

## Sermon 6, April 14: Dressing the Resurrection Body, Colossians 3:12-15

**Proposition:** Because you have been raised from spiritual death with Jesus Christ, your identity has been transformed and you need to dress in love and follow peace.

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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we saw last week what the resurrection kills — or better, how the resurrection exposes the deadness of our old relationship to sin. It used to be the master and we its slaves. That relationship is dead now, because Jesus lives. That means that we need to reckon ourselves dead to sin. We looked at ten sins that are not appropriate for resurrected Christians, and we saw that the solution is a new identity in the New Man who is the maturing Body of Christ. That identity is available to you exclusively through the death and resurrection of the Son of God. Well, this week we are going to return to that Colossians text to see what the apostle says about clothing the resurrection body. You are raised with Christ; what, then, should you be doing? You should put on five virtues that counteract the ten vices of the old

Adamic way of life, and you should walk in forbearing and forgiving love that binds everything together in perfect harmony. Because you have been raised from spiritual death with Jesus Christ, your identity has been transformed and you need to dress in love and follow peace.

### **I. You Have Been Resurrected with Christ, v. 1**

As you recall, we gathered for Easter Sunday last week to celebrate the resurrection of the Son of God. That is good news, for God was faithful. He kept His promises to His Son and raised Him from the dead. But another aspect of the good news is that it is directly relevant to us! We have been raised with Christ. Just as Adam's death on the day that he ate the fruit was a spiritual death that would work itself out later in physical death, so Christ's resurrection on that first Easter has spiritually resurrected you and will later work itself in physical resurrection. We haven't been physically resurrected yet, but we will be! You are spiritually alive in Christ; you have put Him on, having been joined to Him in a death like His and therefore also joined to Him in a resurrection like His.

### **II. You Have Put On Christ, vv. 12-15**

That's why Paul tells us to put on Christ. When Adam ate the fruit and spiritually died, he tried to put on some fig leaves. Those leaves didn't do the job, and he was still unable to enter the presence of God. So God performed a symbolic action. He killed an animal and clothed Adam in its skin.

That is what we are called to do this Easter morning. We are called to be clothed, not in the fig leaves of our own righteousness, but in Christ. He is the Lamb of God and He is the only one who can clothe us in a way that fits us for the presence of God. That's what this Colossians passage is about. You need to put on Christ, and to put Him on means to put off the old Adam and his fig leaves — as we talked about last week. Once you have put off the old Adam, how can you be clothed with the Lamb of God? Well, Paul tells us what that looks like. Remembering the broader context will help us to see that he's not talking about getting better and better until God can finally accept you. Rather, he's saying that since God has accepted you, raised you from the dead, you need to now live that out. If you're clothed with Christ, you will be compassionate and forgiving. If you are clothed with Christ, you will live like Jesus lived. Christ is not a reward for a life well-lived; He is the foundation for a life well-lived. To tie this passage back to our Hebrews passage as well, we can observe that Adam was not able to repair and maintain his relationship with God until clothed in the animal skins. He could not function as a priest in the garden-temple until he was properly dressed. And you and I cannot be priests to our God unless and until we put on Christ.

#### **A. Who's Getting Dressed, v. 12a**

Well, as resurrected Christians, who are you? To be raised from the dead by Jesus means something for your identity. If your identity is in Christ this post-Easter morning, then there are three things Paul wants you to realize about yourselves.

##### **1. God's Chosen Ones**

First, you are chosen by God. He saw the mass of humanity. He knew who and what every person would be. And He chose you specifically, you individually, to be united to His Son and adopted as His child.

That's your identity! Don't let election make you proud — but do let it destroy despair and all feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. Your source of worth is not in yourself, but in your relationship to others and especially to your Creator. You are remembered, visited, and chosen by God Himself.

Maybe your parents rejected you. Maybe your spouse rejected you. Maybe your children rejected you. Maybe your life story is a sad, bitter, and broken one. But in Christ, all of that is swallowed up in the greater truth that God Almighty chose you for His own.

## **2. God's Holy Ones**

And in choosing you, He did not leave you as you were, pathetic and lost and unloved, with no purpose beyond gratifying your most insistent desires. He changed your purpose, gave you something to live for — the most wonderful, glorious thing in the world: Himself. He gave you Himself. That's what Holiness means. To be holy is to exist for God. You are holy. Your purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Easter gives you an identity and a purpose. You are someone, and you have something to live for.

## **3. God's Loved Ones**

And Easter also gives you a status. You are someone loved. You're not rejected, but chosen. You're not tolerated, much less disliked; you're beloved.

