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Putting on Holiness

Colossians 3:12-16

Dear Congregation,

The Christian is no ordinary person. While the majority of the world ominously looks towards their death seeking to live each moment of life to the fullest, the Christian is someone who has already lived (v.3a), died (v.3b), and has been raised to new life in God (v.1). This is called the doctrine of regeneration.

In John 3, Jesus instructs Nicodemus in the doctrine of regeneration and he calls this ‘the new birth’. You see, one must be born a second time by the Holy Spirit. Once you are born again, you have a new life, a new nature, a new heart, a new everything. The Holy Spirit affects in us a fundamental change in every believer. If you are a believer today, you have a privileged and a special status as one who has communion with God. The question I want to put before you this day is, do you live in this reality?

Our behaviour ought to reflect not the life of the *old man* but the life of the *new man* in Christ Jesus our Lord! In (Col. 3:5-11) we looked at what we should not do, we should not sin. That's the negative command. Now we turn to what we should do, the positive command, we are to be holy. In the Christian the old habits must die and new habits must be birthed in us to take their place.

Our headings are:

1. Holiness is grounded in faith in Christ (vv.12-14).
2. Abide in the peace of Christ (v.15).
3. Dwell upon the message of Christ (v.16).

Lesson: Christians are to be *set apart* for the Lord's purposes and plans.

Point 1: Holiness is grounded in faith in Christ (vv.12-14)

Here Paul exhorts us to a practical holiness in our day-to-day life. It was in 1877 when J.C. Ryle, upon examining the holiness of the church of England said, “The subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background. The standard of living has become painfully low in many quarters... I have had a deep conviction for many years that practical holiness and entire consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians”.¹ This was in 1877, what would Bishop Ryle's examination of the church be in 2021? Good doctrine is important but sometimes it seems that we base our sanctification on whether you are a Calvinist or not, or the right interpretation of the millennium, and apologetics. Good doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by holiness. It's a dead religion.

The Bible is full of practical exhortations to holiness in your life (Matt. 6, Sermon on the mount, Paul's Epistles). Holiness is not supposed to be an abstract theological doctrine but to be the daily work of the Christian. Mortification (vv.5-11) is the turning from sin, holiness is the embracing of Christ (vv.12-17). So how does someone grow in holiness?

1.1 - Holiness is grounded in faith in Christ

“*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved*” Just as a flower cannot grow until it is planted and watered so we cannot grow in holiness until we are planted in Christ, by the Father, and watered by the Spirit. Faith in Christ is the root of all holiness - the first step towards a holy life is believing upon Christ. Paul grounds his argument for our holiness in the objective work of Christ (v.12).

1.1.1 - Predestination “the elect of God”

The first reason Paul says that we should be holy is because in eternity past God set his electing love upon you. Consider that statement. The God who knows all things, your every thought and desire, your every triumph and every sin, choose you for salvation. Before you were born God loved you and called you, dear Christian.

This predestination is not only to cause us to sit and marvel but should affect our lives. If God so loved a wretch like me surely I can love my mother-in-law, I can love my often unlovable spouse, my children, co-workers. Life is better as a friend of God Almighty.

¹Ryle, J.C. *Holiness*. Introduction, pg vii.

Religion is more profound, art is more beautiful, work more satisfying, not because you see with new eyes, or hear with new ears, rather you live with a new heart. A heart that knows I am loved by God Almighty.

Know also that God elects his people not only unto salvation but also service. “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works* (Eph. 2:10). God elects us that we might work and serve him on earth. Whatever he calls you to, a student, wife, tradesman, accountant, grandparent, may it be to the honour of the God who called and saved you.

1.1.2 - ‘Holy’

The second reason Paul says we should be holy is because, in a sense we are already set apart by Christ. In your baptism God has laid claim upon you (1 Cor. 7). You do not belong to this world, Satan, or sin. You belong to God. You have been set apart for a sacred purpose in this life, you must respond to his promises. It your purpose in this life.

1.1.3 - ‘Dearly loved’

Yet not only are you called of God, set apart for God, but you are also loved by God. From eternity past God has set his love upon the church. If ye be in Christ, know that he has loved you with an everlasting love. A love so deep and unfathomable that he would even crucify his own Son for your sake.

Paul says for these reasons we are to set ourselves apart, we are to strive each day for holiness. Denying the flesh, putting to death the old man, and following after Christ.

