

5/5/19 - Col. 3:12-14 - "The Identity of the Church"

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[0 : 00] Please join me in prayer. Father, let us not take for granted your word this morning. The depth of your word.

Father, that we treat your word with great stewardship. We don't try to add anything to it that we don't take away.

But Father, that your word is perfect how it is. And Father, at this time, with the help of your Holy Spirit, please expose the meaning of this text to us. Let us see why Paul wrote this letter to this Colossian church this morning.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let me grab my point one swig. So first thing we're going to speak about today is the attributes of the church.

The attributes of the church. Let us read together Colossians 3, 12 through 14. It says, Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, 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 must also forgive.

[1 : 26] And above all these things, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. First point is attributes of the church.

Verse 12 starts out saying, Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. If we can consider what was spoken about last week, Paul instructs the church of Colossae to now put on then, which some translations say put on therefore, meaning that the reader should be pointed to something previously, a previous flow of thought, a literal context right within its midst.

So we look at the previous flow of thought, which was established in the vice lists, the vices that were to put to death, and the vice lists that were to put off. And we see a special group of people here in this text that have a special relationship with God.

They're given an identity, a classification of people. God's chosen ones. In some translations, it says elect here, or elect of God.

Paul identifies this group as God's chosen ones. And in so doing, he distinguishes this group of people as those who have a designated status of sanctified saints of God, his church here.

[2 : 56] The act of putting off and putting on is something unique to this group of believers, saints of God, the elect, and in whom they are clothing themselves for the purpose of identifying themselves with Christ, the creator.

There was also a selected group of people back in the Old Testament. If we look back at all these pages of biblical history, of the redemptive narrative of the Bible, we see this group of people too.

Looking back, surveying this, we see God's chosen ones, the nation of Israel. And this foreshadowed the New Testament church as the continuation of the true Israel.

Deuteronomy 7, 6-7 speaks on this. It says, For you are a people holy to your God, to the Lord your God.

The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all people.

[4 : 16] But there is a specific reason why God, out of his will, chose this group of people. And he had a command specifically for this group of people as we do the New Testament church today, in which Paul is really getting into.

And God's relationship with these people is holy and beloved. Some translations say dearly loved. That God's relationship has great endearments for this selected group of people.

The unions of these words draw great attention that this is a special love. This is a special love with God's chosen people. It's an extremely personal union with these people.

To say holy is literally meaning pure. A group of people that are pure having characteristics of moral ritual, purity. And their beloved, a charitable love, an agape love, a love that forfeits all your rights and possessions for another.

The tone of which is being communicated here in this passage is about like a family-like union. A salvific status has already been obtained and Paul reinforces the importance of walking in a certain manner.

[5 : 39] This is a family clothes and reflects a distinguished community. But these are people set apart that are to look different. They're instructed to look different. And here are the garments of which this church, this selected group of people, holy and beloved, saints, elect of God, are to put on.

The first garment we see is compassionate hearts in your text. In some translations this says bowels of mercy. Compassion, pity, mercy.

Compassion is a deep awareness of and sympathy for another person's suffering. I like bowels of mercy, how some translations say bowels of mercy because it's more probably expresses the literal stomach of entrails like the insides of our guts where so much of our emotion is felt, getting those gut reactions.

And here, he tells the church to put on a garment of compassionate hearts. The garment, the second garment is of kindness in your text.

Also meaning goodness, a lovely quality of being warm-hearted, considerate, humane, gentle, and sympathetic. This is actually, the word here, kindness, is used as a Greek term to explain a certain quality of wine back in this day.

[7 : 09] You know, after the harsh process like early on in fermentation, it's like, wine's like, whoo, like, it kind of hits the back of your tongue. But as the fermentation process goes on, it gets sweet.

And this word, kindness, is actually used to relate to that quality of wine at this time. Sweet and losing its harshness. And it's also a word that's used by Jesus describing his yoke in Matthew 11, 30, where he says, my yoke is easy.

That same word is used there too. Kindness. The third garment he tells the church to put on is that of humility, lowliness, or humbleness of mind, as some translations say.

So that the disposition of valuing or assessing oneself appropriately, especially in light of another one's sinfulness and our sinfulness, it brings everything into perspective.

