

*A young police cadet was taking his final exam for the police academy, and he was confronted with this question:*

*“You are on patrol in the outer city when an explosion occurs in a gas main on a nearby street. On investigation you find that a large hole has been blown in the road and there is an overturned van nearby. Inside the van there is a strong smell of alcohol. Both occupants—a man and a woman—are injured, and you recognize the woman as the wife of your Police Chief, who is away on business. A passing motorist stops to offer assistance and you realize that he is a man who is wanted for armed robbery. Suddenly a man runs out of a nearby house, shouting his wife is expecting a baby and that the shock of the explosion has made the birth imminent. Another man is yelling for help, having been blown into a nearby pool due to the explosion, and he cannot swim.*

*Describe in a few words what actions you would take.” The young man thought for a moment, picked up his pen and wrote, “I would take off my uniform and mingle with the crowd.”*

That’s a funny story but I will say that in some of my past law enforcement hiring interviews, I used crazy questions just like that to get an idea of the thought process of a candidate. I wanted to see how they think, but this story also got me to thinking about the uniform. The uniform makes a police officer distinctive from other people – they stand out in a crowd, and the wearing of that uniform carries certain expectations and responsibilities – in other words, the conduct of an officer is to be consistent with the clothing they wear.

Last week, the Apostle Paul told the Colossian believers and us as well, that because we died with Christ and are alive in Him, we are to throw off our old dirty clothes – we are to discard our old sinful ways – we are to toss out that old self-centered person that we used to be, and we are to put on something new – something consistent with who we are in Christ – something that corresponds to our new life and our new character.

This morning, with the old stuff *put off*, Paul describes what needs to be *put on*. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Colossians 3** and we will pick up where we left off beginning with **verse 12**. We are told,

**<sup>12</sup> So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one**

**another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.**

This passage begins with some deep spiritual truth. We have been **chosen** by God, we are **holy**, and we are **beloved**.

As believers in Christ, we are **chosen** by God – chosen before the foundation of the world. That’s what Paul says in the beginning of his letter to the **Ephesians** and it’s the same thing that Peter explains in his first letter. Before there was time, before anything was created, before the world came into existence – well before we were born – we were God’s choice. In His foreknowledge, God picked us out from among others. Before we were anything, before we could do anything right, before we could do anything wrong, God already knew us and still He chose us.

This is so mysterious – and in truth it’s part a spiritual paradox. The Bible clearly teaches that God chose us but it also clearly teaches that we chose Him. If I was asked **“Did God choose us or did we choose Him?”** my only answer would be “Yes.” I know this is a “*head scratcher*” – it’s a paradox that prompts a lot of questions – but be that may, understand it or not, it is the gospel truth.

In this passage, we are told that God picked us out. He chose us, and because He chose us – we are **holy**. Now *holy* simply means *to set apart*, and it makes complete sense that God would set apart those He has chosen. Our lives have been set aside by God – we are holy, we are set apart, we are not our own – instead we belong to God, and this is because we are His **beloved**. *Beloved* means that we are the special objects of God’s love – and trust me – it’s not because we are loveable. There is nothing *in* us that is deserving of His love *for* us, and yet, God sent His Son *to* us to die *for* us, so that Christ might live His life *through* us.

God chose us from among others before the world was ever formed. He set us apart for Himself, we are His beloved, and Paul says because of all that, we should *put off* the dirty clothes of our old sinful self-centered life, and we are to *put on* the clothing that expresses who we really are in Jesus Christ.

Now, I think that for a lot of us, our clothing is often an expression of who we are, and I know that by looking at me, you can tell I’m all about high fashion. It’s obvious, and I figure I’m about a dozen or so sit ups away from looking like a male model – from looking like Brad Pitt – *it’s uncanny, I’m just saying*, but in all seriousness, in a roundabout way, Paul is saying, just like our *clothing* is often an expression of who we are, likewise our *conduct* should express who we are in

Christ. This morning, we are talking about duds from above – true high fashion revealed in our conduct – revealed in how we treat each another.

So, with that said, the first of these duds that Paul mentions are **compassion** and **kindness** which seem to go together and let me explain. In this context, *compassion* refers to *tenderness* – describing a heart that is tender to the touch – meaning a person feels the slightest touch of another’s need or another’s misery, and in response to that touch of the heart, a person is moved to *kindness* – for kindness is the action that reveals compassion.

