

Study in Colossians

Session 7

The new life in Christ must now be clothed properly. This section of Colossians deals with the idea of “clothing yourselves” (v.10 - last week) and should be compared to the former commands to “put to death” and “rid yourselves”. As brought out last week, this verb is in the aorist imperative which means it is something that must be done urgently with great zeal so that it cannot be undone later. What should be done, should be done in a way so that those past results will be permanent. This is the positive expression shown in the transformation of the Christian’s character. Truly, the rest of the book of Colossians deals with the practical outworking of this phrase “clothe yourselves” as the virtues of the new life which are to be cultivated by the believer are described here for the Colossian church.

I. Virtues of the new life to be cultivated. [Read Colossians 3:12-17]

A. The first set of virtues which are to be cultivated by the believer are expressions of love. Paul’s appeal for the church to develop these traits are based upon three truths: they are chosen by God, they are holy, and they are dearly beloved. In the Old Testament these were used to emphasize Israel’s favored position before God and now these are enjoyed by Christians and the church, as heirs of Israel’s privileges. Since these are who you are (chosen, holy, and loved) then work out your salvation in regards to these realities.

1. There are five Christian virtues listed in v.12. These point to qualities of life, which if present in the community of believers, will eliminate or greatly reduce frictions in the body and increase the impact of the community for the kingdom sake. All of them manifestations of love which gets mentioned in v.14 as the crowning virtue.

a. Compassion - pity and tenderness towards those who are suffering or downtrodden. It’s the outworking of mercy in the worldly setting.

b. kindness - this combines the ideas of goodness and graciousness - it is a sweetness of disposition and in Romans 11:22 it is contrasted with “severity”. In Galatians 5:22 it is listed as a fruit of the Spirit - something naturally produced with the Spirit is allowed to fill and control the believer.

c. humility - this, as well as the following term of patience, were not regarded as strengths or positive traits in the ancient Greek culture. However, the New Testament not only deepened their meanings but also enriched them to the point of where they became cornerstone Christian virtues. Humility is to have a lowly disposition. It is listed as a character trait of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11).

d. gentleness - this is the opposite of arrogance and self-assertiveness. It is the mark of a Christian who has consideration for the rights and feelings of others. Another good definition is “willing to make concessions” (not of truth but of matters of this world and of manner of style of life). It is listed as a character trait of Christ. (Matt. 11:29) and a fruit of the Spirit.

e. bearing with one another is two participles put together. Literally “bear with” and “forgive”. This is the action of the patient Christian in that he is willing to bear with those who faults he find unpleasant and irritating and he has a willingness to forgive those he has grievances against. “Bear with” implies graciously putting up with things we don’t like. The use of forgiveness here goes back to 2:13 when we were told of God’s freely forgiving us of all our sins.

2. Love is the chief characteristic of a Christian. This is the same word as used in I Corinthians 13. Love is larger and higher than all the other traits combined as it encompasses more area and depth of meaning, especially for the believer. Notice that love is mentioned as a separate article of clothing from the other five as it is a higher virtue, described the nature of God Himself. It is like the piece of clothing that holds all the others in place.

a. “perfect” - mature - end result

b. bond of unity - ligament or things that binds something together. Love not only binds all the character traits of the Christian together but also binds Christians with one another.

3. The next expression of the new life to be cultivated is that of allowing peace to rule a believer’s heart. (v.15)

a. “rule” - means to render a final decision. The peace of Christ is to render final decisions in the life of a believer.

b. “peace of Christ” - peace is the knowledge of wholeness and completeness. Out of this sense of wholeness comes the sense of tranquility and welfare. It comes from Christ Himself. **[Romans 5:1]** When we live in the bond of unity with Christ Himself, we know His peace and then that same peace will be our judge for our actions and attitudes towards others. Notice Paul’s emphasis upon being called to one body - he’s speaking of the church body here. Instead of looking for faults in the others or areas of disagreements, the emphasis in the body is to be on the peace of Christ and the unity He provides that holds the body together.

4. “be thankful” - gratitude is associated with peace. Believers are to be thankful for the peace Christ as provided. Thankfulness for the peace becomes an incentive for preserving the peace. “be = become” - This is present tense which means it is to become a habit. The Christian is to be in the constant habit of being thankful to God and to one another.

5. All of these are duties Christians have towards one another. It is the picture of what a mature believer will look like in the world and how the Spirit will show Himself through the life of a believer.

B. Christ’s word is to indwell believers. (v. 16)

1. “dwell” - present imperative. The believer is to make the Word of God at home in his life. It means to settle down and build a house for the Word of God.

2. The idea of “richly” means to give it ample space. This is a cool idea in that when we give the Word of God ample space in our lives, it means we allow it the freedom to move and to impact other, in fact all, areas of our lives. We don’t compartmentalize it to just one day a week or to one set of actions but allow it free reign over us. It is the Holy Spirit teaching us one truth and then leading us to apply it to an area of our lives. Then that same truth touches another area of our lives and we give it ample room to complete it’s course so that all the Spirit wants impacted and transformed is impacted and transformed by this truth. If our lives were compared to houses, it would be like inviting an interior decorator to enter our house and freely redo as much of the house as he wanted to redo. We give the Word of God abundant room in our hearts thus show it to be the rich treasure we consider it to be.

