

PROTECTING WHAT WE HAVE PUT ON

Colossians 3:15-17

Intro: Colossians 3 is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible on what it means to live the Christian life. There are other chapters which are just as great, but I don't know of any that is more comprehensive than this chapter is. Paul began the chapter by telling us how important it is to keep our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to seek the things which are above, where Christ is. And that means not just at the beginning of the Christian life, but all the way through. In fact, you can see in verse 4 that "Christ . . . is our life." That is not just theory; that is the great reality of the Christian life. And it takes time and prayer for us to really appreciate this wonderful fact, and to experience this day by day. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians stated the same truth in different word. He said in 1 Corinthians 1:9,

God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Apostle John stated it this way in 1 John 5:11 and 12:

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life, but he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Being a Christian, then, is to have the Lord Jesus Christ living in us. We don't have to ask Him to come, when we trust in Him for our salvation, He comes, and He comes to stay!

The Lord Jesus, like God the Father, and God, the Holy Spirit, is omnipresent. This means that all of the Members of the Godhead are present everywhere all of the time, present in the totality of Their Persons. So Christ lives in each one of us in the totality of His Person, just like He didn't dwell anywhere else. At this very moment He is dwelling in Christians in China, or any place else, just like He dwells in you and me. And it is by the power of His life in us that we are becoming progressively more like He is. And it is God's purpose in our salvation that every true Christian is going to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. I have quoted Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer many times when He said this: "God is so delighted with His Son that He is filling heaven with people who are going to be like His Son is."

Now we have been learning from Colossians chapter 3 that if we are going to be like Christ, some great changes have to take place. There

isn't anything about a person who is not a Christian that is pleasing to God. So when we are saved, the Lord begins making changes in our lives. Paul described it as putting off certain things, and putting on other things. These words, putting off, and putting on, does not have to do just with external things, like you took off your night clothes and put on clothing which you wear in public. There are external changes in the life of a Christian, but Paul was speaking about basically internal changes, changes in our character. We are to put off the way we lived before we were saved, and put on a new way of life altogether. Specifically, we put off the sins in which we lived before we were saved, and put on those characteristics that are called godly. And for the Apostle Paul to tell the Christians in ancient Colosse to put off certain things, and to put on others, means that we as Christians are responsible to God to put off, and to put on. Last Sunday I gave you a verse written by the Apostle Paul, but found in his letter to the church at Rome which summarizes perfectly what he wrote to the Colossian Christians here in chapter 3. Let me read the verses before the verse I am talking about, so you can get the whole message that Paul was giving to the believers at Rome. Here are the verses found in Romans 13:11-14:

11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Now, among other things that these verses tell us, is that we are going to spend our lives putting off and putting on. That is we are going to spend our lives putting off sins, and putting on godliness. Christ shows us by His life what we have been saved to be, but He also gives us the strength to say "no" to sin, and "yes" to holy living. That is what it means to "put off," and to "put on."

Now let me ask a question for all of us to consider. Here it is: Have we really been living this past week seeking to put off sin, and to put on the characteristics that we can see in our Bibles were the characteristics of our Lord? I hope you remember that I told you that the Apostle Paul gave us

in verses 12, 13, and 14 seven righteous characteristics of the Christian life which can be seen in Christ, and which need to be seen in you and me. Let me review them with you. As we put off our old ways of living, and put on a new way of life, this is what we are going to begin to look like.

Let us look at them again.

1) In Colossians 3:12, “bowels of mercies.” The word “bowel” meant something different when the KJV was written. To us the bowel has to do with the intestines. But in olden days it was practically identical with the heart, not the organ that beats in our chests, but the inner man, the real you. The NASB renders it “a heart of compassion.” The NIV uses just the word, compassion. We are told in Matthew 9:36 that when the Lord looked upon the multitude, His heart was moved with compassion because they were like sheep who did not have a shepherd. When you and I look upon the sinning multitudes today, which is the stronger response in our hearts, disgust, or compassion?

2) The second word which Paul used was “kindness.” It follows from “mercies,” or *compassion*. “Kindness” speaks of a desire to help those we see who are suffering the effects of sin.

3) “Humbleness of mind” speaks of the attitude toward ourselves. It is reflected in the saying, “There go I but for the grace of God.” Philippians chapter 2 speaks of the humility of our Lord who humbled Himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the Cross. We are here in this world to help, to spread the Gospel, and to seek to lift up the fallen.

4) “Meekness” speaks of our attitude toward others. Bishop Lightfoot says that is best described by its opposite, rudeness, or harshness. Think of the Lord in His dealing with sinners. Trench says that meekness is first manifested in our relationship with God. This, too, was illustrated by our Lord’s submission to the will of the Father.

5) “Longsuffering” speaks of a person who can retaliate and avenge himself, but he deliberately chooses not to do so. Again this characteristic was very prominent in the life of our Lord.

And then moving on into verse 13:

6) “Forbearing one another and forgiving one another” is bearing with one another is putting up with one another, and forgiving one another, and this is likened to the way our Lord has put up with us and forgiven us, not of just some of our sins, but of all of them. How Christ-like it is if someone comes to ask forgiveness for what they have said or done against us, that we would be able to tell them that we forgave them before they asked us to do it.