*When thinking about this, I was reminded of the story of a four-year-old child whose next-door neighbor was an elderly man who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the old man crying on his porch, the little boy went to him, climbed onto his lap and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, “Nothing, I just helped him cry.”*

That’s an example of compassion revealed in kindness. Now, I understand we are all different emotionally, but in Christ, we are all able to express compassion and kindness in our own way. Maybe it’s just sitting with someone like that child, maybe it’s an encouraging word – a smile, a card, a text – maybe it’s an offer to help in some way. I would encourage each of you to deliberately look for those opportunities to share compassion and kindness to another, and if you just don’t see those opportunities, then I fear you might be too focused on yourself which brings us to the next piece we are to put on.

In his list, Paul brings up **humility** which means “*lowliness of mind*” and this speaks about a person who has the right view or a realistic view of themselves in relation to others, and just for clarification, *humility* does not mean that a person thinks poorly of themselves or dumps on themselves. Paul is not telling anyone to think *less* of themselves, but rather to think of themselves *less* – meaning in our relationships, we are to think of others first.

Now as we continue through this list of duds, Paul mentions **gentleness**. *Gentleness* is a familiar word that can also be translated as *meekness* and this might come as a surprise to some, but it does not mean to be mild-mannered. Instead, it describes *strength under submission*. For example, this word has been used to describe a powerful horse that has been broken. The horse has great strength, it could break loose if it really wanted to, but it’s submissive to the one who leads it and rides it.

In the same manner, we too are to be under control – willing to give up our power – willing to waive our rights – willing to suffer loss for the sake of another person. That's strength under submission, and it's the idea behind gentleness.

If you notice, **patience** is next and this word in the Greek literally means *long-tempered* as opposed to being short-tempered which we talked about that last week. In our relationships, *patience* is a virtue that describes a person who restrains themselves and refuses to fly off the handle when faced with difficult circumstances or difficult people.

*Have you ever seen a puppy with a very large dog? The puppy yaps at the big old dog, climbs on top of him, nips at his ears and his tail, and all the time the big dog – who could bite the puppy in half if it wanted to, remains patient – it restrains itself and it does not retaliate.*

That's an example of patience. It's self-restraining in nature – giving others the time to change and the room to grow.

Very closely related to *patience* is **bearing with one another**. *Bearing with one another* literally means *to hold back*, and essentially it speaks of endurance or tolerance or we might say it's, "*putting up with people who are difficult.*" So, you know what I am talking about. Now, this does not mean we should tolerate bad behavior – we shouldn't, instead this is speaking about putting up with what we perceive as a weakness or a fault in someone else, and for the sake of harmony and unity – we hold back when we are tempted to judge.

I was thinking about this, and to me, it seems that we tend to have difficulties with people who may not see and do things the way we see and do things – and I'm not talking about the moral absolutes that are spelled out in the Bible. That's not what I am talking about. I know that people can get set in their own ways, they have always done things a certain way – their way is the right way, and everyone else should do it their way – and when it doesn't happen that way – it's perceived as a weakness or a fault, and it opens the door for harsh judgment against another. Paul says, "*hold back your judgment for the sake of unity and harmony.*"

Now, we come to **forgiving each other**, and I think C.S. Lewis summed this up really well when he said,

*"Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive."*

C.S. Lewis was right and we all know he was right – and still, we are commanded to forgive one another. When we are wronged – even when our complaint and our hurt is absolutely valid, we are to forgive – we are to cover the wrong of another with our mercy and our grace – just like the **Lord forgave** us. Paul had to go there, **didn't he?** Before anyone could say “*but*” Paul stops us all in our tracks.

**Does that mean we can't air our complaints?** No, that's not what Paul's saying, in fact, we are told in the Bible that if we have something against someone else, we are to go to that person to try to resolve it. We should say how we feel, we should explain how we've been hurt, but having done that – we are to forgive just like the Lord forgave us. Think about that.

When considering the staggering debt that the Lord forgave us, it's really hard not to forgive another for a much smaller debt, and also think about this:

It is the habit of man to forgive only when the offending party solemnly promises to never do the wrong against you again, but God forgave you knowing fully well that you would sin against Him over and over and over again – sometimes in the exact same way.

It is the habit of man, when wronged, to not forgive unless the offender agrees to bear all the penalty for the wrong done, but God bore all the penalty for the wrong you did against Him.