In other words, Paul is not influencing the saints to think lower of themselves, like they don't matter because they are holy and beloved. They are used for a specific purpose on this earth of being chosen and elect.

[8 : 30] But Paul's not telling them to think lower of themselves, but to think about themselves less. Because pride is self-exaltation, church, and humility is self-reduction.

The minute we start thinking that anything we have, even the salvation we have, is anything that we have to offer or attain, is just garbage. It's bringing everything into perspective of God's free gift, having a humbleness of mind.

So this is someone who has a proper understanding of humility and aspects of knowing who God is, knowing who man is, but also knowing where we stand in the mix of both of those two realities.

The fourth garment that Paul tells us to put on is one of meekness and gentleness. I kind of went on a tangent on this, so bear with me. Some translations say gentleness.

We see meekness here in the ESV. It's acting in a manner that is gentle, mild, and even-tempered. And this is an interesting word because it takes you back to the Beatitudes.

[9 : 42] Blessed are those who are meek because they will inherit the kingdom of God. But this is an important trait as Jesus even called it in the Beatitudes.

And the culture of many ages likes to identify meekness with weakness. You know, like those little key coin phrases, you know, meekness equals weakness and things like that.

The example would be living like somebody else's doormat, you know, just letting life just kind of, like, walk on you, allowing circumstances to not really affect you too much.

However, the complete opposite is true. Meekness is actually to be understood as an extreme inner tensile strength like that of steel.

This presents one who is meek as an individual of extreme, supreme self-control regardless of the surrounding circumstances. It reminds me of, like, a general in war back in the military ages of, like, battles, you know, with other nations and countries.

[10 : 51] How a general could be in the midst of this violent war but still, at the end of the day, have proper perspective, especially if he's a Christian, knowing that he can lay his head on the pillow and not be affected by the surrounding circumstances, that he shows meekness.

So, church, meekness is strength under the control and power provided by God. Meekness is the strength under the power and control provided by God.

If we look back in these pages too, we see Moses was a prime example of someone who was meek, the most meek man on earth at the time. But Moses, disregarding all of his flaws and things like that of his lack of confidence at times, he was a man who was decisive.

He was hard as nails. I mean, if you could imagine the many people that he was leading firsthand out of that land of Egypt. He had to be a meek person, very strong person.

And he had a righteous anger that was shown and manifested itself at the proper time. And so, likewise, those who are clothed in a garment of meekness are those who are immensely powerful people who are controlled by God with this inner strength like no other.

[12 : 17] And the last and final garment here in the text we see is a garment of patience where in some translations says, long-suffering. Patience, forbearance, meaning patient endurance of pain or unhappiness.

So, simply put, if we stand back and observe these attributes, if we look at these attributes, if they were pasted up on the screen and looking at them, church, we start to see something, a certain identity that there was only one person who exemplified each and every one of these and that was Jesus Christ.

And Paul is telling the church in this text to put these things on as Christ is revealed in the community.

This draws attention and meaning to identify this church. The identity of this church is Jesus Christ. This reinforces the main idea that if we put on, that should mirror Christ and in doing so reveals the image by which they have been created and transformed and are being renewed, which we spoke about last week in verse 10, and having put on a new self which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.

We stopped at that text last week so we can go into this a little bit more in depth today. And this takes us back even to Paul's forecast of this book, this epistle of Colossians that he opened up the introductory section of this book actually forecasting what we're talking about here in Colossians 1.11.

[14 : 05] And actually, another part in Colossians 1 is walking in a manner worthy of the Lord. And specifically in Colossians 1.11 it says, His glorious might.

We see here how His glorious might is manifested in the life of His church through this list of attributes of His church, of what they're to be clothed with. The second point we're going to cover today is the relationships in the church, which we will see is on the foundation of forgiveness.

In verse 13, we see He continues bearing with one another. Look at me in the text, verse 13, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving one another.

As the Lord has forgiven you, you must also, you also must forgive. He gives you two adverb phrases, adverbial phrases here.

And I'm going to call it like an adverbial sandwich of forgiving one another and bearing with one another because in the middle between these two statements of action, calling the church to action, is a prime example that Paul uses to highlight exactly what he's talking about here.

[15 : 38] He says in the first adverbial phrase, a complaint against another and a complaint, an expression of grievance or resentment, especially one assuming blame towards one another.

