

# Colossians 3:1-17

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I don't know if you've ever watched the programme Yes Prime Minister or Yes Minister! It is one of the great programmes of our age. If you're struggling to understand British! Yes Minister and Yes Prime Minister is classic comedy. And if you've seen it, you never really! get tired of it. And there's one episode which was called the Ministerial Broadcast.

And Jim Hacker, the Minister, was about to appear on TV. Sir Humphrey of the Civil Service has been advising him about what he should be saying. And the TV producer asks him just before it goes to air, just before the programme, what will he be wearing? Jim Hacker, the Government Minister, says, well what do you suggest? The TV presenter says, well a dark suit represents traditional values. Fine, says Hacker, dark suit it will be then. On the other hand, the producer says, a light suit looks business-like. Sir Hacker says, what about a lightish jacket with dark trousers? And in the end, after discussing and looking at what Hacker was going to say, the producer says, all I can say is if that is what you're going to say, can I suggest a very modern suit, high-tech furniture, high-energy yellow wallpaper, abstract paintings, in fact everything to disguise the absence of anything new in the actual speech. It's a great night, isn't it? Mark Twain says, and clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society. It's true, isn't it? People will judge you according to how you're dressed. We do it, sadly. In our society, it's all sorts of dress codes. You know, those parties or those weddings, you need to know what the dress code is, isn't it? Black tie or is it smart, casual, whatever that means. One preacher I know is a recurring dream of turning up to speak somewhere without his trousers on. Maybe you've got that kind of dream of turning up somewhere and you're wearing the wrong thing. Maybe you've gone to an interview. Do I dress up? Do I dress down? Do I dress formally? Do I dress informally? And we shouldn't judge a book by its cover. But if it's true what Mark Twain says, then clothes, pick the man. What clothes should we be wearing as Christians? What clothes does the new man or the new woman in Christ wear? How do we dress as Christians? And there is a sense, particularly if you look in it from one aspect, that that is what this chapter is all about. Look at verse 12.

Put on them. Put on them. As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. It's not a bad wardrobe. Clothe yourselves as God's chosen people with compassion and kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. If only people would dress like that. If only the world was like that. It's a very different place, isn't it? Your office. Just glance at the passage for a moment. Imagine you had the choice of living in two towns and one town was like verses 5 to 9. This is where you could bring up your daughter. Where there's sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, covetousness, greed, anger, wrath, rage, malice, slander, filthy language. Do you want to bring your daughter up there? Or just down the road, there's another town. And that town is in verses 12 up to 14. And it's full of compassion and kindness and gentleness and humility and patience.

Where would you want to live? Where would you want to bring up your children? The reality is that the world we live in, despite all its beauty, is a pretty ugly, cruel place. And Paul is calling on us, as Christians, to live in a different world, to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. I want us to see two things. And then three practical suggestions. It's really five points, but if I say that, it's just depressing.

What's the best dressed Christian wearing this season? Well, notice in verse 10, it's a designer label. Verse 10. The label of the clothing. That's the first thing. And I'm put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Look at the label of this clothing. That is what we're made for. This is what Paul is saying. This is designer label clothing. In other words, when you become a Christian, you become the person God made you to be. When you become a Christian, you become a real human being. It's interesting that in verse 11, here, there is not Greek

and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, civilian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all. That is what we're made for. There is one race, and it is called the human race in Christ. And in the Church of Jesus Christ, for those of us who are in Christ, they aren't white, they aren't black, English, Welsh, Scythian, barbarian. We're so racist, aren't we? We have so many divisions, and our society is so fragmented.

[ 5 : 14 ] We put people into pigeonholes, we label people, but that is not what we were made for. That is not how human beings are meant to relate to each other. Because of the gospel, do you see what Paul is saying? He's saying we are remade in Christ. We start all over again.

We are renewed according to the image of our creator. And Christ is all in all. So it's designer labeled clothing. And it's Jesus who models us for it. We can't go through all the details, but look at verse 12, here again. He doesn't say clothe yourselves with all these things, and then you will be God's chosen people. It doesn't work that way around. He says, as God's chosen people, dress appropriately. That is what he's saying. Remember that you are God's chosen people. You are holy and dearly loved. So act like this. Wear the uniform.