3. By the use of all wisdom, believers are to teach and admonish one another. Teaching is the word for classroom teaching, book knowledge while admonishing is the word of imparting instruction to another like hands-on training. We teach others what to do but also how to do what we describe. Teaching is one of the best ways to learn something.

4. Music is a way to get these truths across. Don’t draw a strict line between these words here. Paul is merely emphasizing the rich variety of Christian songs. It means that

we are to do the teaching with joyousness and enthusiasm. The power of Christian music is that expresses true human emotion in a way that is worshipful and true to the Lord. Again, thankfulness in heart is the manner in which the instruction is carried out.

5. Paul ends this section with a summary of what the Christian is to put on and that is that whatever is done - whatever action is to be taken - it is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is given as a command.

a. Many have taken the name of the Lord to be a “magic” bullet to all ailments.

b. The truth is the name of the Lord is a way to describe the full character and nature and will of the Lord. It is a short-hand way to encapsulate everything that goes along with the truths of who God is. Thus, to say or do anything in the name of the Lord Jesus is to say or do something with the same motives as the Lord would have if He were in your place. It recognizes the authority of the Lord in one’s life as one’s Lord and Savior so in this sense, we act as His representative in this world.

c. The New Testament does not contain a strict code of conduct for the believer. What is pointed out is basic principles and portraits of maturity of what the finished product looks like. The name of the Lord Jesus ensures that whatever we do, it is done in a manner worthy of the Lord. In such, we are to give thanks to the Heavenly Father through this relationship to Christ.

C. None of these things is native to a human being. They are qualities which we develop over time through displaying faith in God in light of His Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Like fruit, they cannot be manufactured but only grown under the right circumstances. Thus it becomes essential, if you are to grow in these, to put them on, to understand the sovereignty of God and how He orchestrates your circumstances for His purposes and your spiritual maturity. **[Philippians 2:12-16]**

II. Family relationships put in Christian context. [Read Colossians 3:18-4:1]

A. Before jumping into the passage with both feet, we need to remember the context of what Paul shared here. This is a set of specific applications to the truths of what Christians are to put on mentioned from v.10 forward. Secondly, this passage emphasizes the duties of a Christian not the rights. While the rights are implied, it isn’t the focus of this passage. Third, the duties given here are reciprocal in that while one party has one duty it isn’t without a corresponding duty on the other party.

1. The wife’s duty to her husband. (v. 18)

a. The duty of the Christian wife is to submit to her husband. She is to recognize the rights of his authority in the life of the marriage and family.

b. “submit” means to place oneself under the rank of another. Paul’s main thought is that the wife should be willing to take second place to her husband. Yet, this doesn’t mean she is the domestic doormat and that the husband rules her with a rod of iron. It does mean that the wife forgoes exercising the authority and yields her authority to her husband.

c. There are three things we can get from this passage about submission of a wife to her husband.

1) The wife’s attitude is prompted and warranted by her husband’s unselfish love for her, the family and Christ.

2) The tense of the verb “submit” is middle which means she is to play an active role making it happen. In other words, it is voluntary. The wife’s submission is never to be forced or coerced by a demanding husband. It is the trait of a loving wife who is conscious that

her home, like any group of people, must have a head, and by God's design she realizes this is to be her husband.

3) This type of submission is fitting in the Lord. The word "fitting" means "proper". It is how God ordained the natural order and also the Christian order. Thus, submission is brought from a feared and dreaded "rule" to a higher and holy level of godliness. This reflects the Lord in the life of a married woman. **[I Peter 3:1-6]**

d. When my dad got saved and I got to hear his testimony of how he got saved, he credited his salvation to his mom (my grandmother) and my mom (his wife) as their submissive spirits led him to Christ. He saw something different in them that led him to give his life to Christ - just two years before he died. In non-Covid years I do my share of weddings. The one thing that modern, young couples and especially brides hate is for their vows to contain any reference to the word "submit". They want traditional weddings and they want the ceremony to be full of Biblical truth but they want me to scrub submission from the vows and ceremony. It is offensive to the modern woman. However, I explain that to be Biblical, it needs to be part of the ceremony. In every passage in the New Testament that describes the role and duty of the wife, it says that they are to be submissive to their husband. I do my best to explain the teaching but to limited openness. It's a shame that so many wives miss out on the blessings of the Lord because of their refusal to even consider this basic truth of Scripture.

2. The husband's duty to his wife.

a. In the ancient world, even in Judaism, wives were little more than property to a man. Paul's words here are a striking contrast to the mainstream view of the day. Paul modified the assumption that the husband wielded authority and others were bound to obey by inserting the principle of Christian love. The Christian husband is to lead by demonstrating the love of God towards His wife. Those qualities which Paul just told believers to "put on" in the previous section are the exact traits to be shown by the husband to the wife.

b. There are two responsibilities of the husband to the wife - one positive and one negative.