And then he gives you a specific, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. To forgive someone on account of goodwill one has towards another.

And then finally with the last phrase, forgiving each other. To forgive someone on account of goodwill one has towards another. He's drawing to you action within the church.

But there is a perspective shift here because he's not only just telling you to do it, he's actually bringing in perspective and he's qualifying what he's saying here because he says, just as the Lord has forgiven you in your text in verse 13, you must also forgive.

The expression of a forgiven church is a forgiving church, simply put. The expression of a forgiven church, a sanctified, set-apart church who has chosen a lack of God is a church who expresses forgiveness to one another.

[16 : 56] It is a love which empathizes with those in our lives knowing no matter what garment we have on, we could be all stars rocking these garments, man, knocking them off the list, but knowing that we're no better than one another and we're no better than the worst of sinners outside.

That we are chosen. Nothing of our own doing, but Christ. So the main point is our lives are to mirror Christ in our relationships with one another.

The forgiveness we have received must be reciprocated in our lives. It must be. It is a contingency. The church of Colossae, for instance, and all centuries henceforth to today, we must be masters in execution of forgiveness.

Masters of execution of forgiveness. forgiveness. Because this validates the forgiveness we have received. But the reality is, is Paul is crucially reminding this church, as I am reminding us today, we are terrible at this.

Literally terrible at this. If we were good at it, Paul wouldn't have found a need to remind this church of forgiving one another.

- [18 : 13] And interestingly enough, the connection with bearing with one another and forgiving one another is actually a subtle undertone of each one of the garments which Paul is trying to tell us to put on.

The church of Colossae in us today, it's like the undertone of bearing with one another is having humility, having patience. Bearing with one another is having compassionate heart.

You see how this ties into an undertone of those attributes, those garments which we went through. And this manner of living, living works in complete opposition with the viceless which we spoke about last week.

Of earthliness, of things we need to put to death, of things that we need to put off, it works in complete opposition to those things. So church, the grace we express to one another authenticates the understanding of the grace that we have received.

Think about that. The grace that we express to one another authenticates the grace. Not only just the grace but the understanding, the cognitive understanding of the grace that we have received.

- [19 : 26] Aren't we saved by how we forgive? And then finally, the last point today is speaking on the unity of the church.

We will see this out of the supremacy of love. In verse 14, please turn down with me at verse 14. It says, And above all these things, well above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

man, above all these, Paul just went through an exhaustive list. I guess not exhaustive, but pretty, pretty extenuous list of garments which the church is to put on.

But even more so, he's saying, we are still missing something at this point. He's telling us to put on another garment here.

To put on love. Or some translations say put on charity, which point blank directs exactly what's being spoken about in this usage of the word love, which is charity, agape love, an attribute of God, our creator.

- [20 : 49] To be loved with strong, non-sexual, non-feeling related love in regard to one's own understanding by God's moral and perfect being.

That God's essence is agape love, the charity of saving the worst of sinners, electing sinful people. love is the most crucial garment the church must resonate because not only does it bind the church together, but it's also, as this text says here, binds everything, not just together.

It doesn't just bind things together. It binds things in perfect harmony. Some other translations say bond of unity, bond of perfectness or completeness.

And what's being spoken here is actually pointing to perfectness in the sense of maturity. The state of being complete and without defect or blemish.

To be bonded, binded together in perfect harmony. A bond of perfectness. Completeness.

- [22 : 04] Love is the substance of each manner of relationship expressed within the church, good or bad. Love is the essence.

But it is also the substance of the attributes of all the garments which the church is to put on, which we identified in verse 13, as the church forgives. And think about this interesting little tidbit.

Looking at perfection, looking at bonded in perfection, bonded in this maturity aspect. Loving others in the most difficult seasons is actually the process of which the church is greatly matured.

Loving others in the most difficult seasons is actually the process of which the church is greatly matured. Putting off our agendas and our feelings for the sake of one another.

This is an unconditional love, church. When the circumstance suggests hostility that this person said this about me and I'm going to come back and I'm going to get the last word in, you know, it's like, I don't know, our culture just has this thing about having the last word.

[23 : 20] I don't know overseas if that's a thing, but you always, when you're fighting with your wife, you've got to have the last word, men. You've got to rise up and put them in their place. You know, the world will say to you, no, it's garbage.

