

“Put On”

Colossians

Colossians 3:12-17

06/11/2023

Introduction

Colossians 3. Pray.

Marriage. I want to start this morning with a hypothetical conversation. Imagine you were talking to a newly married husband. It's a friend of yours who had recently gotten married and so you want to know how the marriage is going.

And you were curious so you asked him – **hey what's different now that you're married?**

Now imagine they respond something like this:

- Well, let's see...I stopped dating other women.
- I stopped living on my own.
- I stopped only buying groceries and cooking meals for one person.
- I stopped having any say in how my house was going to be decorated.

Maybe you'd find yourself thinking – that's great, but your list feels a bit lopsided. You just gave me a list of all of the things you stopped, but like *what are you actually doing now?* What, if anything, has been added to your life as a result of this new identity as husband?

Now, while that's a silly hypothetical, I actually think it's a pretty accurate representation of sort of the default of how many people, both inside and outside the church, tend to think about what it means to be a Christian.

Being a Christian, more often than thought, is defined by a list of “don'ts”, right? What does it mean to be a Christian? It means you don't have sex. Don't drink. Don't smoke. Don't cuss. Don't be mean.

And while that's maybe the more caricatured version, I think many of us can actually believe this is true in much more subtle ways. Just think for a moment about the last few times you confessed your sin to God or to another Christian. How often was your confession focused on

a wrong you did that you shouldn't have done? And how often was your confession something right you failed to do that you should have done?

- I know in my own life I'm much quicker to confess an outburst of anger than I am a failure to share the gospel with my friend out of fear.
- I know I am more likely to confess, like I did this past week at community group, my coveting/desire to have what others have, than I am my own lack of generosity.

And that can show us that functionally we often think of following Jesus as a list of things we stop doing, and not also an invitation to things we must start as well.

Now, Christianity certainly has a list of "don'ts" involved with it, that's true...But if you track through the Scriptures for any amount of time you'll start to notice Jesus and the NT authors are just as concerned, if not more concerned, about what you'll start doing when you follow Him. Almost every list of "don'ts" comes with a list of "do's". Attributes, actions, embodied ways of being that should now mark our lives as followers of Christ.

And that is true here in Colossians 3.

If you missed last week we are doing a little two-week mini series focusing on Colossians 3 and talking specifically about **sanctification – The work of God, over the course of our lives, where He shapes us, through our active participation, to look more like Jesus.**

And last week we started by grounding ourselves into what is true about those of us who follow Jesus – that we have participated, in the fullest sense, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Meaning – our old self, our old nature, who we were before Jesus has died with Christ, and we have been raised to walk as a new creation.

And we spent the whole time exploring that the first part of what it means to walk as a new creation is to **stop doing some things**. These things we put to death in the language of the passage – things like sexual immorality, anger, slander, idolatry.

But, just as crucial in learning how to live out our faith, is not just what we stop doing, but also what we are to now start doing. What is now supposed to mark our lives as followers of Jesus.

And that is what we'll turn our attention to today. Paul is going to turn away from what we put off, and he's going to instead now challenge us to "put on".

So here's where we're headed, just like last week, same outline – easy to follow:

1. **What** do we put on?
2. **How** do we put it on?
3. **Why** do we put it on?

What do we put on?

12 Put on then...

Just like we saw last week we *are freed to say no to sin*. In the same way, we are *free to say "yes" to the things of God*.

MEANING – You are not a slave to your feelings. You are not beholden to your emotions. You are not exempt from following Jesus because of your personality type, history, or past or present experiences.

You have the capacity and command to choose to honor God with your life by putting these things on.

Here are some things that should mark your life as a follower of Jesus (from v12-13):

1. **Compassionate Hearts** – Deep seated pain over someone else's difficulty or misfortune. We might more commonly refer to this as empathy. The ability to see the struggle someone else is dealing with, not stay reserved or disconnected or pulled back, but to enter into that pain with them and let it actually affect you on an interior level.
2. **Kindness** – The word here in Greek is best defined as the tangible meeting of real needs. To be kind is not simply to say something nice – it's to step in and meet someone's real need. This can be financial, relational, emotional, physical.
3. **Humility** – Thinking of others more highly and more often than yourself. The posture that switches when you enter a room, where you're no longer entering thinking "Here I am!" but rather "There you are!" I'm getting my eyes off of myself and onto others.