All of this comes first! This is who you are in Christ. He freely provides all of this for you out of His abundant riches in mercy. You don't work your way to this; it's simply a free gift. Just as your parents conceived you in an act of love, and hopefully raised you with love before you could ever love them back, so Jesus Christ loves you as His bride.

This is why you can do all of the things that the apostle lists next. It's why you can manifest the five character qualities that he wants to see. To be chosen, holy, and loved is the source of your ability to choose to love the rest of God's saints.

### **B. What They're Wearing, vv. 12-14**

The saints have put on Christ. That's not a nebulous thing. It certainly does not refer to a generalized warm fuzzy feeling of goodwill toward men. It refers to specific, measurable character qualities both in your attitude and in your actions.

#### **1. Dressing Your Attitude, v. 12**

So you have put on the new man. Christ rose out of the tomb, and His Spirit has applied that same resurrection life to you. That means you must put on these five character qualities. You must dress your attitude with Christ. These are not optional, an extra-credit opportunity for super-Christians. These are for every one of you.

##### **a) Compassionate Guts**

Have some compassionate guts! In our world, the notion of empathy has gotten out of control. We have heard so many times about the morality of sentiment and that you should do what your

heart tells you that we have gotten cynical. We on the conservative side of things associate the bleeding heart with liberalism and its all-too-real cruelties. But here it is, in the Bible in black and white. You need to have some compassionate guts, “bowels of mercies” as the KJV says.

What is this referring to? It’s referring to suffering with, to being moved internally by the plight of someone in pain. Paul says that this quality was well-developed in Christ: “God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus” (Phi 1:8 NAS). That word the NAS renders “affection” is the same word for “guts” here in Col 3.

There is nothing Christian about being hard-hearted. I’m not saying that the world with its notion of unrestrained empathy and the morality of sentiment has gotten this virtue right. They haven’t. They’ve corrupted it, just as they manage to corrupt all the virtues. But they are right to suggest that compassion is a virtue, that having your guts moved for someone’s plight is not a sign of weakness but of love.

We live in a tough climate and we’re proud of being tough. We define ourselves over against the sissies and what Arnold Schwarzenegger called “girly men.” But no one was tougher than Jesus, and very few are tougher than Paul. Yet these men had compassionate guts. They cried freely. They were not afraid of their feelings. Instead, they directed their feelings toward holiness and love.

How would you show compassionate guts to one another? Try listening and truly caring about the sob story that your brother or sister has for you. Don’t interrupt with your own sob story. Don’t be afraid to open your wallet either. I once saw a charismatic preacher open his wallet, pull out \$500 and hand it to a new father because he was prompted by the Spirit to do so. That’s a pretty fair specimen of compassionate guts. The action may be open to criticism on rational grounds and even on biblical grounds, and there is no doubt that helping can sometimes hurt when it’s done poorly. But the abuse does not change the use and none of that changes the duty that you and I have to cultivate compassionate guts.

#### **b) Kindness**

We are also called to be kind to one another. Don’t be mean. Don’t be nice. Be kind. It’s a more demanding virtue than the pseudo-virtue of niceness. Kindness, for those of you who don’t know, is showing genuine love and care to another person, with humility rather than aggression. Don’t be severe; be kind.

#### **c) Humility**

Humility is the central virtue in this list. It means thinking of yourself less. It means letting your thoughts get out of that prison in your head and travel outward to someone else. The humble person loves and delights in everything.

Humility is the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point, not to a small thing or a large one, but to a thing with no size at all, so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are—of immeasurable stature. That the trees are high and the grasses short is a mere accident of our own foot-rules and our own stature. But to the spirit which has stripped off for a moment its own idle temporal standards the grass is an everlasting forest, with dragons for denizens; the stones of the road are as incredible mountains piled

one upon the other; the dandelions are like gigantic bonfires illuminating the lands around; and the heath-bells on their stalks are like planets hung in heaven each higher than the other. Between one stake of a paling and another there are new and terrible landscapes; here a desert, with nothing but one misshapen rock; here a miraculous forest, of which all the trees flower above the head with the hues of sunset; here, again, a sea full of monsters that Dante would not have dared to dream. These are the visions of him who, like the child in the fairy tales, is not afraid to become small. Meanwhile, the sage whose faith is in magnitude and ambition is, like a giant, becoming larger and larger, which only means that the stars are becoming smaller and smaller. World after world falls from him into insignificance; the whole passionate and intricate life of common things becomes as lost to him as is the life of the infusoria to a man without a microscope. He rises always through desolate eternities. He may find new systems, and forget them; he may discover fresh universes, and learn to despise them. But the towering and tropical vision of things as they really are—the gigantic daisies, the heaven-consuming dandelions, the great Odyssey of strange-coloured oceans and strange-shaped trees, of dust like the wreck of temples, and thistledown like the ruin of stars—all this colossal vision shall perish with the last of the humble.<sup>1</sup>

Did you get that? It's better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly because then, and only then, can you see the glory of Christ!

