

### **“Put on the New Self”**

#### **Colossians 3:12–17 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

Today we continue thinking about the Christian life. In the previous section of Colossians, the Apostle Paul called the Colossians to kill all the earthly, sinful things from their lives. We can assume that this was as difficult for the Colossians as it is for us. Seeing the ways that we have been corrupted by the world and the sinful desires of our hearts is not pleasant. Nor is it easy to eliminate the things that we perceive as sinful actions. Without going on and on about specific sins, it is enough for us to say that we all continue to struggle with sin. The Apostle Paul (AP) doesn’t stop with a simple list of things that we should stop doing. He gives another list of things that Christians should strive to bring into their lives. In essence, AP is telling the Colossians that they need to fill their lives with the things he lists rather than the sinful things that characterized their lives before.

There is something poetic about being told to put on new things after taking off the old things. We all enjoy putting on fresh clean clothes, but I think we take special pleasure in putting on new clothes that fit perfectly. If we apply this kind of thinking to what we are talking about in Colossians 3, Paul is saying that Christians should take off the patched and sin-stained garments of our old lives and put on brand-new garments that make us all the more comely. We don’t lose our personality in this change of clothes, but we give homage to the Lord who died for us.

But all this talk about taking off and putting on causes me to ask, “Is this all really worth it?” And to that question, my mind immediately jumps to Jesus’ words in Luke 9:25, “For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” The pleasures of this world are not worth giving up our souls. We have been called to do as the Colossians were called to do. We have been called to put off the old and put on the new. I think we can view this command to put on like we see the command to “seek the things that are above” in Colossians 3:1. This is not something that we can accomplish in one day or in a lifetime, but it is something to strive for. With our eyes set on heavenly truths and our minds being renewed in knowledge after our Savior, let us seek to bring to bear the truths of the gospel in our lives.

Now, in verses 12-13, AP says to put on several different things, but I think we should view this as a set of things. Essentially, what we see in verses 12-13 is a call to imitate our Lord Jesus—especially to imitate Jesus’ forgiveness. Who had a more compassionate heart than our Lord Jesus? Who has ever been kinder to the brokenhearted or down-trodden than our Lord Jesus? Who else ever gave up their place of glory to be born in a stable and to die on a cross between two rebels? Who else ever laid down their life for people that hated them? Who else patiently calls rebellious sinners back without fail? Truly our Lord Jesus has done all of these things for us. To be clear, Jesus has done for us more than we can ever imagine, but most importantly for us, he is still doing these things. He is not leaving us on our own. His forgiveness extends to us today. When Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 18:22 to forgive 70 times 7, he was trying to show how much he would forgive us. For the disciples, Jesus was making the image of forgiveness broad and glorious. So now in Colossians 3:12-13, AP is saying that everyone who has their minds set on things above, and who have killed off the earthly from their lives—in other words all Christians—need to put on the character of their Savior and forgive one another.

As God’s people, the Colossians were called to imitate the Savior. As God’s people, we are being called to the same thing. Take note however, this forgiveness cannot be in word only. We are called to forgive from a heart of compassion and humility. Do you think that there are people in the church today that have been hurt by others in the church? I imagine that there are people here that have been hurt by others. Hurts occur wherever sinful people are. The real question for us today is, have you forgiven the people that offended you? I do not think that you have to allow yourself to be mistreated to be faithful in forgiveness, but in the case of small offenses and slights are you active in forgiveness? In the case of more serious offenses, as you seek justice, are you able to walk humbly and with compassion? Let us look to heaven, because seated at the right hand of the Father is the one who died to bring us forgiveness. He was crushed for our transgressions. His death bought us salvation. He did not suffer for his own sins. He was not humiliated and shamed for his own faults. He did all of that for our sins. The way that our Lord forgave us should shape the way we forgive others.