1.2 - Holiness is to be our daily Work

“*put on*” (*Clothe yourselves*)

When you woke up this morning and choose what clothes to wear, did you leave them on the bed and walk out with nothing on? I sure hope not! Where did they go throughout the day? The answer is, my clothes went wherever I went.

You see, in the same way what we wear goes with us, so Christ is to go with us! We are to be always clothed in a Christlike character. Here we see that true holiness is not only a believing and feeling, but a bearing and doing.

This means our tongues and tempers, passing inclinations, our conduct as parents (v.21), as children (v.20), as employers and employees (vv.22-25), as husbands and wives (vv.18-19), our dress, how we spend our time, our business, our demeanour in sickness and health, riches or poverty should all be done in a Christ like manner (vv.12-14).

A holy man must abide in Christ with his family, at work, in times of leisure, and in times of sorrow. The image of Christ is to be seen and observed by others in us (Rom. 8:29).

1.3 - Holiness is being Christlike

Again, it was J.C. Ryle who said, “a holy man will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ”.² When Paul speaks about compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. He describes for us the only person who has ever modeled these attributes perfectly, the Lord Jesus.

We are to have compassion because he had compassion on us. He has been kind to you, humble in his incarnation, he is the gentle shepherd, and is patient with us in our sins. He has been all of this towards us, how much more so should we be these things towards each other? “*even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*”

“*But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection*” (v.14).

William Henrickson says, “Love is the lubricant that enables the other virtues to run smoothly”.³ It was love that sent Jesus to earth to redeem the church (Jn. 3:16), God is love (1 Jn. 4:7), God has given us the Spirit of love (2 Tim. 1:7). The whole focus of our lives is to be the love of God and our neighbors (Mk. 12:30-31). It is love that allows these things to flourish in us and to stave to be like the saviour.

²Ryle, J.C. *Holiness*. Pg. 35

³Hendriksen, William. *Colossians: New Testament Commentary*. pg.158-159

Thus we see that holiness is not innate within us, but is rooted and grounded in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ *in us*. So it is not us that does this, but the grace of Christ which is in us.

Application:

1. Holiness is intensely practical. Some of the most holy people I know couldn't define sanctification, that not what makes someone holy, it's how they live. We must endeavor to shun every sin, and keep all of God's commandments before our eyes.
2. Holiness is practised by Christians when they are of one mind with God. We must steep ourselves in him, hate what he hates, love what he loves. When we agree with God, we shall be holy.

Point 2: Abide in the Peace of Christ (v. 15).

The second way we progress in holiness in this life is by an abiding, or in other words a living, in the peace of Christ.

When man first fell into sin, our forefather and mother Adam and Eve, it is said that God placed a Cherubim with a flaming sword at the East entrance to the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23,24). Why? Even though God had made Adam and Eve in his perfect image, had revealed to them his perfect moral Law in his character, they disobeyed him and were now at war with God.

We are taught from the beginning that sin is disobedience to God. God loathes sin. Jesus hates sin. And we, due to the fall and our own wicked way are sinners! Big or small, coloured or white, young or old, rich or poor, man or woman, we are all at enmity with God because of sin. Yet the Apostle teaches us to live lives of *peace*. How can I a sinner have peace with God?

2.1 - *Peace*

When Paul writes '*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts*' he speaks of the peace that can only come through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:7). The question for you here this day, is of the utmost importance, do you know this gospel peace?

The gospel peace is a resting and a contentment in our hearts to know that the Saviour lives. It is the conviction knowing that our sins have been forgiven (1 Jn. 1:9), that whatever takes place today is from my God (Matt. 10:29-31), and whatever comes to pass in the future shall never separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38-39). Do you know this peace?

2.2 - *Hearts*

This reality is not to be a theoretical doctrine that we store on our bookshelves, but to be our daily rule. It is to *rule in your hearts*. Now, of course, Paul does not mean the physical organ but he is using the Hebrew euphemism to refer to the seat of your emotions. It is from our hearts that we act (Lk. 6:45), from the heart we speak (Matt. 12:34), and do we live.

The emphasis here is that Paul would have you do all things in the knowledge of the gospel. That our actions each day are filtered through the stained glass of the love of God and peace we have in Christ Jesus.

