

What are you wearing?

Did you know that God REALLY cares about what you wear to church?

Now our culture is preoccupied with clothes.

Only a couple hundred years ago,

you were considered extremely wealthy if you had a dozen shirts.

Today we are besieged by advertisers telling us that we need the latest fashion!

Fashions change every few years in order to keep the fashion industry afloat.

The tragedy is that most folks buy into it.

Not only do they buy the clothes,

but they also buy the image.

How many of you walk into a room

and immediately notice what everyone else is wearing

--and then instantly decide how you measure up?

How many of you are sensitive to what others think about how you look?

There is nothing wrong with good grooming.

But it can very easily become an obsession

--especially in a culture that is obsessed with clothes and looks.

So what are you wearing?

Matthew 22:1-14

If you are not wearing your wedding garment to the Wedding feast of the Lamb,
then you will not enter the Kingdom of God.

But what IS this wedding garment?

Why does God care what we wear?

Let's go back to my three circles:

heart/identity

desires/flesh

thoughts/words/deeds

The kind of person that you are is reflected by what you "wear"!

It's usually pretty easy to identify someone who rides a Harley Davidson motorcycle.

Bikers have pretty distinctive clothing.

You can i.d. a Catholic priest from a mile away,

or a police officer, or a lawyer.

Even so,

Christians should be recognized by what they wear!

The reason why the King can tell that this man does not belong at the wedding
is because he is not wearing a wedding garment.

In the same way,
one who has died and been raised with Christ,
one who has put on the new man in Christ,
is going to look like it.

So this obviously brings us to the question:
"What should we be wearing?"

We sang in Psalm 132 about how God would clothe Israel's priests with salvation.
But in Zechariah 3, the high priest, Joshua, is clothed in filthy garments.
What was Joshua wearing?
The high priestly garments.
The holiest clothing ever made by man is filthy.

Only God can clothe humanity with clean garments.
God demonstrated that in the Garden, after the fall of man.
Adam and Eve tried to clothe themselves with fig leaves,
but such self-made garments would not suffice.
And so God himself clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins,
thereby demonstrating that the shedding of blood was necessary
to cover Adam's sin.

We're used to talking about being dressed in Christ's righteousness with respect to justification.
Justification is God's legal act
whereby he forgives our sins and declares us righteous in Jesus Christ.
Whereas, sanctification is the transforming work of God
whereby we died with Christ and are raised with him in newness of life,
and therefore we more and more die to sin and live unto righteousness.

We must clearly distinguish between justification and sanctification,
but we must also recognize that they are inseparably connected.
In Christ we receive both justification and sanctification—
they *always* come together.

Because in justification your sins are forgiven,
but justification (by itself) doesn't change you.
Justification is something God says *about* you.
Sanctification is something God does *in* you.

Both are absolutely essential for salvation.
Justification deals with the guilt of sin.
Sanctification deals with the power of sin.

In Colossians 2:13-14 Paul has set forth the basic concept of justification—
how God has forgiven our sins and canceled the record of debt on the cross.

Now in Colossians 3 Paul is explaining our sanctification.

1. Get Rid of the Old Man's Wardrobe (3:5-11)

Verses 5-11 explain who you are.

You could summarize the whole paragraph by saying,
you have put off the old man
you have put on the new man
therefore get of the old man's clothes!

The old man wore the filthy rags of sin. v8-9

But the old man has been crucified with Christ;
your old nature was snipped away by the circumcision of Christ.

He is dead,

so clean out the closet,
get rid of his stinking clothes,
and get yourself a new wardrobe!

What are the items which Paul inventories from the old man's closet?

The clothes which Paul lists in verse 8-9 fit into two categories:

1. sins of the temper
Anger--Wrath--Malice
2. sins of the tongue
Slander, obscene talk, and lying

These things were your clothing --in the life you once lived,
but NOW,

Paul says that you are a different person,
so you should take these things off,
and throw them away.

Now that you have a new identity,

Christ has given you a new wardrobe.