4. **Meekness** – Meekness in the Scriptures is an active and deliberate acceptance of undesirable circumstances. It's the ability to be hurt and not have to lash out in retaliation or defense, even when you can. It's rephrased by Paul in verse 13 – “bearing with one another”. Allowing yourself to absorb the hit. Absorb the pain and not feel the need to play the victim, sulk, pout, or retaliate.
5. **Patience** – Goes right along with meekness as well. The Bible's idea of patience is often translated in older translations as “long-suffering”. The ability to remain joyful over a long time even with the hurtful or frustration-inducing actions of someone else.
6. **Forgiveness** – Freely extending grace and pardon to someone else. Choosing to overlook when someone hurts you. Choosing to extend grace when someone does something you'd rather them not to. Being willing to reconcile and resolve the conflict.

And then Paul sums it up in v14...

14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Above all of these...aka really what I'm talking about with this whole thing is – **LOVE**. Love. At a base level what marks your life towards others, specifically those in the church now as a Christian? **Love**.

You put on love. As a follower of Jesus your life becomes marked by and full of love. Love, not in a cultural sense of ‘when it's easy’ or ‘when they'll love you in return’ or ‘helping them be their best selves’, but love in the ways of Jesus.

The #1 thing that now defines your life as a follower of Jesus is your willingness to act in sacrificial love for the good of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

In fact this is to be such a marker that John would say it this strongly in **1 John 4:8** —
“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

You choose to put on, to embody via action, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and forgiveness towards those around you.

Which once again, is easier said than done right? Like I don't think that's a shocking revelation. Hey Christian – you're called to love others. WHAT? I AM?

The battle is in the gap. The gap between what I know and how I actually live. So then the question we have to ask is – how?

How do we put on love?

Paul tells us. 3 things:

1. Remember you're a part of the body of Christ.

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

Now, when Paul says “your hearts”, the “your” is plural. He’s not saying let the peace of Christ rule in your individual heart, but let the peace of Christ rule collectively in all of your hearts. Which means the peace he’s talking about is not inner tranquility. Though Christ has inner rootedness and hope for your heart, that’s promised elsewhere in the Scriptures (Phil 4), that’s not what’s being addressed here.

What he’s talking about here when he says “let the peace of Christ rule in y’all’s hearts” is the interpersonal reconciling peace of Christ that unites us to other believers.

That’s made even more clear in the second part of verse 15 – the peace of Christ, to which indeed you were called in **one body**.

Let me explain – When you become a Christian, you become through Jesus a part of what the Bible calls “The Church” – that is everyone around the world who also professes faith in Christ, you are now a part of that group. You don’t choose to become a part of it, trusting in Jesus makes you a part of it. (You must choose which local little ‘c’ church you’ll live out that big ‘C’ church identity in, but you, because of Jesus, are brought into the big ‘C’ church, whether you wanted it or not).

And there’s a ton of ways the Church is described in the Bible – family, temple, the bride of Christ.

But one of the most prominent ways the Church is described is as the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the church, and we are His body.

Meaning we are connected like your elbow to your hand. Or like an ankle and a foot. That is how thick our attachment to one another, not *should be*, but *is* because of what Christ has done to join us together in reconciling peace through the gospel.

So if you want to put on love, you must that let reconciling peace, that Christ-given, Christ-bought, Christ-established peace ***rule in your heart.***

In other words – you must let the reality that Christ has put you into a body of believers be your north star for relationships.

How you interact with me and how I interact with you is *ruled by*, is *governed by* the fact that we're a part of the same body.

- So I can't say I don't need you, you can't say you don't need me.
- I can't say I'm more important than you, you can't say you're more important than me.
- I can't just cut you off and leave you out to dry, and you can't just cut me off and leave me out to dry.

You can't sever the tie between your elbow and your hand except at great pain and great cost. The same is true of how we are meant to function in relationship to one another. We're all a part of the same body, united by Christ, and that now rules over how we live.

“Best friends”. One of the things we've been doing lately is repeating over and over to Harper (our 3-year-old) that Norah (our 1-year-old) is her best friend. We say it and ask it all the time – “Who's your best friend?” “Norah!” And we've been doing it enough now where she's started saying it on her own. She'll run up to her and shout (a little too loudly) – “NORAH! YOU'RE MY BEST FRIEND! GIVE ME A SQUEEZE!” Work in progress...

