, but it pleases God, is much more satisfying and changes the world.

Let's live lives worthy of and in imitation of him and let's have a lot to live on tomorrow by being deeply nourished in our Lord and thankful for everything we have today.

*Feasting on the word*

## Summary

At Christmas, we recaptured the mystery of God coming to dwell with humanity and offered our wonder and worship of the child in the manger. Now we decide how we will live in light of this history of which we have become a part. We consider how we will follow Jesus as his disciples after we turn the Christmas lights off.

In the Epistle to the Colossians Paul describes what this looks like. He urges his friends to put down deep roots in Christ for their nourishment and maturity as disciples; to live lives worthy of and in imitation of Jesus and to let their thankfulness to God overflow.

He talks about being properly dressed. This has little to do with wearing jeans or a suit, being clean shaven or scruffy faced. Instead, it is about whether we look like Christ on the inside and the outside. Whether we pursue living like Christ, more and more each day, no matter how hard it is. It's much more challenging, but it pleases God, is much more satisfying and changes the world.

Some clothing needs to be discarded: characteristics like anger, malice, slander, greed, bad language, abusiveness, indulgence, impurity, lies and the like. Then a new wardrobe, new values and behaviours are to be seen on us: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, forgiveness, forbearance, patience and love. The Word of Christ is to take up residence in our lives, dwelling in us richly, becoming a part of us, shaping our life. When we dress up for each day's work from Monday to Saturday, and for worship on Sunday, we dress ourselves in Christ. And whatever we do, whenever we do it, we carry it out in a spirit of thankfulness. Taking Christ as our model, wearing Christ as our clothing we are ready to live as his ambassadors in the world.