Adopt the lifestyle. If you're united to Christ, then you live like him, as God's chosen ones. Verse 12, put on them 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 also you must forgive.

Let me just stop on that, because it's much easier said than done, isn't it? And we know, as believers, that is the way we should live. That is the clothes we should wear, but it is not easy. If you hear that terrible joke of me about the man who went to his GP, doctor, doctor, my wife is historical. Don't you mean hysterical? No, historical. She keeps bringing up the past. I know it's a rubbish joke. But what is Paul saying is don't do that. Don't bring up the past. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. And if the devil, if Satan keeps bringing up your past, when the devil brings up your past, you just remind him of his future.

It's the devil who is the accuser of the brethren. Jesus never dredges up our past. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. See, as Lewis said, everyone thinks that forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive. It's not easy, is it, to forgive and to forget.

[ 7 : 40 ] And to forbear with one another. How do you do that? How do you dress yourself like this? How do we as a church family show this? Forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven you.

Remember his final words of the cross? Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Compare that with Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Do you remember how he died? In Acts 7, at the end, his final words, as a stoner, falling around his head as he's gasping his final breath, we are told that he cried out, Lord Jesus. He gazed into heaven and he saw God's glory. He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God and he says, look, I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of the Father. And then he says, as he gasped his last breath, Lord, receive my spirit. And he cried out with a loud voice, didn't he? Lord, do not charge them with this sin. Do you see, how did Stephen die? How did the first Christian martyr die? How did he die? He clothed himself with Christ. It's dramatic, isn't it? That's how he went to glory, clothed with Christ. And that is what you and I are to do. Hopefully we'll never be in a situation like that. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. We say that, but it's not true. Words do a lot of harm. The tongue is a deadly weapon. And when we are falsely accused or insulted or put down or spoken against, what have we got to do? Well, we've got to do what Stephen did. We've got to set our minds on things above. Verse 1. We've got to see Christ. And we have got to clothe ourselves with compassion and kindness. We have to, we've got to forgive one another. As the Lord has forgiven us. And you and I know to our pain that that is not something we can do in our own strength. And in our own power, that does not come naturally to us to live like that.

So you and I need the Holy Spirit to do that. You see, these clothes, they are designer labels. Firstly, that is how God has designed us to live. And they are fashioned to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. They are modeled for us by Christ. But they are worn and they are fitted, if you like, by the Holy Spirit. 1 Peter, he talks to the women of the congregation who had unconverted husbands. And nobody tells them. He says to them, don't nag your husbands. Stop beating your husbands over the head of the Bible. He says, your beauty should not consist of outward things. Like elaborate hairstyles or the wearing of gold ornaments or Hollister clothes or whatever it is. Or Bowden. But your beauty consists in what is hidden in the heart. The imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit. That is very valuable in God's eyes. And that's how holy women who put

their hope in God in the past beautified themselves, he says. And that is what will win your husband, inner beauty. It's the contrast, isn't it, between outward adornment and inner beauty. And these clothes that are being described to us in chapter 3 of Colossians, they are spiritual clothes. It is not dressing up to look good to others on the outside. It's not dressing up to impress onlookers. It is not dressing up to disguise your true self to others. That's morality. It's something that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in you. And it arises out of your relationship with Jesus. And so here is what the best dressed

Christians are wearing. They are wearing spiritual clothes that are designed by God, they are fashioned by Christ, and they are fitted by the Holy Spirit. Now let me try and help you put them on. Because we want that, don't we? You want that for yourself. We want that for our society.

We don't, we hate, don't we, the anger in our lives. The anger that we can't understand. If you have those mornings where you can't, you don't even know why you're angry, but you're angry. We don't want malice. We don't want slander and greed. We don't want those things.

[12:05] We don't want sexual immorality and impurity. We don't want the world we're living in. We want the world that Christ lives in. So don't we? We want things to be on earth as they are in heaven. And that's what Paul is urging us to do. To set our minds. Can you see verse 1? Where Christ is. How do we do that? Three things from the passage.