The proud man looks down on creation because he looks down on the creator. The humble man looks up to his Creator, and in so doing, he sees with fresh eyes the glory and wonder of all creation — and especially of his brothers and sisters in the pews around him.

If you are proud, you cannot welcome and love your brothers and sisters in this church. You will be too concerned with how they might affect you, how they might bother you. In other words, you won't even be thinking of them, but only of yourself.

How do you grow in humility? By putting on Christ! When you understand that He died for you, you will be much more able to get outside yourself and welcome the rest of your church in humility.

#### **d) Meekness**

The same goes for this quality of meekness or gentleness. Again, this is the opposite of being aggressive or rough. As with the compassionate guts, this is not the only aspect of the Christian's life. It is one that our culture has allowed to grow into a parody of its true self. Gentleness refers not just to form but to substance. In other words, it isn't gentle to very nicely inform your husband that you are leaving him for another man. The leaving is ungentle, no matter how nicely you put it. In the same way, gentleness with one another in the body refers not just to how we talk to one another, but also to what we say. If I gently inform you that you are scum and that I want nothing more to do with you, but that I hope you will continue to worship here and pretend that we love each other, I'm not being gentle. Again, gentleness is not just a style. It's a

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<sup>1</sup> Chesterton, "A Defense of Humility," in *The Defendant* (1901).

substance. Gentleness means not only speaking kindly, but being kind. It is love in deed as well in tongue.

### **e) Longsuffering**

Well, all of those are good things and we all want to be those people and to be around those people. We like being clothed with Christ when it comes to qualities that our culture valorizes like compassionate guts and gentleness. But now Paul gets to the tough quality, the one that none of us wants to exercise and especially not at church. The quality of patience or longsuffering is a virtue indeed. The English name of this quality tells us exactly what it is. It means putting up with suffering not for a short time but for a long time. The Christian who is clothed with Christ needs to be ready to suffer for a stretch of time. We're not necessarily talking mere minutes here, or even mere months, but years. To be longsuffering means you might still be suffering in 2054 and beyond.

## **2. Dressing Your Actions, v. 13**

And this longsuffering is exercised primarily in the church, to add insult to injury. We expect, perhaps, to have that annoying coworker. We understand that the world can be a cruel place and that nonbelievers aren't going to show much of the fruit of the Spirit. But we expect our fellow Christians to show the five qualities that Paul just mentioned. When I come into a church, the people there had better have compassionate guts, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Or else! Isn't that how we like to think? And to a certain extent, those thoughts are justified. Jesus does command these things to His people, after all. But to what extent are my expectations of my fellow believers justified? I would put it like this: to the extent that these qualities are true of me. If I'm extremely patient, if my guts are incredibly compassionate, if I'm unfailingly kind and humble, then I have something of a right to expect my fellow believers to be like that too. But of course, I expect them to be that way and they aren't, what then? Well, if I get proud, if I am unkind and impatient, if my guts are haughty rather than compassionate, then guess what? My right to expect Christian humility from others has just vanished. In other words, brothers and sisters, that's the thing about the Christian message. You are most certainly called to put on Christ and to behave like a Christian at all times in your compassion and kindness and patience. But if you expect your fellow believers to behave like that, if you hold them to this standard and reserve the right to judge them harshly when they don't live up to it, then you just showed that you yourself have no compassion, kindness, or patience.

### **a) What: Forbearing and Forgiving**

Well, guess what? Paul had lived in the church for years, and he knew all about this dynamic. He addresses it head-on here. If you think someone in the church has gossiped about you, what do you need to do? Judge them for being less kind and gentle than yourself? No. You need to forbear and forgive. Forbearance means refusing to be offended. Forgiveness means dropping an offense. In other words, he gets you coming and going. There is absolutely no room for bitterness in the heart of one who has been raised with Christ and put on Christ. You're not a

fig-leaf-wearer dressed in the old Adam. You are a Christian, with resurrection life and clad in the priestly garments of the Son of God. When someone at this church, the guy in the pew next to you, the woman behind you, the pastor up here on the platform (yours truly) — when one of ‘em fails to show compassionate guts, when one of them is unkind, ungenerous, ungrateful, entitled, annoying, socially inept, and more, you have very clear marching orders. You are not allowed to take up a grievance against that person, on your own behalf or anyone else’s.

