

Clothed with Christ (Part II) (Col 3:12-17)**Matthew Williams****August 28, 2022**

Few people have the luxury of sitting around all day pondering existential questions like, "Who am I?" The world certainly encourages teens and 20-somethings to try whatever looks good or feels good in the quest to discover the real you. But with age comes responsibility, in most cases. Finding a way to pay the bills pushes self-reflection to the fringe of our conscience.

And by your early 30s, most people answer a question like, "Who am I?" with a quick description of their vocation. Who am I? I'm a programmer. I'm a lawyer. I'm an electrician. I'm an artist. I'm a teacher. Or I'm a parent of three kids five and under trying not go insane!

But there are other answers to the identity question, answers that may fly below the radar, but are far more influential in guiding the course of our life. I'm successful. I'm a failure. I'm loved. I'm unloved. I'm needed. I'm expendable. I'm rich. I'm poor. I'm healthy. I'm sick. I'm a victim of injustice. I deserve to be respected. I'm always right. I'm always wrong. The list goes on.

For example, I may not walk into the house after work consciously thinking, "I'm a successful man who deserves to be respected." But what if the first question my wife asks reveals something I was supposed to do and failed to do? The first instruction I give one of our children is promptly ignored? And anger begins rising in my heart? What's going on? My chosen identity just got outed.

Deep inside, I like to think of myself as successful. I like to think of myself as respectable. That's who I feel like I am. And when failure is exposed or respect is denied, I react with anger (in part) because it feels like my wife and kids have formed a criminal syndicate to assault my identity.

In contrast, what if I walk in, convinced I am a sinner saved by grace? A human being who will never outgrow my need for forgiveness? A father to whom the Lord has given the incredible privilege of training my boys to embrace his loving authority? Might that sense-of-self change my response to my wife and kids? Absolutely.



Every moment of every day, our internal identity has a profound influence on how we interpret and respond to all that's happening around us and inside of us. You may not feel it. You may not see it. But we're all living with some sort of answer to the "Who am I?" question, even if the answer is, "I have no clue," and your life is riddled with confusion and despair. Whether conscious or unconscious, we're all working with a sense of self, an identity of some kind. It's part of being created in the image of God. The critical question is not whether you have a sense of self but what is it?

Friend, only the identity God offers you through faith in Jesus will never crush you or the people around you. It's not something we achieve for ourselves on a performance treadmill. It's a gift. And because it's a gift, it's not an identity that can be used to look down on others. If you're a Christian, here's your identity. V. 12, you are a chosen, holy and beloved child of God. That's who you are!

And if you remember your identity, Christian, and choose to live in a way that's consistent with your identity and expresses your identity, being true to who God created and saved you to be, then, and only then, will you grow in the virtues the Lord commands us to embrace in Col 3:12-17.

If you think of them as a list of behavioral rules, you are sunk. If you think of them as suggestions for being a good person, you are sunk. If you think of them as marks of maturity reserved for old or serious Christians, you are sunk. They are none of those things, my friends. They are how you will live to the degree you embrace the identity Jesus purchased for you at the cost of his own blood.

That's what the gospel is all about. Why did Jesus live, die, and rise from the grave? To give sinners like us a new identity as the people of God. **And the gospel that establishes our new identity in Christ both requires and enables a new kind of life in Christ.** That's the main point of Col 3:12-17! When Jesus moves into the house of your life, redefining your identity, certain attitudes and actions are no longer fitting. They deny who you are in Christ. And new set of attitudes and actions becomes entirely fitting. They confirm and express the glory of who you are in Christ!



Last Sunday, we examined the virtues in vv. 12-13. Given you who are, Christian, put on compassion and kindness. Put on patience and forbearance. Put on forgiveness. Today, we'll pick up in v. 14. What kind of life does our identity in Christ require and enable?

1) LOVE AS A PEOPLE RULED BY THE PEACE OF CHRIST (vv. 14-15)

There's something striking about all the virtues in this list. They're all corporate in nature. Here's what I mean. They're not about how you do you over in a little corner by yourself. They're all focused on how we relate to one another in the church. The vices the Lord commands us to put off in vv. 5-11 are all behaviors that sow division and disunity. The virtues the Lord commands us to put on in vv. 12-17 are all behaviors that sow unity in the body.

