

The Book of Colossians

Lesson 10: Put On the New Self in Love -- Colossians 3:12-17

Every morning you stand in front of the closet and decide what to put on. It is such an ordinary act that you barely think about it, and yet what you wear sends a message about who you are and where you are going. Paul has been using exactly this picture. He told us to take off the old self like a set of filthy, outgrown clothes. Now he hands us the new wardrobe and tells us what to put on. And the garments he names are not achievements or accomplishments. They are the very character of Christ: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. This is what a person raised with Christ wears.

But before he names a single virtue, Paul tells us who we already are: God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. That order matters more than almost anything in this letter. He does not say, dress like this and maybe God will choose you and love you. He says, you are already chosen, already holy, already loved, so now wear clothes that fit. Everything that follows, all the patience and forgiveness and love, flows out of a settled identity, not toward an uncertain one. We forgive because we are forgiven. We love because we are beloved.

And the centerpiece of the wardrobe is love, which Paul says we should put on above all these, like an overcoat that holds the whole outfit together. Love binds everything into perfect harmony. With it comes the peace of Christ, which Paul says should rule in our hearts like an umpire making the final call, and a thankfulness that keeps welling up. This is the picture of a community actually clothed in Christ: bearing with one another, forgiving one another, held together by love, governed by peace, overflowing with gratitude.

Then Paul shows us what fills and fuels such a life. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, he says, not as an occasional visitor but as a settled resident, so richly that it spills out as you teach and encourage one another and as you sing together psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankful hearts. And he sums up the whole Christian life in one breathtaking sentence: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Read this passage and let it dress you. There is a whole new life hanging in the closet, and it is cut to the shape of Christ.

Group Discussion: Paul tells us to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, and above all, love (vv. 12-14). Why do you think Paul pictures these as things we put on, like clothing, rather than feelings we wait to have? And what does it look like in practice to put on a virtue you do not yet feel?

Personal Reflection: Paul begins by reminding us we are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, before he asks us to do anything. How would your daily life and your obedience change if that settled identity, chosen, holy, beloved, were the thing you most deeply believed about yourself?

Study Questions

1. Paul says, put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (v. 12). Why does Paul ground these commands in who we already are (chosen, holy, beloved), and how does that settled identity change the way we pursue Christlike character?
2. Paul lists specific garments of the new self. Looking honestly at your own life, which one of these (compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience) is most threadbare right now? What would deliberately putting it on look like in a specific relationship this week?
3. Paul commands us to bear with one another and forgive each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive (v. 13). What is the connection between the forgiveness we have received from Christ and the forgiveness we owe one another, and why does Paul leave us no room to withhold it?
4. Forgiveness is rarely easy and rarely a single act. Is there someone you have been refusing to forgive, or a wound you keep picking back up? In light of how the Lord has forgiven you, what would taking a real step toward forgiveness look like, even if the feelings have not yet caught up?
5. Paul says above all put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body (vv. 14–15). Why does Paul call love the garment that holds all the others together, and what does it mean to let the peace of Christ rule, or act as umpire, in the life of the church?
6. Paul links the peace of Christ to our life together in one body. Are you, in practice, a peacemaker in your congregation and your home, or do you sometimes feed conflict? Where is the peace of Christ being asked to rule in one of your relationships right now?
7. Paul says, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (v. 17). What does it mean to do everything in the name of, or by the authority of, the Lord Jesus, and how does this single principle shape both our daily conduct and the way we worship?
8. If everything we do is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, then no part of life is off the clock. Where is there an area of your life, maybe your work, your entertainment, your private habits, that you have not consciously brought under the name and authority of Jesus? What would change if you did?
9. Paul says, 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 (v. 16). What does it mean for the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, and what does this verse teach about the place of congregational singing, where we teach and encourage one another in song, in the worship of the church?
10. Look back across this passage. Paul clothes us in the character of Christ, binds us together in love and peace, fills us with His word and song, and sets the name of Jesus over everything

we do. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Colossians 3:12–17 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Ephesians 4:31–32, putting away bitterness and forgiving as God in Christ forgave us; Ephesians 5:18–21, being filled with the Spirit and singing to one another; Matthew 18:21–35, the parable of the unforgiving servant; 1 Corinthians 14:15, singing with the spirit and with the understanding; Romans 12:9–21, the marks of genuine love in the body.