Building on the call to forgive one another is Paul’s command to put on love. Verse 14 says, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” On the surface perhaps love and forgiveness do not seem to go together, but they are intimately connected. In John 3:16 it says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...” and in Romans 5:8 it says, “and God shows his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus’ death for sinners is at the heart of God’s display of love for the world. As essential as forgiveness is, I think what AP is bringing before the eyes of the Colossians is that love is even more fundamental. If remembering all that the Lord has done for us leads us to forgive others when they hurt us, love is the thing that makes us want to forgive. Love is the thing that “binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Do not miss the point, love and forgiveness is something that defines the Triune God’s—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’s—relationship with mankind. God loves us. The eternal Son dies for us. The Holy Spirit in love brings us to repentance and faith in the Son. We are received by the Father and justified. All of the love of God displayed in forgiving sinners should bind us to one another. AP says that love “binds everything together in perfect harmony.” When we love one another we show the world and one another that we are Christ’s disciples. Love, which can be thought of as self-sacrificial service and faithfulness, will hold people together when there is nothing else in common. It is probably

the single most uncommon thing in our world today. If we are bound together in love then we will be inviting harmony into our lives and into the church.

And on the foundation of love and forgiveness, Paul gives four more commands. The first is that Christians should “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body.” This is a call to unity in the body of Christ. However, this seems very similar to the call to forgive and love one another. After all, if we are loving and forgiving one another wouldn’t that lead to unity? On one level I think that kind of thinking is right. If we are doing the things that have already been commanded then we will probably naturally be living in unity with one another, but there seems to be something a bit deeper going on here. The phrase “to which you were called in one body” is important. How have Christians been called in one body? Primarily, we have the calling to unity in Christ’s body, right? Indeed, we have all been called members of Christ’s one body—that is the church. We have a role to play in Christ’s church. Though for many of us we probably won’t make much impact on the church globally. Rather our presence will likely be felt more keenly in our local church. So how have we been called to be part of the one body of our Lord Jesus? I think this is a very important topic, and it has many different layers. However, in general I think this means we are called to unity in our confession of Christ and the gospel. There are several doctrines that make up our faith that we must hold on to, confess, and teach to others. And when we all gather together, we should eagerly repeat the truths of our faith.

We are called to unity in Christ. We have not been called to stand alone against the world, the flesh, and the devil. In our unified confession of Jesus, in our forgiving one another, and in our love, we have the practice of the Christian faith. The deeper work of salvation belongs to God, but God has called us to do these things so that the Triune God receives his proper worship. He has called us to unity so that we can encourage and build one another up, and to share the gospel with power. A church that is cannibalizing its members is despicable. Why would you quickly sacrifice the sheep for whom Christ died?

The next command that AP gave is “And be thankful.” Actually thankfulness is a bit of sub-theme of this passage. Paul mentions thankfulness in one form or another three times in the text. What strikes me about this is that the nature of the Christian life seems to be complicated. Christians are called to be forgiving, to love, and to be unified, but perhaps as an undercurrent to all of these things, the Christian is supposed to be thankful.

Thankfulness is one of those things that comes up a lot in the Scriptures. It seems to me that the writers of Scripture believed that thankfulness is a natural part of the Christian life. Paul is here echoing the rest of the Scriptural witness. “Be thankful” should be a rhythm of our lives—just like bathing, eating, and any other thing that we have to do to flourish. So many evils are borne in our hearts when we neglect thankfulness. The chief evil that we will carry in our hearts is the sin of bitterness. This happens because when we are not thankful to the Lord and the people around us, we begin to mistrust or doubt their intentions. The spark of mistrust in the goodness of God undermines our faith. When I say “undermine our faith” I am not saying that we start doubting that God exists, but we won’t have the confidence to obey him in hard places. In other words, by storing up bitterness in

our hearts, we rob our own faith of its strength. The call to “be thankful” then is an essential part of the Christian faith, and we neglect it to our own injury.

Alongside of thankfulness, AP says that we ought to “let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” The command to “let the word of Christ dwell in us richly” brings to my mind an amusing image. The idea of dwelling richly in something carries with it the idea of living a long time in one place as well as putting down roots. The life of the Christian in the word of Christ is supposed to be one of constant contemplation or application of the word of Christ. The image in my mind is that of a tea bag. When you put a tea bag in a cup of hot water it starts to flavor the water. If you allow the tea to stay for a long time in the water the tea gets stronger and stronger. The same is true for the Christian. The longer we dwell in or, dare I say, steep in the word of Christ the stronger our faith will become. There is a clear connection between being thankful and dwelling in the word of Christ. The thankful person who recognizes the glorious work of Christ does not try to figure out life on their own. They go to the word of Christ. And they do not just taste a little of the riches of the good news about Jesus. They dwell in the word. The wonderful news that God has purchased a people for his own possession and that by grace through faith we may all be inheritors with Christ our Lord.