No, I’m not talking about rational measures to protect yourself from being harmed by someone else’s sin. But I am telling you that you are almost certainly a terrible judge of which sins are likely to harm you. Someone gossiping about information that you would rather keep private? That’s not very harmful to you. Someone offering to sell you access to a streaming service with a lot of sexualized content? That’s a lot more likely to harm your eternal soul than anything a brother or sister in here is likely to do. Worst case scenario, we could have one or two child abusing perverts in our congregation. But the business model of corporations like Disney and American Girl is increasingly built around child abusing perverts. So please don’t tell me that you are protecting yourself and your family from spiritual, emotional, or physical harm caused by an immature saint when you deal with far worse from Hollywood, New York, Silicon Valley, and our local library every single day. To reverse an example the Lord used with Jeremiah, if you can win a footrace against horses without breaking a sweat, I’m pretty sure you will have no trouble running against your fellow men. If you can withstand the spiritual attacks of the world and the devil on a daily basis, I think that you should have no difficulty at all with disposing of the temptations and strains and, yes, sins that you encounter within the walls of our church.

How might someone in the church sin against you? They might stress out your dog. They might spill chocolate on your carpet. They might track mud on your floor. They might not recognize how smart and wonderful you are. They might ask you to help them with a project you’d rather not get involved in. They might give you books and sermons in an officious and overbearing manner. They might seem to be judging you because you have a lower level of participation in church events than they do.

Are you seriously going to let sins like that — “So-and-so said that I had a fight with aged parents, but it was only a misunderstanding and so-and-so completely misrepresented it to someone else in the church!” or “So-and-so keeps trying to get me to come over and help him assemble his AR-15” — stop you from forbearing and forgiving? Jesus asked the Father to forgive the men who crucified Him. Stephen asked Jesus to forgive the men who stoned him to death. You and I have a hard time forgiving the guy who says that our new baby looks like a creature from *Star Wars*.

Honestly, brothers and sisters, Paul writes this passage because he knows what it’s like to live in the church. He knows that even though everyone here is trying to put on Christ, we are all failing together at times, and we like to get offended and hold it against each other.

#### **b) When: When You Have a Complaint Against Someone**

Whoever has a complaint against anyone. The words are deliberately completely general. It doesn't matter if you're two years old and have a complaint against the head nursery worker, or if you are sixty-five and have a complaint against the head elder. You need to forgive. Now, again, your mind goes immediately to criminal acts and so on. That's your cultural training; in the name of the outlier and the exception, we've deleted most of the rules. Frankly, that's absurd. That's not how things are supposed to work. Anyway, to forgive someone who committed a criminal offense does not mean that you cover for that person or allow him to continue to commit crimes. Forgiveness and justice are perfectly compatible. Forgiveness means that you hold no grudge, that you have let the offense go, that you have put it into the hands of God and (in some cases) into the hands of His agents in the state who are charged with exacting the appropriate punishments. But forget about that. To my knowledge, no one in this church has ever committed a criminal act against another. We have a huge swimming pool full of love, joy and peace in here, and it feels really good. But we must make every effort to maintain that, rooting up the weeds of bitterness immediately whenever they threaten to appear. To forgive means to absorb the pain of the offense into yourself and thereby to neutralize it. It means to stop holding on to that pain and looking for an opportunity to inflict it on the one who wronged you in an epic act of revenge.

### **c) How: Like Christ Forgave You**

This forgiveness must be carried out just as Christ forgave you. How was that? Freely, from the heart, and at great cost to Himself. He had to die to forgive. If you have to take the loss of \$20 to forgive, will you do that? If you have to accept that someone gossiped about you, that someone slandered you, that someone hurt your child, will you do that? Or will you choose to hang on to your right to be offended and thereby drag yourself down to hell?

The clearest condition in Scripture on receiving the forgiveness of Christ is that you must forgive others. If you won't, then you will not be forgiven. That was the point of Matt 18, as we saw a few weeks back. Bitterness, wrath, anger, slander — none of them have any place in the Christian life. If you give them a place, you cannot count on being saved.