I'm kind of practically trying to think it through a bit tweek. Number 1, seek the heavenly, verse 1 to 4. Number 5, verses 5 to 9, slay the earthly. And number 3, strengthen the Christly, verses 9 to 11. I'm making sure that's a word. So first of all, verses 1 to 4, seek the heavenly. So look at verses 1 to 2 again. How do we wear these spiritual clothes?

Well, Paul says in verses 1 to 2, we are to be heavenly minded. Twice he says, we are to be heavenly minded. Let me try notes in order. Sorry. We are to be heavenly minded. Set your mind on things that are above. We rather people, don't we? We rather folk be down to earth.

That's what we quite like. Folks. They've got their feet firmly on the ground. You know that kind of joke is that people are too heavenly minded to be of earthly use. So what does Paul mean when he says, set your mind on things above, not on earth? Because your life is hidden with Christ in God. Can you see that? There's 1 and 2. Let me try and illustrate it. Let me explain it on this. Christ is your forwarding address. You know when you move somewhere and there's a forwarding address? So if people want to get to you, if people want to reach you, they write in the forwarding address. And if people want to reach you, you know that it is in the care of Christ who is at the right hand of God. He is our forwarding address.

That is the address. Think about it for a moment. That is where you live. You live in Christ. So if you want to get the mail to get to you in your moving house, you want the mail to get to you, you have to give a forwarding address. Now you are a Christian. You have a forwarding address. Your life is hid, verse 3, with Christ in God. And so when the world comes looking for you and knocking on your door, as far as the world is concerned, you are ex-directory. But if the world wants to deal with you, if people want to deal with you, it has to be through Christ. I love the story of Martin Luther. Somebody comes knocking on Luther's door and they say, does Martin Luther live here? And Martin Luther answered the door and said, no, Christ lives here now. Martin Luther is dead. Christ lives here now. Your life, verse 3, is hid with Christ in God. You have been raised with Christ. And you are seated at the right hand of God. So set your minds on that. Hubert Humphrey, I think he was the vice president of the USA. I might be wrong on that. And he referred to the seating arrangements in the Senate. And he said this, you must remember in politics, how you stand depends on where you sit. Think about that. You watch Parliament, don't you? You are Parliament and it's all got the seating arrangements. How you stand depends on where you sit. Same is true for the Christian.

[15:51] Where are you seated? You are seated with Christ in heavenly places. That is the truth about you. My friends make fun of me because they say no matter when they see me, I'm always wearing same clothes. I have a very, very limited wardrobe. I have got no interest in changing that wardrobe.

We wear clothes, don't we, that we are comfortable in. Warren Wearsby calls these clothes our brave clothes. We say, that's the way I am. It can't change me. It's just who I am. I'm sorry. I know you don't like it, but that's just the way I am. I'm comfortable in my own skin. I'm comfortable living this kind of lifestyle. That is who I am.

And Paul says, because of those things that you are living comfortably with, the wrath of God is coming. So you better get out of the grave clothes and get into your grace clothes. Put off the old way of living and put on Christ. That is what he's saying. Somebody has said, we are not what we think we are, but what we think we are. Is that clever? I wish I'd thought of that myself. We are not what we think we are, but what we think we are. What were you thinking? Let's say you come down in the morning for breakfast and you find yourself in a really grumpy mood wearing a frown. That's where you live.

What were you thinking? Wearing a frown. You'd better come back. That didn't you? You'd better go back up and change. You'd better start thinking of Christ at the right hand of God. I've got to work on a better system of putting my notes together.

[17:51] But when you come down and you've got to find, you've got to go back up and think of Christ at the right hand of God. You've got to start reminding yourself that you have died for that old way of living and you've been raised and you now have to wear a totally different set of clothes.

You set your mind on Christ just as you set your alarm in the morning. You set your mind on Christ. Every time you wake up, set your mind on Christ.

What am I going to wear today? I always wear the same clothes. But we need to do that every morning, don't we? We need to say, what am I going to wear today? I am a new man in Christ. I'm going to clothe myself with gentleness. With kindness. With compassion. Do you see what the Apostle Paul is saying?