1) The positive one is to love his wife. This is their supreme duty. This love is "agape" love. It is not a romantic or affectionate love but rather a love that denotes self-sacrifice for the well-being of the other. Devotion to the other's highest and best (from God's perspective), not self-satisfaction is what Paul has in mind here.

2) Husbands are not to be harsh with their wives. The literal phrase is a command and it means to "stop being bitter" against your wife. Quit being irritable towards your wife. Since it is in the middle voice, it means the husband is to take the responsibility to do this himself. He must hold himself accountable for his own actions and attitudes in this area. This doesn't mean the Spirit won't help out, rather it implies that the Spirit will lead this direction (away from bitterness) but by faith, the husband is to act upon the Spirit's leading.

3. The children's duty to their parents.

a. Children are to be obedient to their parents. The word "obedient" means to "listen while looking up" as a sign of respect, to be under another. Since it is in the present tense, it is to be a constant habit of children.

b. Two aspects of this obedience of children to their parents.

1) it is to be complete as it says "in everything". This, of course, is set in a Christian context and presupposes a Christian home and godly attitudes on the part of the parent.

2) The obedience of children to their parents pleases the Lord. The obedience of

children to their parents is not based on accidental factors but rather upon the sovereignty of the Lord who put the family together in the first place and thus the child's obedience is not dependent upon the character of the parents. It is a duty grounded in the nature of the relationship God has established between parents and children. It is just the right thing to do.

4. The father (parent's) duty to the children.

a. There is some hem-hawing about whether Paul meant "fathers" to include "both parents" and the passage would allow for that but the word is father. As the head of the household, the authority figure, it would be logical that this duty would fall upon the father.

b. "exasperate" means to nag by way of habit. It is also used in a good way in II Cor. 9:2 when it is translated "stirred up" or "stimulate". The key thought is that fathers are not to challenge the resistance of their children with unreasonable exercises of authority. This will lead to embittering the child against the father. It is an admonition to exercise discipline in the household in the right and godly spirit. "Don't over-correct" or "harass your child to resentment" is what's in mind here.

c. The reason for this is so that the child doesn't become discouraged. Parents can become so severe that they create a feeling in their children that the parent is impossible to please, thus lose heart in life. They lose the zeal for life. This reminds us as parents that there is a balance between godly discipline and fleshly over-correction as well as a balance between guidance and wisdom to lead a child to their highest potential and zealous harassment that leads to demoralizing the child.

5. The slave's duty to their master. (vv. 22-25)

a. It is important to understand slavery in the ancient world in order to make sense of this passage. Slavery, with all of its associated evils, was not only universally accepted in ancient times but also considered a fundamental institution, indispensable for a civilized society. Over half of all people in the Roman empire were slaves. This was the social status of many professional people such as, doctors and teachers and craftsmen. Slaves were people with no rights and were mere property existing only for the comfort and convenience of their owner. This duty is listed here because slaves were part of the family.

b. Modern and enlightened man has taken issue with the New Testament, and especially Paul, in that he (and the other Biblical authors) did not denounce slavery and demand for its immediate overthrow. The apostles were not social reformers. They were proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Also, on practical terms, the church and Christianity had only about 25,000 followers in 50-60 A.D. There were probably around 350 million people in the entire world so Christians accounted for 7 one thousandths of the world's population at this time. It wouldn't matter how loudly they shouted and protested, they just didn't have the numbers to influence the entire world social order at that time in history.

c. What is important to note that the Bible doesn't condone slavery. When it speaks of slavery, it speaks as a state of social fact, not one of ideal or what is best for anyone. Indeed the principles of equality of master and slave that eventually led to the destruction of slavery in civilized society came from the teachings of the New Testament.

d. The duty of the slave is complete obedience. The word here means to "listen or heed". Paul has in mind the Christian household here. The obedience is not merely outward but of the heart with reverence of the Lord. By being obedient to God first, the slave is then to obey their master. "sincerity of heart" means lacking base and self-seeking motives.

e. Notice Paul spends three verses on this issue. The slave is to see their service as to the

Lord thus this mind set will transform the lowest and most menial task into one of dignity and honor as it's done for the sake of obeying the Lord. It is the Lord who will render the reward of inheritance and not from the master.

1) This is a huge thought here. Slaves were property with no rights in the eyes of society. Yet, in the Christian faith, slaves were not only equally loved by God but they also had the same opportunity to receive the inheritance of a saint from God - receive the same reward as the master in the next life.

2) Wrong-doing on the other hand, will be punished without partiality from the Lord. He has set the stage for life and is sovereign. Thus disobedience to the master is disobedience to the Lord Himself.

6. The master's duty to the slave.

a. Again, Paul's words here are revolutionary in scope. He is teaching that masters are to deal equitably and fairly with their slaves. While slaves were merely property in the eyes of the world, in God's eyes, they were humans who He dearly loved and wanted to be saved, like anyone else. Thus, God demanded that special care be taken of one's slaves. They needed to be treated fairly.

b. The master may have slaves on earth but the master has The Master of all humans who is in heaven. Thus, Christian masters were held accountable to how they treated their slaves as both bow to the Lord who shows no favoritism.

Q: Are there any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?