There are no loopholes for large offenses. Absalom was in sin when he was bitter against David for committing adultery, tolerating rape and incest, and generally being an absent dad. David was wrong; obviously! But Absalom was in sin when he took the matter to heart and fed a raging bitterness that ripped a nation apart in civil war.

### **3. Dressing in Love, v. 14**

Where do you get the strength to do this? How will we keep our church from disintegrating in a tangle of mutual offense, suspicion, innuendo, and outrage? We have to put on the love of Christ that ties together all of the other virtues, that's how.

One of you told me recently that many false religions make people do things they hate in order to appease a god who hates them. That's true. And if that's the sum total of your forgiveness, patience, humility, and so on, then you're going to burn out in a few weeks. Your virtues may not even last an hour. Paul names many good deeds in 1 Cor 13 and says that if they're done without love, they are nothing. He names many good deeds here in Col 3 and says that if they're done without love, they're nothing. Compassionate guts, kindness, humility,



gentleness and patience — none of them will work or last without love. Love is wanting what's best for the other person, doing what's best for the other person, and delighting in the other person. You and I can try as hard as we want to be compassionate and kind, but if those virtues are not powered by the love of Jesus expressing itself in our love for one another, they will fail.

Love binds us all together.

### **III. You Must Follow Christ Together, v. 15**

That's incredibly important for two reasons.

#### **A. Being Ruled by Peace in Your Hearts**

First, since we were raised with Christ, we must let His peace rule in our hearts. We've talked about this a lot over the years. Peace in the heart is not going to stay there, though. It will flow out to the whole world.

If there is peace in the heart, there will be peace in the family.

If there is peace in the family, there will be peace in the city.

If there is peace in the city, there will be peace in the nation.

If there is peace in the nation, there will be peace in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Now, those words aren't mine. They were said by Confucius, five centuries before Christ. But don't they immediately ring true? I believe that they do. Our hearts are divided, pulled between competing lusts and virtues. Our families are divided, whether by outright divorce or by quiet resentment and desperation. Our cities are divided, white vs. black, poor vs. rich, cops vs. criminals. And so our nation suffers from partisan politics and our world hovers on the brink of open warfare between superpowers.

Not so in Heaven! The Son does nothing except what He sees the Father do. That's why God is called so often in Scripture *the God of Peace*. The three Persons are always in perfect harmony and perfectly at peace. And this is the goal, not just for your heart's inclinations, but even for your relationships with every person you know. Perfect peace is harmonious desires and interpersonal harmony. A world where everyone agrees with you, and you agree with everyone, and you're all mutually satisfied in each other! It's so different from the world that now is that it's hard to believe that this is what peace is. And indeed, we will not have this kind of perfect peace within our hearts and with all men around us until we are in heaven. But we can and should strive for it now. Now, little disagreements about immaterial things are consistent with peace here on earth. You're never going to be at perfect peace even with yourself, never mind with your spouse or the grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia. But if you put on the resurrected Christ, you will be ruled by His peace — not by the clamor of your competing appetites.

#### **B. Heeding the Call to Peace in the Body**

That call to peace was not issued to us as individuals, but to us as a body. We need to have peace in our hearts so that we can have it in our families and churches.

The worst kind of disease is autoimmune disease, where the body attacks itself. The worst kind of problem in the church is an autoimmune disease, where we Christians attack each other. Whether it's over something significant or (more likely) over nothing at all, we were not

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<sup>2</sup> Confucius, quoted in Peter Kreeft, *Ecumenical Jihad*, 94.

called to become servants of Christ so that we could fight each other. We were called to become servants of Christ so that we could live in peace with Him and with each other. Peace is the union of the appetite's inclinations. The whole body needs to desire the same things. That's the definition of peace, and that is our calling. That's the goal here.

The goal is not to make sure that everyone respects you, that everyone shares your interests and obsessions, that everyone does it your way. The goal is to glorify Christ by living at peace with Him and with one another.

### **C. Living out an Attitude of Gratitude**

How do you know whether you're doing all these things? By whether you are grateful or ungrateful, content or angry. When you think of your brothers and sisters, are you grateful for them, or are you upset about how they are not living up to the standards described here in Col 3? Brothers and sisters, don't let it be the latter. If the others in this church aren't the Christians they should be, forgive them for two reasons. The first is that Jesus forgave you. The second is (and I hate to break it to you) you aren't the Christian you should be either. If you recognize your own needs, if you walk in humility, then you will know the resurrection power of the Son of God. He is alive, and His death kills our petty grievances and brings us to peace, gratitude, and the joy of love. Know that and live that this Easter season, for that is what maturity is. Amen.