

Out with the old, in with the new

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[0 : 00] Let's pray one more time. Let's ask God for his help. Father, as we come before your word today, help us to do so in humility.

! Will you give us a desire to be transformed the way you want us to be transformed? And will you give us a hope that such transformation is actually possible? May your word change us today from the inside out to be people who are living joyfully in Christ.

And so we ask for a mighty work of the Holy Spirit to be done in us today. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hang out with me for a while and you'll soon realize that I'm definitely not known for my fashion sense. For me, 95% of the time, picking clothes is all about one thing.

Is it comfortable? But whether we care about fashion or not, the truth is, clothing does much more than simply cover us or keep us warm.

[1 : 05] What we wear can send powerful signals about who we are, where we belong and what matters most to us. Take someone wearing a turban or a tudong, for instance.

These aren't just accessories, but visible statements of a person's faith. Or at the very least, their cultural heritage.

Or picture someone going out in a Versace dress. She's communicating something about her status. She's making clear her place in this social hierarchy.

Whether we are aware of it or not, our clothes are often more than just fabric. They are expressions of our identity.

So, if what we wear reflects who we are, what does that mean for us as Christians? What should the wardrobe of a Christian consist of?

[2 : 11] Well, to figure that out, we need to remember first, what's our identity? If you are someone trusting Jesus as your Savior and Lord, who are you?

That's what last week's sermon was all about. If today you are in Christ, you are risen. You're alive in Christ.

Because He died, you're dead to your old life. And because He rose again, you belong now to the realm where Christ reigns.

That's the way we define ourselves now. That's our identity in Christ. But how do we best express that?

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul will help us understand this morning. You see, Paul knew that there were different ideas about how to show your Christian identity.

[3 : 10] For some, it was all about external rules. I'm a Christian because I wake up every morning at 5 a.m. to pray. Or, I'm a Christian because I avoid certain movies.

For others, it was about mystical encounters. Or, I'm a Christian because I feel powerful touches from the Spirit. Or, I'm a Christian because I receive signs from the Lord.

These were certainly some of the answers on offer in Colossae. But Paul says, truly expressing your Christian identity is about what you wear or don't wear spiritually.

More precisely, if you are in Christ, it's about taking off the clothes marked old self because they no longer fit you.

And it's about wearing the clothes labeled the new self. Because that's what fits you now. Because something fundamental has changed.

[4 : 27] Now, I'm sure this isn't a perfect analogy, but consider a mom who has gone through pregnancy and given birth. She then discovers her old jeans and tops don't fit the way they once did, even if her wake goes back to normal.

Her body has changed. The shape is different. So, she needs a new wardrobe to reflect this new reality of motherhood.

In a similar way, when you come to Christ, you are reshaped spiritually. Your heart, your desires, your purpose, they've all changed.

And so, since Christ has changed you, naturally, you need a new wardrobe. Just as old clothes don't fit a new body, so old sinful patterns don't fit a new creation in Christ.

So, that is where Paul is taking us this morning. But let's be absolutely clear. He is not handing us a self-help style guide.

[5 : 36] Rather, this divine wardrobe change is a gift, already given by God's amazing grace. Our job is simply to identify those old garments we need to shed, so that we can then slip into the stunning new clothes God has already handed to us.

And that really is going to be the two main points of my sermon this morning. To express our new identity in Christ, we take off our old self, crucified with Christ, and we put on the new self, given by Christ.

So, first of all, we take off our old self, crucified with Christ. Actually, Paul uses much stronger language than that.

Verse 5. If your identity is in Christ, Paul says, then, put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Don't just hang it back on the clothesline.

Don't just throw it into the laundry pile. No. Kill it. Murder it. This is sin we are talking about. This is an enemy whose only aim is to take you down to hell.

[7 : 07] So, you need to take it down first. As the theologian John Owen once famously said, be killing sin, or it will be killing you.

But what specifically needs killing? Paul gives us two hit lists in verses 5 and 8. This is what needs assassinating sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, fealty language.

Now, it's important to recognize that these are representative, not exhaustive lists. But perhaps Paul focuses on them, partly because these are all things that don't just harm you, but others around you.

Take the verse 5 list, for instance. Is it mainly sexual? That's what some people have suggested, and it is certainly a theme.

But it seems to me, as one commentator proposes, that exploitation is really the focus.

[8 : 32] These sins are all to do with using other people for our own gratification. They dehumanize people. Same with verse 8.

These are verbal sins, where words are used as weapons to wound and degrade others. And Paul says, now that you're a Christian, these things are no longer in fashion.

Strip yourselves of them. So what does that mean in the day-to-day? Take sexual immorality and impurity. For example, what does putting death to death look like?

The Greek word is porneia, which is where we get the English word pornography. But this simply speaks of any sexual activity or desire, whether acted upon or not, that lies outside marriage.