And it doesn't work. When the circumstance suggests hostility, church, and a saint responds not in hostility but in love, this reveals which is the heart expression of the gospel understood.

That somebody is acting in complete act of love that as hostility would call somebody to respond in a manner that's reciprocated hostility, responding in an act of love and putting off yourself, saying that, you know, I'm not, I don't care about my pride, laying down your pride, putting on humility, putting on these attributes of the church, and reflecting love, it actually brings, would you think about it, it brings to light the theme of the entire book of Colossians of Christ being supreme.

Christ is reigning over even our little bickering and arguments because we're forgiving one another, we're bearing with one another, not just putting up with one another, we're bearing with one another.

love which preeminently flows among the church, it values its faithful submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the validation of a church that has been bought and elected by God.

[25 : 11] And looking forward, we're going to continue to build upon this idea of the body picture here with garments, we're going to continue to build on this, which we're united with, but we're going to be speaking about next week, how this is actually manifested in our life together in worship.

So as we come to a close today, I think the greatest takeaway in this passage, among many others which we've kind of already discussed, is that this passage is meant to be understood and completely dependent upon a context in the midst of community.

without community, the meaning of this text would be absolutely, completely, utterly lost. Paul's calling together a community.

For instance, how much easier would it be if verse 13 in this wasn't included of forgiving one another, bringing another party into it, of forgiving one another, bearing with one another, that adverbial sandwich that we spoke about, if it wasn't included?

Because if we keep it real, we know that we might have greater success in pursuing and acquiring and putting on these garments if we didn't have to deal with other people's craziness.

[26 : 29] If you want to keep it real. If people weren't involved in this. But Paul instructs to put on and therefore to test the garments that he's telling us to put on, the attributes, the church's attributes are tested in community specifically.

So community is at stake. And we think about it in another sense, how much easier it would be to not have to wake up on Sunday morning, how much easier it would be to just sit in your pajamas on the couch, flip on some live streaming services on the TV.

I don't know if you guys are into that, but I don't like those kind of guys. But there's some good live streaming sermons that you can find online on different websites.

How much easier it would be to just sit at home in your pajamas on Sunday morning and just watch a service and just sit back with a cup of coffee and not having to speak a word to anyone without having to deal with the difficulties we face in our specific community because we're people, we're sinful, we're sinners, we have to bear with one another, we sometimes have to forgive one another.

It happens. But these tests, the fibers of the garments that we're to be putting on with one another in community. This brings the importance of the conviction of our consistent gathering week in and week out, Sunday morning specifically, but also periodically throughout the week, doing life with one another in community, a lively community.

[28 : 08] community. But it's not only this community that's within walls, within a certain confine of a Christian life or a Christian community. This flows outward beyond these walls of the church, beyond the kitchen tables with one another that we share.

This should flow outward. This wardrobe is called to hit the streets, church. This is a realm that comes in complete opposition to the attire that we wear.

Violent hate speech coming to us as a church. You see martyrism and persecution of the church. The world does not like the attire that we wear. They do not like the attire of which we represent and reflect of humility and love and bearing with one another, forgiving one another.

Let me reread this passage in full once more. It says, Put on then, look at it with me, Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, 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.

And above all these, put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. I'm going to read an excerpt out of a book where you see this very act of humility put to practice.

[29 : 45] And it's, I would say, if it were a movie, it would be rated R, but it is an extreme example of this faith, this type of community, this type of understanding and testing being put to the prime test.

In his book, Let Justice Roll Down, John Perkins, he tells how he was beaten in a Mississippi jail, being repeatedly kicked and stomped on as he lay in the fetal position for protection.

The beating went on and on and he lay in a pool of his own blood. While inebriated, officers took turns using their feet and blackjacks against him. At one point, an officer took an unloaded pistol, put it to Perkins' head and pulled the trigger, just a taunting of him.

Then another bigger man beat him until he was unconscious. Obviously, this is in a very, like back in like the 30s, you know, prison, culture was a lot different. But on one specific night, it got worse.

During a conscious period of Perkins' life, in this prison, one officer pushed a fork down his throat. It was barbarous torture to this man, a great reason to hate, a great reason to retaliate.