And then moving on to verse 14, we have

7) “Charity,” or love. Lightfoot wrote that “love is the outer garment which holds the others in their places. It is good for us to remind ourselves of 1 Corinthians 13, not only seeing how indispensable it is, but the characteristics of the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts. Human love can go to amazing lengths, but nothing can compare with “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the words of verses 12, 13, and 14 were descriptive of each one of us. They can be, and they should be. But they are not natural to us as they were to Christ. But these are the garments that we need to put on, and to keep working on them, as we look forward to the day when it will be natural for us to manifest these characteristics toward other and toward ourselves in the same way we see them displayed in the life of the Lord Jesus.

But now as we come to the last three verses in this section before Paul addressed the family and the workplace, what was the Apostle Paul's purpose in the teaching we have verses 15, 16, and 17. Many expositors don't seem think there is any difference from the verses that have gone before. But Dr. Griffith Thomas who lives and ministered in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, believed that these verses has a very special purpose in the mind and heart of the Apostle Paul. Dr. Griffith Thomas called the theme of these last three verses, “The Safeguard of the Christian Life.” I have called them, as I have indicated in the subject of my message, “Protecting What We Have Put On.”

We all know, or should know, that the Christian life has its ups and downs. God did not design it that way, but because of what we are, still in the flesh and struggling with sin, weak in ourselves, we need to know how to preserve the gains that we have made, and continue to climb by God's grace to our final glory. Christ always has been, and always will continue to be, the source of true and continued progress in our pursuit of holiness. And so in the first of these three verses, verse 15, Paul turned our attention to the peace of Christ (which seems to be the preferred reading, although in Philippians 4:7 we do have “the peace of God) . In the 16th verse, it is the Word of Christ. And in verse 17, “the name of the Lord Jesus.” So in all three verses the emphasis is upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The point is that the Lord Who brought us this far, is not going to forsake us now, but He is going to see us through until we are glorified.

However, we have a responsibility in all of this. I say this because all three of these verses are addressed to the believers in Colosse. Let us look briefly at all three.

First, the peace of Christ. One of the greatest needs of the human heart is the need for peace – and perhaps it is the greatest need. Don't overlook this theme all through Scripture. In Romans 5:1 we are told that one of the major gifts of our salvation is peace with God. There is no peace for anyone that does not start with peace with God. Now this peace which we have through Christ, acts as an umpire in our hearts. As long as we are doing the will of God, our Lord maintains peace in our hearts. But if we take another path of our own choosing, we leave the peace of Christ behind. Therefore the peace of Christ in our hearts is a safeguard for us that we are in the will of God.

And notice that we are called to peace in one body, so that Paul is thinking here about the peace of Christ that we enjoy with each other in the church, the body of Christ. For this safeguard, we give thanks to Christ, but also to God, and to the Holy Spirit. If we have turmoil in our hearts, or if there is broken fellowship with others in the body of Christ, it is a warning that we need to turn back and make things right.

You will remember that the Lord Jesus said to His disciples when He was with them for the last time before His arrest and death, He said to them,
27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

Although it did not seem right that He would leave them, and especially that He would die, yet in giving them peace He witnessed that all was in accord with the sovereign will of God.

But let us move on to verse 16. What is “the word of Christ”? It is the Bible. But probably it has to do with the way in which the Bible speaks of Christ. Does the “word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom”? Has it found a home in your heart? When you are not reading it, are you thinking about it? Are you getting wiser day by day because of what you are learning from the Word? The best way to begin to slip back in your life as a Christian, is to neglect the reading and meditation on the Word. But if it dwells in you richly, abundantly, it is going to produce worship in your heart toward the Lord, and it will lead to ministry to the people of God, and again I would say, that the context here is in the church. What a

blessing it is to be with people who have made a home in their hearts for the Word of God! Such a church will be a foretaste of heaven on earth. The sword of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is the Word of God. When the Word has a home in your heart, and your life is being transformed by the Word, it is going to have the same effect on other Christians in the church. And the Word in your heart will make a difference to you as to the music that will likewise be dear to your heart – “psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs,” as you sing in your hearts to the Lord. Notice the ministry of music is designed to go in two directions: to other believers, and to the Lord.

But now let us move on to verse 17.

Spiritual progress will continue if all that you do “in word or deed,” and that is a big order, you do it all “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” What does this mean? The character of the Lord Jesus is revealed in His Name. To do in the name of the Lord Jesus is to live under His authority, and to depend upon His power and blessing in every situation. He is our Master; we are His servants. Bishop Moule says that to do all in the Lord’s name is to remember as the deepest instinct of our lives that in everything and for everything we belong to Him, “giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”

Concl: Thus we can maintain the relationship with our Lord that we have, and go on to greater heights of blessing, if we are faithful in seeing that we have “the peace of Christ,” and in making a home in our hearts for “the word of Christ,” and be careful that we do all and speak all “in the name of the Lord Jesus. Thus, we will maintain the ground that we have taken, and be able to press on to “the prize for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).