So Paul is saying, want to show that Christ is your life? Then no sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend.

[9 : 51] In fact, even sexual acts that isn't sexual intercourse is out of bounds as well. Or take lust. Practically, what does it mean to cure it?

Well, that means no indulging in certain kinds of fantasies. That means disconnecting from the internet the moment a porn link appears.

That just doesn't fit with the new you. But why doesn't it fit? Not because sex is bad or dirty.

No. Sex is a good gift designed by God for self-giving intimacy within marriage. But our old selves prefers to take, not give.

And sexual sin takes sex from its proper place, often leaving people feeling used and empty. It takes someone's body with no intention of giving them our entire lives.

[11 : 05] It takes an image bearer whom God loves and turns them into objects for us to consume. And Paul says these are old clothes you need to throw away.

And that includes greed as well. Or as some Bible translations put it, covetousness. Why? Because in some ways that lies at the root of our taking.

Think back to the Ten Commandments. What are the first nine commandments all about? They are to do with actions, aren't they?

Don't steal, honour your father and mother, etc. But right at the end, we get don't covet. covet. And that's no longer just to do with our actions, but with our motivation.

By ending with coveting, God shows that sin isn't just about what we do, but what we want. For what we want, we take.

[12 : 22] And Paul seems to be employing the same logic here. Why should we put to death all these verse 5 sins? Because all of them, in the end, are tied to wanting or coveting something or someone else other than God.

And that is idolatry. back in Colossians 3 verse 2, Paul says, set your minds on things above, which is really just a way of saying set your minds on Christ.

But this is us setting our minds on things other than Christ. But Paul said, hey, don't you call yourself a Christian?

Doesn't that mean Christ is your life? So don't make someone else's body, or someone else's job, or someone else's house, or someone else's life, the very thing your life becomes all about.

That is not what you should be putting on. That's idolatry. And verse 6, idolatry invites God's wrath.

[13 : 45] So don't go there. And why would you, when in Christ, you can know with full confidence that you no longer need to fear God's wrath?

So, leave behind your old self, and live out your true identity, one, where you know that you can stand before God in faith, faith, not in fear.

So that is the verse 5 list. But really, the verse 8 list is similar. Once again, Paul says, get rid of all that garbage that comes from your mouth.

So ask yourself, am I someone who displays a quick temper anger, or a sharp tongue, especially when my desires are not met?

If so, Paul says, don't give in, but get rid of anger and rage. Or ask yourself, am I someone with a mean spirit, an attitude where I just wish the worst for someone?

[15 : 02] Paul says, don't give in, but get rid of malice. Or ask yourself, am I someone who pains others in such a way that makes them seem worse than they are?

Maybe I do that so that I can look good in comparison? Or because that person happens to upset me? Well, Paul says, don't give in, but get rid of slander.

After all, Christ isn't that kind of person. And if you claim Christ is your life, that's not the clothes you should be wearing, should it?

And once again, just as he did with verse 5, Paul rounds it off by getting to the heart of the matter in verse 9. Do not lie to one another.

For are not things like malice and slander and unjustified anger all based on lies? They are misrepresentations.

[16 : 14] And why do we lie? Because we often want to push our own agenda, not God's. That's why Paul describes idolatry elsewhere as trading truth for a lie.

So don't go down that path. It is idolatry territory and it's not living out the true you in Christ.

But here is the thing. I've just spent a bit of time talking about what we need to kill. But in truth, on our own, we can't.

Now, some of the other guys on Colossae thought we could. Do you remember a few weeks ago when we looked at 2 verse 20 to 23 and saw all those rules that some people had come up with?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. They thought detailed rules could do the job. But they couldn't.

[17 : 25] Why? Because such rules can't touch our hearts. And that is where sin makes its home. Left to ourselves, we simply cannot put sin to death.

But here is the good news. In Christ, we can. Why? Because the short answer is, Christ has already put it to death.

He's already cut sin off from us. It's a bit like this. Imagine that you discovered some sort of cancerous growth on your arm.

You know, it's almost like an extra limb coming out here. It's pretty itchy. And the doctor says, we've got to amputate if we want to save your life.

And after the surgery, the doctor urges you, every trace of that cancerous limb is gone. There's no cells, no nerves, no muscles that remain.

[18 : 33] It's been put to death, so to speak. That's precisely what happened when we put our faith in Christ. Our old, cancerous, sinful self, that earthly nature Paul speaks of, has been cut off and crucified with him.

But then you ask, why doesn't it feel that way? Well, ask an amputee, and they will tell you, sometimes, even though you know that limb is gone, you can't help but still feel it.

you know, there's still an itch where it used to be. Sometimes you even go looking for it, reaching to scratch that part, even though it's not there anymore. Some people call these sensations a phantom limb, where your body remembers what used to be there, even though it's been amputated and you've got no connection with it any longer.