2.3 - *Unity and Thankfulness*

This should affect how we live. This peace that is born in our hearts by the gospel has a social aspect. It should affect the way that we live and interact with each other. "*to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.*". Again Paul reminds us of the doctrine of election. He reminds us that when God in eternity past elected the church he elected them as a whole body. He set his love upon everyone of us together. Even that guy you dislike, even the seemingly least lovable Christian you know, if they are in Christ they are loved by God. Elected as a corporate whole in Christ. Therefore we should have unity in the church.

Application:

1. "*And be thankful*". Be thankful for the gospel. It is said of the greatest man who ever lived, that he tied a cloth around his waist and washed his disciples feet (Jn. 13). Though he has not physically washed you, if you are a Christian Christ has spiritually washed your sins, not with water but his precious blood (Isa. 53). He is the lily of the valley, the prince of heaven, the king of creation, the pearl of great price, sell everything you have, forsake father, mother, and brother that you may have him. Yet this gift of Jesus is free! He showers you with blessings. He prayed for you. Died for you. Rose for you. Now live like someone who cherishes what he has done.
 - a. When is the last time in prayer you simply thanked God for his blessings?
 - b. Teach your children to count their blessings. Spiritual and physical.

Point 3: Dwell Upon the Message of Christ (v.16)

Paul now turns to the worship of God's people, which is the third way we grow in holiness. Now, a disclaimer, not just any worship helps us in our holiness. Paul qualifies that worship that grows our holiness as worship that is Christ centered.

3.1 - the Gospel

He says, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*". Meaning the object of our study as Christian people is to be the gospel. The message of Christ. And for Christians we never get tired of the gospel. Because in it is revealed Christ himself, clothed in flesh, born as a baby, his life, his death, his resurrection. But even more than that the gospel reveals the eternal decree of God for our salvation.

Does this mean we should only read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? No. Jesus is the eternal Son of God and was revealed in the Old Testament under types and shadows. Jesus said, "*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me*" (Jn. 5:39). Therefore Christians should study the whole Word of God, including Leviticus, because the whole word of God concerns Christ.

It is the gospel that should be on our minds, lips, and hearts. It should govern our every thought, word, and deed. This is how we instruct people in holiness. Look to the perfect Savior Jesus, (Taking children in his arms, selfless, loving the unlovable, he is the perfect example) who wouldn't want to be like him?

"*teaching and admonishing one another*". Everyone is given the gospel truth. When every member has this gospel richly within them: treasuring it in their hearts, treating it as the Word of life, this gospel will bear fruits of holiness. And this gospel is for everyone. Man, woman, and child. Let us teach one another its words.

3.2 - Singing

Part of our worship that also glorifies God is singing. Another way God's Word dwells in us richly is by song. "*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*"

This text causes much controversy for some who have argued that we must only sing the psalms of the Old Testament, while others have argued to include hymns. What does Paul mean here? Unfortunately I can't get into all the details. But Paul breaks down what should be sung in Christian churches into three categories. *Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*. I don't believe that these are synonyms, but there is some overlap.

Psalms obviously point us back to the Old Testament Psalter inspired by the Holy Spirit. Psalms indeed must still have a prominent place in our 2020 worship services.

Hymns, more contested, should be regarded as Augustine defined them in three ways. They must be sung; it must strike the note of praise; and must be directed towards God.⁴ Thus many Psalms are hymns. Nevertheless, there are many hymns in scripture that are not Psalms (Mary's song Luke 1:46-55; the song of Zacharias Luke 1:68-79; etc.). All in all, a hymn still must be scriptural.

Spiritual songs, by spiritual Paul does not mean charismatic. But if we look at the other Biblical data where this term is used (Eph. 5:19; Rev. 5:9; 14:3; 15:3), we know that this does not refer to Psalms either, but to sacred songs. Songs that praise God for his work, wonders, gift, his Word, maybe without being directed explicit towards him.

Conclusion:

Lets conclude. Let us be reminded that God has predestined that you would be set apart for him and him alone. You are a baptized forehead, you belong not to Satan, the world, or even the old man within, you belong to Christ. Put on his righteousness and live a life of holiness/gratitude for all that he has done. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. The aim and trajectory of our lives is to do all things in the name and to the glory of God who saves sinners.

⁴Arthur, J. Philip. *Christ all Sufficient*. pg.106