Since Christ has become your life (v4),

and your identity is found in him,
that should have some effect on what you look like!

Paul says that you have put off the old man with his deeds,

and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge,
according to the image him who created him.

In other words:

the old man and his clothing go together.

the new man and his clothing come as a package as well.

It is unthinkable that a Christian should "wear" anger or filthy speech.

Christians are renewed in the image of Christ.

In Col 1 Paul told us that Christ is the firstborn of creation

AND the firstborn from the dead.

Christ is the image of the invisible God,

and in him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form.

Now, Paul says,

YOU have been renewed in knowledge in the image of Christ.

YOU are included in Christ,

and you have been made complete in Christ--lacking in nothing.

And here Paul launches into a reminder that this promise is for all of God's people:

for in Christ there is neither Greek, nor Jew,

circumcised, nor uncircumcised,

barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free!

Why?

Because Christ is all and in all!

Christ is the center

--not merely of creation,

but also of redemption,

--nor merely in some abstract, theoretical way,

but also in the nitty, gritty details of your life.

And it is this which Paul immediately turns to in the rest of the chapter:

Since this is who you are in Christ,

therefore,

this is how you ought to live in the church (v12-17)

in your families (v18-21)

and in your work (v22-4:1)

2. Put on Your New Clothes (3:12-17)

In verses 12-17 Paul describes the new wardrobe of the Christian.

There are five imperatives in these verses.

Five commands.

"Put on" which is the verb that controls all of verses 12-14

"Let the peace of Christ rule"

"Be thankful"

"Let the word of Christ dwell"

And "do everything in the name of Jesus"

These five imperatives whereby Paul tells you how you should live,
are rooted in the indicative of who you are in Christ.

Since you are the elect of God, holy and beloved, live like it!

Notice these three things that Paul calls the Colossians:

Elect
Holy
Beloved

You are first called the elect.

Why?

Does Paul know that every individual member of the church in Colosse
is elect?

No.

But Paul believes God's promises that not one of Christ's sheep will be lost,
and so even though he can't tell the sheep from the goats,
he refers to them all as the elect,
because as members of one body,
they belong to Christ.

But notice what effects the doctrine of election has on Paul:

Some people claim that to call people "the elect"
makes them proud and haughty.

Paul calls the Colossians "the elect" – God's chosen ones
--and says that this ought to provoke them to humility and patience.

Paul also calls you HOLY.

You are set apart in Christ
and are declared to be a new creature in him.

In your heart--in the core of your new identity,
you are pure and undefiled,
as holy as Christ--because it is Christ who dwells within you,
purifying you, even as he is pure.

Your identity in Christ IS HOLY.

But Paul does not turn around and say,
"well, since you're already holy, who cares how you live!"

NO!

He says, SINCE you are holy in Christ,
clothe yourself with garments fitting your new identity!

And Paul calls you Beloved.

You are beloved of God.
God has chosen you in Christ;
He has made you holy in Christ;
But he has also made you beloved in Christ.

He has not only elected you from the foundation of the world,
he has also loved you from the foundation of the world.

These two go together!

It is not as though God needed you!
He is HOLY beyond imagining!

God dwells eternally in his own marvelous triune love.
He has no need for you!
But he has set his eternal love upon you.
He has pursued you and wooed you to himself.
As a man loves a maiden and attempts to win her heart with his love,
so God has loved you,
and has set his affection upon you.
Would you spurn his advances?
Would you turn aside the love of the heavenly bridegroom?
Yet every time you sin,
that is exactly what you do.
You who are the elect of God, holy and dearly loved,
you are not to greet your bridegroom wearing the filthy rags of your old nature,
rather you are to put on the beautiful garments which Christ has given you:
tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering
forgiving others as Christ forgave you
Love--the bond which holds the whole package together

You are to live as one who is elect, holy, and beloved of God.

1. Verses 12-14 command us to put on this new clothing that is ours in Christ:
*Compassion, 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.*

Because you are in Christ – because you have put on the new self,
therefore these things are to characterize you.