Set your mind. This doesn't happen by osmosis, does it? You don't just drift into these things. You have to dress yourself. So ask yourself, what clothes I'm going to wear today?

[18:55] First is five times. They paint a horrible picture, don't they? Look at what this says. Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness.

Greed, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your lives. Take them away. And we find out in verse 9, don't we?

That the old life is actually bound up in lying. These are our grave clothes. And the Bible tells you to put to death all that. Put to death whatever belongs to this earthly nature, whatever it is, and to put on Christ.

But you say, point taken. How does it put into death? What does it mean? How do we do that? Seek the heavenly. Set your mind on Christ.

Slay the earthly. Kill those things. But then thirdly, by strengthening the Christly. Let me use an illustration. From Greek mythology. There are two famous heroes.

[19:59] There is Odypheus and Orpheus. And the story goes about the sirens. Maybe some of you read it. The sirens were notorious bird women. They were half women, half birds.

And according to mythology, these half women, half bird sort of creatures, they lived on an island and they would sing. And their singing would lure sailors onto the rocks until their death.

And those who heard the sirens, they fell under their spell, except for those two heroes, Odysseus and Orpheus. And Odysseus, what he did, because everybody knew about the sirens, Odysseus had his men tie him to the ship's mast.

And he ordered the men to put wax in their ears while rowing. So that they would not hear the singing of the sirens. And so as they went past and he would be tied to the mast, they avoided the sirens.

Orpheus chose a very different method. When he and the Argonaut sailed past the island. And past the sirens, instead of strapping himself to the mast and putting wax in his ear, he took his harp and his lyre.

[21:09] And he began to sing. And he sang such a beautiful song that he drummed out the sirens. He played music much better. So that the crew listening, they did not hear the sirens calling to them.

Now do you see the difference between those two things? I'm a bit upset with the ESV. I love the ESV. But do you remember how chapter 2 ends? Do you remember how chapter 2 ends?

It says, doesn't it, do not submit to its rules. You know those regulations, those rules. Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. Paul is saying that there's some value in rules and regulations.

But there's no power. There's no power in rules and regulations. We want to wrap ourselves in them. But there's no power in rules and regulations. It says, doesn't it, there's no power.

I love that at the end of verse 2. It's so helpful. They are of no value. Absolutely of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. You can't change a person's heart with rules.

[ 22 : 16 ] You can't cleanse your heart by washing your hands. You don't pray by lighting a candle. And then you come to chapter 3. Look at verse 18, the title in the ESV. You wonder how on earth these people get paid.

Rules for Christophos. It's astonishing. How does that work? How do you escape from the siren voices of the world?

Rules. The world is always calling to us, isn't it? The world, the flesh and the devil is always backing us. It plays its music and it ends in the rocks, on the rocks and ruins.

It makes shipwreck of our lives. Well, you could tie yourself to the mast. That is the rules. So you've got all these rules and all these regulations. You strap yourselves to the mast. That is the oddest way.

What Paul is saying is, no, no, no. That is not the way to do it. It's the obvious way you need to go. You need to listen to a better song. You need to set your heart on things, on your mind, on things above.

[ 23 : 21 ] It's a better song. You see, God never intended to fight our instincts with rules. The remedy for the sinful human heart is much more radical than that.

God's solution is that we fight passion with passion. We kill off our old nature. How do we fight sin? By looking to Christ. By being taken up with him and allowing him to be the controlling passion.

So we are obsessed with Christ. We set our affection on him. We remind ourselves how wonderful he is. How big he is. How attractive he is.

We worship him. It's what Thomas Chalmers calls the expulsive power of a new affection. A new affection has come that has expelled the others. That's how you live the Christian life.

You set your affections on Christ. Let me just show you really quickly how you do that. I know it's hot. How do you make Christ your chief obsession? Your controlling passion?

[ 24 : 24 ] Well, look what he says in verses 15 to 17. There are two things there. Look at verse 16. You let the word of Christ dwell in you, plural, richly.

Teaching and admonishing one another. And all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. So can you see that at the start of verse 16?