That's how sin can feel like in our lives. its power has been cut off, but you can still feel its old tug.

You still feel an itch to gossip, or a twitch of anger, or a yearning for that old habit. And you might even scratch that itch sometimes.

[20 : 06] Those phantom sensations can be pretty overwhelming. But the truth is, it is no longer there.

That cancerous limb, that old sinful self, has been surgically removed by Christ's finished work. The itch you feel is just a memory, a ghost of what used to be.

It has no real power over you anymore. or as verse 7 puts it, you used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived, but the point is, it's no longer part of the new you.

So when those phantom sensations of anger, lust, greed, or envy arise, we don't have to scratch them.

We don't have to give in. because what is causing the itch has been cut off. The desire to scratch that itch is precisely what we are called to put to death by reminding ourselves, it's not there, it's not part of me anymore in Christ.

[21 : 26] I don't have to give in to it. So my brothers and sisters, live out the real you. of course, this side of heaven, it isn't always easy.

I don't know about you, but I still have a shirt or two that is a real struggle to take off whenever I wear it. You know, the fabric, it clings to you in weird ways, and so it becomes a real wrestling match just to take it off.

And sometimes, taking off the old self is like that. But the good news in Christ is, God says it's possible.

Really. Truly. Honestly. So make the effort. Dig into the idols driving these behaviors and apply the gospel to them.

Is your lust a desire for intimacy without vulnerability because vulnerability feels too scary? Well, in Christ, you can have both.

[22 : 39] Vulnerability before him without fear of him walking away. Or is your malice rooted in insecurity? In Christ, you'll find true security freeing you to humble yourself and to lift others up.

So that is the first step in expressing our identity in Christ. Take off the old self. But of course, we must then take the corresponding step.

So, secondly, put on the new self given by Christ. Put on the new self given by Christ. Paul starts this section by building on what he's just said.

not only are you no longer your old self, Christ has cut it off, but you are already a new self.

Notice the precise wording in verses 9 and 10. It's on the screen. Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices.

[23 : 46] Now, look at that phrase, since you have taken off. That is past tense. it's done. And then look at have put on the new self in verse 10.

What tense is that? Also, past tense. This is key. Paul is not commanding you to become new.

He is saying, because you are new, put on your new clothes to express that God-given identity.

This is absolutely crucial. So, think of a graduation gown. When I wore mine at Oxford, it didn't turn me into a graduate, but it did signify my new status.

By putting on what I've been granted, I showed I wasn't a student anymore. I've graduated. And so later, when Paul lists the qualities in verses 12 to 14, he is simply saying, dress like the person you are.

[25 : 05] You've been chosen, set apart, and beloved by God in Christ. Verse 12. So, dress in a way that signifies your status.

Christ. And yet, at the same time, verse 10, this new identity in Christ is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

So, Paul is telling us expressing our new identity in Christ isn't something that happens all at once. It's a process. Yes, God has made us new people in Christ, but we still need to spend the rest of our lives learning to live that out, step by step.

We have to keep turning our hearts and our minds towards Jesus again and again. Growing spiritually takes a lifetime. The Bible affirms this elsewhere.

In 2 Corinthians 4 verse 16, we're told our inner self is being renewed day by day. Romans 12 verse 2 says we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

[26 : 24] In other words, we are an ongoing renovation site. So, there is going to be some scaffolding, some clutter, some debris, but that is okay because God is doing this, renovating us, so that we can become like the most attractive person in the universe, Jesus himself.

The very image of God. And you know what? That is really what the Christian life is all about. Becoming more like Jesus.

God is forgiveness. And that is why the new set of clothes we are meant to put on looks the way it does in verses 12 to 14. There is compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

There is bearing with one another and being forgiving. Because when you think about those things, isn't that just describing Jesus?

Isn't he full of compassion as he draws near to the bruised heart, tenderly lifting up those who lie crushed beneath the burden of sin and sorrow?

[27 : 52] Perhaps it's your bruised heart he is engaging with today. Isn't he kind, letting the little children come to him and speaking with tenderness to the Samaritan woman?

And is he not kind to you, welcoming you in all your dirtiness and messiness? Is he not humble, stooping low to wash the feet of his disciples?

And not allowing his status as the creator of this universe prevent him from dying a dishonorable death on the cross? Has he not counted himself the least for your sake?

And are we not talking about a gentle and patient saviour, ready to journey with slow learners and doubters? People just like us, in other words.

This is Jesus. And this is the set of clothes we're meant to put on if we're in him.

[29 : 09] That's logical, isn't it? So if you are expressing your identity in Christ, that means you become a person who pays attention to others.

When you see a need, you simply and quietly meet that need without any fanfare. You see others who are lower on the packing order and you serve them without saying they owe you anything.