Now you may notice a pattern in my preaching. I often make a big deal of the work of God on our behalf. I have been doing so today again. Even though this passage is full of commands, I keep on drawing our attention back to the many ways that God in his love has brought all of this to pass. I think that this is right and proper, but we should also take account of how much is expected of us. We don’t always listen to and receive teaching. We are called to be “teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom.” As much as we all feel like we need to know more and be better prepared before we teach others, AP says that we should be teaching and admonishing one another. Teaching means explaining what we have received in the word of Christ—the gospel—to others. Admonishing means warning others of the dangers of sin, false teaching, and unbelief in our Lord Jesus.

Interestingly enough, AP says that the teaching and admonishing that we are supposed to do should be filled with wisdom, and that we communicate this wisdom through “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” I think there are a couple of reasons that singing is the way that AP encouraged the Colossians to teach one another. Firstly, songs are a great way to pass on truths. Especially when reading and writing were not as common as they are now, it was really easy for people to memorize the Psalms, hymns, and other songs. Secondly, not everyone is good at teaching, but everyone that has been taught can repeat what they have been taught. In other words, in a Psalm or spiritual song teaching about God can be communicated by people who do not have a lot of confidence in their own teaching or knowledge. You can warn other people of the dangers of sin by reminding other people of the Psalms that talk about the dangers of sin. You can teach other people how vital it is to dwell in the word of Christ by recalling Psalms that talk about meditating on the Law, etc.

In other words, everyone in the church can teach and admonish when we are equipped with the Word of God, but Paul seems to give special attention to teaching and admonishing each other through singing within the church and through the Psalms. We can encourage, challenge, support, and teach

one another in this weekly gathering, but also through the week by stirring our hearts with the Psalms. I encouraged our home church a few weeks ago to read the Psalms everyday, and I also encourage you all to do the same. The Psalms contain all the struggles of life and they teach so many helpful doctrines. Chiefly, the Psalms teach that God will support his people and bring them out of adversity, but that the people must keep the Law of God faithfully. A special focus in the Psalms is that God takes special care of the weak, downtrodden, and forgotten people of the world. If you want to have a life full of hope for the future and strength to endure today then the Psalms are the place for daily encouragement. I urge you to read several Psalms everyday. 2-3 Psalms everyday will give you a bigger picture of God's faithfulness in every situation.

We need to be reminded of God's faithfulness to his covenant. Our hearts are prone to wander far from God. Likewise, we have to regularly examine the direction of our Christian lives. What is guiding you day by day? As we saw in Colossians 3:1-2, we should be seeking heavenly things, but if we get distracted by the earthly things that surround us, what should we do? In verses 5-12, we are told to put to death the earthly things in our lives. However, what happens if we don't clearly see the earthly things in us? The final summary answer to what should we be doing as Christians in this world is in verse 17. AP says, "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."

Doing everything in the name of Jesus is the perfect way to summarize everything that we have said thus far in looking at verses 12-16. How should you treat people that wrong you if you are trying to do all things in Jesus' name? Well I suspect you will do as he has done for you—forgive them with patience and compassion. How should we treat one another in the body of Christ in Jesus' name, if not by loving one another and seeking to live in unity? Truly all of what we have said can be summarized in this command. "Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus." There is great power and authority in the name of Jesus, so while we are bound by his name we aren't carrying a burden. Doing everything in Jesus' name should stop you from pursuing a life of sin. After all, it is hard to imagine intentionally sinning in Jesus' name. On the other hand, by doing things in Jesus' name we are bringing Jesus into every situation. And one thing to keep in mind about our Lord—everything that he does is good and wherever he is there is blessing. I am not talking about earthly success in business affairs. I am talking about bringing the peace and grace of God into the world; lighting the world with the light of the gospel.

I encourage you to examine your life and stir one another up by reading and rereading the Psalms to one another. I urge you to imitate our Savior in all your relationships. But most importantly, I pray that we will strive to do all that we do in the name of our Lord Jesus and giving thanks to God the Father through him. Our lives and hopefully our world will be changed by the compassion, love, and peace that comes to the world through the name of Jesus.