[31 : 03] But this is what happened as Perkins tells it in his book. Directly from his book, he says, the Spirit of God worked on me as I lay in that bed. An image formed in my mind, the image of the cross, Christ on the cross.

It blotted out everything else in my mind. This Jesus knew what I had suffered. He understood and he cared because he had experienced it all himself.

This Jesus, this one who had brought good news directly from God in heaven had lived what he preached. He wore those garments.

And he continues, yet he was arrested, he was falsely accused, like me. He went through an unjust trial. He also faced a lynch mob and got beaten.

But even more than that, he was nailed to rough wooden planks and killed, killed like a common criminal, Jesus Christ. Perkins concludes, at the crucial moment, it seemed to Jesus that even God himself had deserted him on the cross.

[32 : 17] The suffering was so great, he cried out in agony, he was dying. But when he looked at the mob who had lynched him, he didn't hate them, he loved them, he forgave them, and he prayed God to forgive them.

He said, Father, forgive these people for they don't know what they are doing. His enemies hated. But Jesus forgave. I couldn't get away from that, Perkins said.

It's a profound, mysterious truth. Jesus' concept of love overpowered hate. I may not see its victory in my lifetime, but I know it's true.

I know it's true because it happened to me. On that bed, Perkins concludes, full of bruises and stitches, God made it true in me. He washed my hatred away and replaced it with love for the white man in rural Mississippi.

I felt strong again, stronger than ever. What doesn't destroy me makes me stronger. I know it's true because it happened to me.

[33 : 28] Church, it's not enough to just put up with one another. Not just in our community, but others around. And just to avoid retaliation, but still having harbored bitterness and resentment towards one another, that's not enough.

We must truly forgive just as Christ has immensely forgiven us. And not only that, if we think about the atonement on the cross where our sins were placed on Jesus himself, that our legal record has been wiped away clean through that atonement.

So we must also forgive. Forgive and forget. We must recall the cross when we struggle with forgiveness with one another. We must recall the creator who is the image of whom we are to emulate church, of compassionate hearts, of kindness, of humility, of meekness, and of patience.

And the world will sell us replacement attire. They'll say, try this on for size. It's a little bit easier to wear this. You'll fit in more. You won't get persecuted.

You won't stand out among the crowds. The world will try to captivate us. And if we want to keep it real, I think all of us can say that what the world sometimes offers is captivating.

[34 : 49] That what they're holding out to us is captivating if we don't keep ourselves in his word and renewed in knowledge after our creator.

But to put a garment of the world on is to take a garment of Christ off. We can't have both. It's one or the other. We have to choose.

We have to put on what Paul is speaking of. The garments. The holy garments. So the final takeaway this morning is in Ephesians 2.10.

The church is God's workmanship. He is the tailor of the garments we are to put on. He is the potter and we are the clay. We are in process and while it is tough to perceive it now, we will one day be complete masterpieces.

One day. Everything. All these temporal things that we experience in this life that is just a blink of an eye.

[35 : 49] That if we think about all of our perspective, our hostility towards one another, maybe in this church, maybe outside of this church, if we think about it, it's the blink of an eye. In perspective, a redemptive history, we need to see that it is more important to be putting on than to taking off and putting on what the world has to offer.

Hostility and retaliation towards one another. It is absolute trash. We must not do it and we must not partake in it. But we are God's workmanship. As verse 1 through 4 said, let me encourage you today.

Let us set our minds on things that are above where Christ is, church, and reflect Him in our endeavors together. Let's pray. Father, we come to You and we're asking You for help and conviction at this time.

Father, to examine this text today in context, let us look back at these vice lists of that which should be put to death and those that we're to be putting off and then today what we're to be putting on.

Father, let this not just be one Sunday where we talk about this and hit it hard and we're talking about it. We're all good to go. We're putting on garments. We're taking things off. We got movement.

[37 : 12] We got understanding. But Father, when life really does happen and challenges come across our paths, let us be reminded of Your Scripture here in Colossians 3 and be directed to renew ourselves in the knowledge after the image of our Creator as we spoke about last week.

Father, we thank You for this identity that we have in You. An opportunity where we can put on and be participants in this community and to reflect You, Lord Jesus.

We pray You to continue this work in our lives. We pray this in Jesus, precious and holy name. Amen. Please stand with us as we end our time. We pray this in me.

Thank you.