But our goal is that we'll repeat it enough that eventually they'll both believe it's true and then their actions will be governed out of that reality. We want the reality that they are sisters and therefore best friends to rule over their lives such that it actually changes their actions. That by saying it, they believe it, and by believing it they act like it.

Because belief drives identity and identity drives action. That's how all of life works. If I believe we're best friends, then I will learn to identify as best friends and therefore I will act like we're best friends.

The same is true here. If I believe I've been brought into the body of Christ, then I'll identify with that body, which will then lead me to treat others like we're a part of that body together.

Which, let me just give you a gift here – that's a huge part of why we do a time every week in the gathering to "pass the peace". It's two-minutes where we pause to greet those around us, have a short conversation. It's not just to make introverts feel uncomfortable. It's a rhythmic practice of weekly remembering together – we are now the family of God brought together by the reconciling peace of Christ. So let that go to work for you.

Let the 2 minutes we spend each week be a spurring on moment for you towards greater love, forgiveness, kindness, and humility you are called to have EVERY DAY towards your church family.

2. Be thankful for your present community.

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

This one seems really basic, but it's almost so basic we miss it. Gratitude is a lost key in sanctification.

If you want to grow in love towards other Christians – learn to be thankful for them. Learn to give God praise in your prayers for the people He has placed in your life.

This is Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his book *Life Together*. He writes,

"Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for what He has done for us. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, by His forgiveness, and His promise."

How do we put on love? By being thankful for those around us. Why are we thankful for these people that are difficult to love? Because we realize that Christ himself brought us into this body. What a gift! We must now learn to continually receive it as a gift.

Community. I see this all the time pastorally with folks who will be new to the city and new to our church and for the first 6 months or a year they're just so grateful. Like they are just

incredibly thankful to not be alone in this city, but to be able to have people in their lives who love God and love them.

And then about a year in, nothing about the community changes, just their perception has. Community stops being a grace gift, and starts being an assumed burden. And their ability to love it and receive it starts to wear thin.

So if that's you, if that's where you're at, struggling to put on love – great first step in learning to put on love towards them – Start being thankful. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you switch from a posture of grumbling to gratitude.

Instead of “ugh that person blah blah blah” just pause, breathe – “Lord, thank you for this person. They're a gift from you in my life.”

Because that person is always a gift from God:

- Either a gift who is at that present moment serving you, loving you, caring for you – and that is for your good.
- Or a gift who at that present moment is sanctifying you and humbling you via your frustration – and that is for your good.

So remember you're a part of the body of Christ. Be thankful for that body.

3. Memorize God's Word

16 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.

Be full of God's word. Memorize it. Meditate on it. Read it, study it. Hear it taught. Sing it, right? Let God's Word make its home in you.

How does this lead to love? Well you can't get very far in the Scriptures, particularly the NT, without seeing God's desire and design that you love His people as He loves His people. Without encountering one of the 59 commands in the NT alone of how we should forgive, love, serve, and care for one another.

Without reading passages like...

Phil 2:3 – Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Romans 12:10 – Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

So we let those passages through memorizing, meditating on God's Word, sitting with it in stillness and silence, dwell richly in us and then produce the fruit of believing it and obeying it and loving those around us.

Because you know what the Holy Spirit does? When we are faithful to hide God's Word in our heart. He brings it into our minds at just the right time to convict us and lead us to holiness.

Lord's Prayer. I got hit by this a few weeks ago. During Lent this year we worked through the Lord's Prayer. And one of the practices we did as a church was to pray through the Lord's Prayer every day. And so for 7 weeks I had been praying straight from Scripture "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."

And then you know what happens. Lindsay and I get into an argument, as married couples do. And my default is bitterness. I'm an expert grudge holder, the Lord is sanctifying me. But as I'm sitting there withholding forgiveness from her, you know what the Spirit brings into my mind – "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."

The power of getting in God's Word weeks earlier, is now being used by the Holy Spirit to transform me and renew me in this moment.

This is why we push Scripture as such a central and formative practice in our church. It's one of our 4 core practices - Scripture, prayer, Sabbath, and hospitality.