The Bible is indispensable. That if we want to make Christ our life, do you see how he talks in verse 4? When Christ, who is your life, appears.

Who or what is your life? What is there or who is there? If that was taken away from you tonight, that you say, well it wouldn't be worth me living anymore.

Is it Christ? Or is it something else? Is it your career? Is it your home? Is it your grandchildren? Is it your spouse? Is there something else there?

[ 25 : 22 ] Or is it Christ? How do you make Christ your life? Well, verse 16. By listening to his word. By letting the word of Christ dwell.

Do you see that verse 16? So Paul is not just saying, if you want Christ as your life, make sure you read your Bible every day. He's saying, let us get beneath the surface.

Let it dwell in us. You see, as we read God's word, it is to be a spiritual experience. It's not just about moving the bookmark forward. It's not just about that.

It's not just reading comprehension. It is a spiritual experience. Let the word of Christ find its home. Let it dwell in us. And not only that. It's something that we ought to be doing in the context of Christian community.

Verse 16. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. See, you don't read the Bible on your own.

[ 26 : 27 ] We read the Bible together. I think we should probably do more of that. More of that. So I'm asking you, are you reading your Bible? Reading it prayerfully and carefully and expectantly and letting it dwell in you.

And reading the Bible in fellowship with other Christians. Maybe that would be a great thing to say. Why not? I'll have a coffee and tea to say. Why don't we read through the book of Philippians together? Say that to somebody. It's a short little book.

There's one other thing. Verse 16. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

With thankfulness in your hearts to God. There's one extreme, isn't there? There's one extreme that says, well, we're going to have our time of worship. And then we're going to have some time of teaching. There's one church in the evening that at one point had the worship part they thought before.

And then you could have coffee and tea. So those who wanted to go home could go home before the teacher. Seriously, that's true. Of course, the Bible, the sermon, the reading of the scripture is the climax of worship.

[ 27 : 34 ] You hear Christ. You worship Christ when you hear him speak to you through his words. It's the climax of worship. You don't have a time of singing that you call worship time and then you have the teaching. That's a complete misunderstanding.

But on the other hand, the bigger problem for churches like ours, is that the sermon becomes such a big thing that all the rest are the preliminaries. That's not right either.

Singing to one another, singing to God, are not preliminaries. That's how you get the word of Christ. It's how you internalize it. That's how it goes, the 18 inches from head to heart.

I need to do a bit more work on this, but there's two brothers in the 18th century, two very famous men called John and Charles Wesley. John Wesley was the preacher, the founder of Methodism. He preached tens of thousands of sermons.

I doubt, maybe there's one person here, maybe two, if any of you others have read one of John Wesley's sermons. But we sing Charles Wesley's hymns, don't we?

[ 28 : 41 ] We're going to sing in a minute, And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood? Dies he for me who caused his pain, for me who him to death pursued? Amazing love.

For can it be, that thou my God should die for me? Now I am certain that John Wesley preached that. But Charles Wesley put it to music. And we still say it.

And those words have taught us our theology. Martin Luther said, Next to the word of God, music is the greatest treasure in the world.

A person who doesn't regard music as marvellous creation of God does not deserve to be called a human being. He should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs.

We see it in sports, don't we? I don't know what songs he said to you. And when I go to the sport, we sing. And we sing when we're winning. We often sing when we're losing.

[ 29 : 41 ] And we are inviting everyone to join us. Keep being in those football games. There are incredible occasions where you sing. And so I say, what are we doing on Sunday? Don't we want to sing?

It matters what we sing. It really does. It has to be the word of Christ to one another. We don't always sing scripture. But every time we sing, it ought to be scriptural. So let me close by saying this.

The power to transform our lives, to become like Jesus, is not willpower. It is not rules. It is not regulations. It is not religion.

The Christian life is not about making rules. It is not about gritting our teeth and trying to be moral. It is about Jesus. Who is seated at the right hand of God. Who is seated because his work is done.

It is about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is about knowing that your life is now hidden in Christ, is in God. It is knowing that where he is, you are.

[ 30 : 39 ] And you are seated in glory at the right hand of God. And so you put off. And you put on. Let's pray. Let's pray.