You might be someone who is strong, whether physically or maybe in the influence you have or in some other way, but you bring that strength you have under control to thoughtfully care for others.

And that is being gentle. You see, aren't these the privileges we have received in Christ? That's how he has treated us.

And that's now the privilege we get to share with others to treat them in the same way. And that is why we always need to keep coming back to Jesus so that we can clothe ourselves with him.

[30 : 21] As John Owen also said, our greatest hindrance in the Christian life is not our lack of effort, but our lack of acquaintedness with our privileges.

So, for example, if we don't realize how much we've been forgiven, little wonder we have trouble forgiving others. But immerse yourself in that wonderful truth of what a wretched sinner we are.

And yet, in Christ, God still forgives us. And that becomes a little easier. And to clothe yourself with Christ means you are clothing yourself with love above all.

Verse 14. You see, whenever you're being humble or gentle or whatever it is, it should be an expression of love above all.

That is what Paul is saying. At the end of the day, these virtues are simply specific ways love shows up in our lives.

[31 : 27] But here is another implication. Paul also says in verse 14, it is love which binds all these virtues together in perfect unity.

In other words, love is like a belt which keeps all your clothes in the right place. So this invites us to ask ourselves, are all these things being held together in my life?

For example, I might think of myself as someone who is very patient. I don't get angry with people quickly. But I might not actually be very humble towards them in my attitude.

And if so, then maybe, just maybe, I'm not as loving as I think I am. Because these virtues should go together.

Otherwise, it is like as if we are wearing our new clothes in a sloppy way. You know, my arm might be in the wrong sleeve or my zipper is unzipped. And as a result, I'm only displaying Christ-likeness in a haphazard way.

[32 : 46] So love is how we put on the new clothes or the new self properly. But Paul needs to help us see one more thing. this wardrobe change we're meant to undergo, it's not just for individuals, it's for the community.

Because look at verse 11. Here there is no Gentile Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

In summary, Paul is simply saying if Christ is all that matters, no other difference matters. Sure, we come from different cultures, we have different histories, but in Christ, we can love one another and not harm one another like those sin lists in verses 5 and 8.

For verse 15, we are now members of one body. We are called to peace because the peace Christ has won for us on the cross, the peace which means there is no barrier between God and us, is now at the core of our community.

But how can we make sure we keep encouraging one another to put on the new self, to wear the new clothes, and to live out this gospel peace.

[34 : 28] Answer verse 16. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

This is how the director of FES Australia, Richard Chin, explains it. We are to bathe ourselves in the gospel as we read, speak, and sing the scriptures to one another.

The Bible is the means by which we let the peace of Christ, that is the gospel, rule in our hearts.

and that is why you would notice one of the core convictions of our church is to be driven by God's word. Because actually, how can each of us become more like the Jesus of verses 12 to 14?

Only if we let the Bible live in us as a church. Not just in Bible studies, but in our songs, our prayers, and even our conversations.

[35 : 51] And as we truly clothe ourselves with Christ, what will mark our lives? A deep, abiding thankfulness.

Paul hammers this home three times in verses 15, 16, and 17. Be thankful, verse 15. Sing with gratitude to God in your hearts, verse 16.

Whatever you do, do it giving thanks to God the Father through Christ, verse 17. Why does he emphasize this so much?

Because thankfulness is the natural overflowing response to all Christ has accomplished. it is also the guardrail protecting the presence of love in our community.

For an attitude of thankfulness constantly reminds us that we are all simply recipients of God's abundant grace. And crucially, thankfulness is the motivating field that keeps us from taking off our new clothes.

[37 : 04] thankfulness reminds us that in Christ we already have God's complete fullness. We have all we need.

He is all sufficient. So my brothers and sisters, this morning we've seen who you truly are.

Chosen, loved, and raised to new life in Christ. This isn't a theory. It's your reality if you are truly a believer.

And because it's your reality, you have the power to shed those old ill-fitting garments of anger, lust, and greed. And you can step confidently into the beautiful Christ-like attire of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

So let this new wardrobe define you, not as a burden to achieve, but as the natural expression of the new person God has already made you to be.

[38 : 22] And as you live out this true identity, may your life be an overflow of thanksgiving to God through Jesus in every word and deed.

Let's pray. Father, the Bible is your voice, and we trust that you have spoken loud and clear.

So we pray that this morning we will not harden our hearts, but we will allow your spirit to keep it soft so that we will hear what you need to say to us.

We pray that indeed the message of Christ, the gospel of Christ, is dwelling among us richly right now, and that it will enable us to keep teaching and admonishing one another so that we will keep being renewed in the knowledge of the image of our creator, so that we can be more like Jesus.

And we pray that it's not just us individually, but we pray our church as a whole will become more and more conformed to Christ, and that will help a watching world take notice.

[39 : 35] Let that be our prayer today. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.