It's not so much because of the immediate effects of right then and there Bible reading, but because we believe Hebrews 4:12 is telling the truth – that the Scriptures are *living* and *active*. So over time this will do for us what it has been doing for Christians through the centuries – **The Spirit of God works through the Word of God to produce holiness within us.**

So we commit to study it, read it, get it into our hearts. And then we wait in eager expectation that God will use it to over the long haul, form us into particular types of people.

Because as I was reminded by another pastor this week – The Word of God is not in danger of not succeeding.

Scripture is huge part of the means of how God makes us more compassionate, kind, patient, humble, meek.

So what do we do? We put on love.

How?

- **Peace of Christ Rule**
- **Gratitude for our community**
- **Get in God's Word and get God's Word into us**

Why do we put on love?

Which leads to the final, and I would argue, most important question – **why?**

- Because it's the right thing to do! Sure.
- Because it's what the Bible tells us! Definitely.

But there's something even deeper than that. And it's eerily similar to last week. Look back at verse 12. I wanted to skip it until here.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved...

How do we learn to put on love? **By living as the beloved of God.**

It once again all comes back to identity. **Who you are in Christ Jesus overflows into your life in the world.**

Just look for a minute at who the Bible says you are. If you are in Christ, here's three short, yet reality-altering words:

Chosen. Before the foundation of the, Ephesians 1 tells us, God looked out and declared that you would be a part of His kingdom. Meaning – if you're in Christ it's not because you woke up one day and decided to come to Jesus. But it is because God chose you, pursued you, won you with His love.

Long before you were born and became a part of history, you existed in God's heart. Long before your parents looked down with their admiring gaze, or before you got a certificate for some accomplishment, before you had a title or prestige or relationships or a place in the world – God wanted you.

You are a Christian only and solely based on the wondrous grace and favor of God. God pursued you! God wanted you! You deserved nothing. And you got everything only because of the love of God.

And then not only did he choose you, he made and declared you **holy**. Meaning He set you apart for Himself. That's what holiness means – being set apart. God chose you to be holy. He won you to Himself so that you would be distinct from the world and set apart for Him. For life with Him. For flourishing with Him.

And if that were not enough – mystery upon mystery – God calls you His **beloved**. Are you kidding me? Me? Me? All my failure? All my regrets? All my stupidity? All my limits? All my humanity?

The same God who we read about in Ecclesiastes who does whatever He pleases. Who holds the world together. Who's work goes on into eternity. He would call me, little tiny mist of a life me, His beloved?

The beloved of God. Dearly loved by my Father. That he likes me. That he delights in me. That he smiles at me. That in Christ Jesus I've freely received His smile.

Just let that sit for a moment, Christian – **you are the beloved of God.**

Loving others doesn't win you God's love.

Having God's love creates in you love for others.

Because when we're living in the daily reality of being the beloved of God, we then have the freedom and power necessary to sacrificially give of ourselves for the good of others.

- When we're rooted in being the beloved of God, not searching for our belovedness somewhere else, we're free to extend kindness towards one another without expecting anything in return.
- When we're living in the abundant compassion and patience of God towards us, we're freed and empowered to extend that same compassion and patience towards those who frustrate or wound us.
- When we're living in the assurance of God's forgiveness to us for every wrong and evil we have and will do against Him (freely forgiven because of Jesus) – we're freed and empowered to extend exorbitant, counter-cultural, shocking to the world and human rationality, boundary breaking forgiveness to those who sin against us.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved...love.

Conclusion

And then here's Paul's conclusion to this whole section. His summarizing phrase to what we've seen the past two weeks:

17 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.

That's sanctification. That more and more...whatever we do, Paul says. Every word we speak, every action we take. Every single one – we do in the name of Christ.

- As I'm entering into this conversation, I'm doing it in the name of Jesus.
- As I'm parenting and disciplining my kid, I'm doing it in the name of Jesus.
- As I'm encouraging or confronting someone about their sin, I'm doing it in the name of Jesus.
- As I'm sending the text, making the phone call, cooking the meal for someone in need, I'm doing it in the name of Jesus.

Resting in the deepest reality that my old self is dead, I'm raised with Christ, and I am the chosen and holy beloved of God.

Pray.