Too often we are content to live in the old filthy rags of our old self.
But Paul says that as we get rid of these old rags,
we are to put on the clothing of Christ.
As we put off anger and malice,
we are to put on compassion and kindness.
As we put off slander and obscene talk,
we are to put on patience and humility.

You see, it is not enough to stop doing bad things.
We must replace the old patterns of life with new patterns.

In verse 13 Paul says that we must forgive as the Lord has forgiven us.
When your brother sins against you for 47th time,
and he repents and asks you to forgive him,
forgive him, the way the Lord has forgiven you!
You are not allowed to hold grudges.

How often does God have to hear you repent of the same sin?
Even so are you to forgive your brother!

The verb is not repeated in verse 14.

The sentence simply continues,

"above all these, love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

The verb comes from verse 12 –

"put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience...and above all, love."

Love binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Love is like the belt or scarf that binds the whole outfit together.

Without love, the rest of the outfit doesn't hold together.

Love is that which makes everything else complete – which brings everything to its fulfillment.

2. Let the Peace of Christ Rule (v 15a)

The second imperative is to let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in one body.

The "you" here is plural (as throughout the passage).

The Peace of Christ is to rule in your hearts,

since you (together) were called in one body

Certainly it is to be true of you as an individual –

but Paul expects to see these things characterize the body as a whole.

He expects you – Hillsdale OPC, as much as the Church of Colosse–

to be a place where compassion, humility and forgiveness dwell.

a place where the peace of Christ reigns.

Paul is speaking to a audience well familiar with the Pax Romana – the Peace of Rome.

But he says that it is not the Pax Romana that rules you.

Rather, it is the Pax Christi – the eirene tou Christou – the Peace of Christ,

the Peace of the Messiah,

that shall reign in your hearts.

What peace rules you?

Everyone seeks peace.

Even gangs seek peace.

Augustine commented that outlaws seek peace among themselves.

The members of a gang, or of the Mafia,

seek peace within their own community.

After all, if you cross the leader,

and ruin his peace,

you aren't going to like the consequences!

So what sort of peace rules in your heart?
Do you seek peace from God, or from others?
When you deal with family members,
are you ruled by what they think of you?
do you seek peace with them at any cost?
It may be tough.
You may have in-laws who are extremely difficult.
You may have relatives who simply don't care about the gospel.
What rules your heart when you spend time with them?
Do you find peace in trusting Christ to exercise his sovereign power?
Or do you seek peace in trying to pacify your relatives--or your co-workers?
Paul says that the only way to find true peace in the midst of the chaos of life,
is to let your heart be ruled by the Peace of God.

I think of Brother Lawrence,
the monk who wrote the classic, "The Practice of the Presence of God."
Brother Lawrence could have had a much more enjoyable job,
but he preferred to work in the kitchen,
because the constant service of others
enabled him to keep his heart and mind fixed upon Christ.
He had no desire for advancement in the monastery,
because he recognized that God had called him to a life of simplicity.
Yet this simple monk,
who was content to live in a small place,
with simple work,
is now more famous than any of his contemporaries who sought glory and fame!
Brother Lawrence wound up becoming a counselor to younger monks,
and others who sought to live their lives in the presence of God.
People would come to his monastery and talk with him,
others would write and ask for his counsel.
He wound up writing his book because so many people wanted to learn his secret.
They saw a life characterized by compassion,
humility,
kindness,
and they wanted to know how their lives could be changed as well.
He had found the peace of God in serving others;
in allowing his life to be ruled by God's peace,
rather than in seeking after his own selfish interests.

So let the peace of Christ rule your hearts
--a peace which is rooted in recognizing that you all, together,
are called to peace in one body.
Christ has reconciled us as one body to himself;
Now he calls us to allow HIS peace to rule our hearts.

3. And Be Thankful (v15b)

The third imperative is short and to the point:

And be thankful.

This command will run through the following two commands as well.

Indeed, the last two commands could be taken as an exposition of this one!

4. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly (v16)

You know how when you first buy a new pair of shoes,
it takes a while for the shoe to grow accustomed to your feet?
But slowly, the shoe takes on the form of your feet.

It's the opposite with our spiritual clothing.

Our spiritual clothing reshapes us!

Since the Word of Christ has renewed you into the image of Christ,
let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,
teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

How does the Word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom?

We need to be steeped in the Word.

In fact, we need to be so steeped in the Word that it overflows in song!

Do you want your life to be transformed by the gospel?

then allow the gospel to reshape you!

I am not going to tell you to have a fifteen minute devotional time each day.

Rather, I am going to tell you that your whole life should be rooted in the Word!

Paul is not saying, "let the Word of Christ have a few minutes of your time"

He is saying, "let the Word of Christ LIVE in you!"

God's Word should permeate every aspect of your life.

I know a woman who photocopies whole books of the Bible,
laminates them,
and places one copy above the kitchen sink,
so she can study the Word as she works in the kitchen.
She also keeps a copy in the car,
so she can memorize it while she's running errands
or waiting for the kids to get out of school.
Then, once the book is memorized,
she does a dramatic presentation for her church.

That's one example.

There was another woman who knew the Word of God so well,
that her singing tied together more than a dozen bible verses.

Think of Luke 1.

Mary's song consists of eighteen lines,
 yet there are references to more than six different OT books!
That is how the Word of Christ should dwell richly in us.
 NOT so that we can mindlessly quote bible verses,
 but so that the Word of God permeates every aspect of our lives.
This is why Paul says that the result of Christ's Word dwelling richly in us
 should be that we teach and admonish one another in song!

Paul says to sing "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs."
 These terms do not refer to three different types of songs,
 rather they are three different words for songs,
In the Greek translation of the Psalms,
 these three words are used to refer to various psalms.

In the early church,
 they sang mostly psalms from the Book of Psalms,
 but they also sang "contemporary psalms"--you might say.
But very few hymns were written until the fourth century,
 when Ambrose of Milan introduced several hymns into his church.
During the Middle Ages congregational singing died out.
 All the singing was done by choirs of monks and priests.
At the time of the Reformation,
 reformers like Martin Bucer reintroduced congregational singing,
 and translated both the Psalms and other Christian hymns
 for singing in worship.
They recognized that true Christian piety is rooted in the Word of God,
 therefore we should sing God's Word to each other.
We can do this either through singing the Psalms or other biblical passages,
 or through singing paraphrases and summaries of biblical teaching.

We teach and admonish each other, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord.
 Perhaps you don't have a very good voice.
 That's okay.
God doesn't care how it sounds,
 but he delights to hear us sing his praises.
Zephaniah 3:17 says,
 "The Lord God is in your midst,
 The Mighty One will save;
 He will rejoice over you with gladness;
 He will quiet you with his love,
 He will rejoice over you singing."
God himself sings in his joy that you are his people,
 we are to imitate God,
 and sing our praises in response to him.

And as we do, the Word of Christ will continually reshape us into his image.

5. Since Christ is all and is in all, DO all in his name, with a thankful heart!

Since you are the elect of God, holy and beloved,
Since the peace of God is to rule your hearts as one body,
Since the Word of Christ is to dwell in you richly,
 Since your whole life is bound up with Christ,

Therefore,
 whatever you do in word or deed,
 do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
 giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Christ is the center.

 Everything in your life should revolve around him.
When you speak, it is in his name!
When you act, it is for his glory.
 But PLEASE do not get legalistic about this!
 This is not done out of guilt,
 or out of some sense that YOU can please God in your own efforts!

NO!

 You do all things out of gratitude for what Christ has done for you!
Because YOU ARE IN CHRIST
Because You Have Died with HIM,
 and been raised to the right hand of the Father in HIM,
 therefore all your life is to be centered in him.

So,

 because this is who you are in Christ,
 take off your dirty clothes,
 take off your filthy, sinful rags,
 and put on Christ.