It is the habit of man, even when forgiveness is offered, to keep the offender at a distance – to place the offender at a lower or at an inferior status, but God's forgiveness to you is so complete that you were adopted as His very own child and you were placed into full intimate fellowship with Him.

Tell me, in Christ, **how can we not forgive one another?** Christ is both our *model* and our *motive* for forgiveness. Paul says, take off the rags of anger and wrath and the words which come with it – and the excuses and the justification we give for it – *put off* the old sinful and self-centered ways, and *put on* the duds from above – the clothing that Christ modeled for us – compassion and kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another, and forgiveness. It's this kind of conduct that expresses who we are in Christ.

Now in **verse 14**, Paul ties it all together, and he says,

**Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.**

Considering all that we have looked at, Paul says to **put on love**, which is the foundation that binds them all together in perfect **unity**, and staying with the picture of clothing, the power of love is the belt that unites and holds everything together and makes everything better.

It's almost as if Paul is saying, "**You know all those duds I just talked about?** Well, here's another way to say it – just love one another." If you really love – you are going to have compassion, you are going to be kind, you are going to be humble, you are going to be patient, you are going to be forbearing, and you are going to be forgiving.

Next, beginning with **verse 15**, Paul moves beyond our lives as individuals to the church, and how the body ought to function together. He tells us,

**<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**

In this passage, Paul is describing what *church* should be like when we come together, and I want you to notice right off the bat, that both of these verses begin with the little word "**let**" – meaning we have to allow this – this is something we are to do – it's on us – and he begins by saying that as a church body, we have to **let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts**.

That word "**rule**" is an interesting word and the idea behind it is that *peace* is to "*act as an umpire*" amongst believers. Baseball fans know that the person in the black suit who stands behind the catcher is the umpire, and that person makes the difficult calls during the game. The umpire is to be calm, cool, and collected – in control even when at times things seem out of control.

I think maybe Paul brings this up because there are times when compassion and kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, forgiveness – *you get the idea*, take a back seat in the church body. Not everyone in the church plays by the same rules – conflict and strife can raise its ugly head, and as a result, we need an umpire in our hearts that shouts "*peace*." In the context of relationships within the church, you and I are to allow the peace of Christ to be the umpire, to call the shots in our own lives and also in the life of the church so that in the end, despite the differences, we are all seeking the same thing – unity and harmony – because "*go figure*" we are on the same side with Christ.

And then Paul tosses this in: “**and be thankful.**” In light of the fact that we don’t deserve a single thing, be thankful for the things that God has done in your life, and when you are, it’s amazing how peaceful you will be.

Paul continues in **verse 16** and says that once again, we are to **let**, we are to allow the **word of Christ** to dwell within us. We have to do that – it’s on us.

That word “**dwell**” means to be *at home* and the idea is that we are to allow the Word of God to be settled down and become comfortable in us. That requires deliberate effort and time. Being in the Word should be a daily Christian activity, where each of us in the church body are involved in it. Paul explains that we are to talk about the Word with each other, teach and challenge one another, and when necessary, with the Word and in love, correct someone who is walking in the wrong direction.

We to be in the Word of God, and another way by which we may experience and express it is through a variety **psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs** whose focus is on the truths of God – and let me say, that just because a song may be identified as a “*Christian song*” does not mean it is biblically correct, so be careful, read the lyrics – for you have no more right to sing a lie than I have as your pastor to preach a lie.

Now in **verse 17**, Paul brings this all together by directing our focus upon one single point. He says,

**Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.**

If you say you are a Christian but you live like you are not, then you are going to confuse a whole lot of people, especially the church body. In **word or deed**, in whatever we do, we are to do it in **the name of the Lord**.

*When I was a teenager living under my parents’ roof, occasionally my father would tell me before I went out, “Remember whose name you carry.” **What did he mean by that?** My last name is not a royal name, it’s not a name for the history books, there’s nothing special about it as far as I can tell, but what my father was saying was that I represented someone other than myself – I also represented him. I carried his family name, and what I said and what I did would be a reflection on him, on his character and on his reputation. In essence, my father was saying “Remember whose son you are and whose name you carry.*

If you are a Christian, then you get the privilege to carry the name of Christ. He carried your cross, and you get to carry His name – and because you carry His name – a family name, you have the responsibility to carry it well, to honor Him, to dress up in the duds from above which reveals your new life and your new character in Christ.

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