We shouldn't be surprised because our identity in Christ is not a you-and-Jesus thing. It's an us-and-Jesus thing. To be "in Christ" is to be part of his body, part of his people, a union we express through membership in the local church. The behaviors that characterize new life in Christ have everything to do with how we relate to one another as the family of God. So Paul says in v. 14, "Put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Love compels all the other virtues and sustains our practice of them even when it's hard.

It's the heart attitude that delights in what God says is good and is devoted to helping others experience what God says is good. Jonathan Leeman summarizes the collective testimony of Scripture when he writes, "Love is affectionally affirming that which is from God in the beloved, and giving oneself to seeing God exalted in the beloved." If I love you, I will affirm what is from God in you and give myself to seeing God glorified through your life!

Notice the entire definition is all about God, not you or me. Why not? Why is love not whatever feels good to me? Or whatever feels good to you? Love for one another involves our feelings, but it's not ultimately a product of our feelings. It's a gift from God and reflects the character of God because my emotions and your emotions are not the moral standard of the universe. God is. 1 Jn 3:16, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."

Where Christ-like love is present, where all our speaking and acting is compelled by a longing to strengthen your brother or sister's joy in Jesus, biblical unity and harmony will flourish in our church. In Christ, we are one. That's already our identity. The Lord's admonition to us in v. 14 is to love in a way that maintains our unity amid threats of division. And that kind of love, a unity preserving, harmony producing kind of love, is only possible when our heart-attitude toward one another is ruled (v. 15) by "the peace of Christ."

Paul isn't talking about warm fuzzies, emotional detachment, or an abstract kind of shalom. He's talking about the sturdy, life-changing reality of knowing it is well with your soul because of the gospel. The joy of knowing you are right with God. That you are his. He is yours. And you will get to spend the rest of eternity knowing and enjoying him!

When the joy of peace with God is the supreme or ruling desire in our hearts, when the one thing we want more than anything else is the very thing God has freely granted us through the gospel, guess what happens when weak and sinful human beings frustrate my other desires? My desire to be loved. My desire to be supported. My desire for excellence. My desire for a quiet home. Whatever it is. I may be disappointed, I may be deeply hurt, but anger will not rule my heart and destroy my relationships because "the peace of Christ" (v. 13) is already ruling my heart.

Our hearts are always ruled by some sort of desire, brothers and sisters. May it be the peace of Christ, not lesser desires for lesser things, even good things, that other people inevitably fail to satisfy, leaving us bitter and angry. Be honest friend. What's ruling your heart right now? What's shaping your emotions more than anything else? What they did to you? What she said to you? How so and so treated you? Or who Jesus is and what he's done for you, the peace and joy he's granted you in giving you the gift of himself?

When Jesus is on the throne of our hearts, our greatest desire in every potential conflict will be to pursue what makes for peace. We'll be free to love people more and need them less because we're no longer asking them to provide what only peace with God can provide. Being clothed with Christ means loving as a people ruled by the peace of Christ.

2) BE THANKFUL AS PEOPLE SATURATED WITH THE WORD OF CHRIST (vv. 15-16)

Paul's admonition in v. 16 is sandwiched with calls to practice thankfulness. Look at the end of v. 15, "And be thankful," Paul says. Now look at the end of v. 16, "...with thankfulness in your hearts to God." A spirit of gratitude is not optional for Christians. It's a command. It's not a personality thing or a luxury reserved for people who are healthy or wealthy. It's what God created and redeemed us to do, to give thanks and praise to the One from whom all blessings flow.

Jas 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights..." Rom 11:36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." Acts 17:24-25, "The God who made the world and everything in it...gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

When Paul says, "And be thankful," he's not talking about looking on the bright side or being more positive. He's describing the kind of worship our generous Creator deserves and requires. Listen to how Paul describes the essence of sin, the core problem of the human condition. Rom 1:21, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Godward gratitude is a matter of spiritual life and death, brothers and sisters. It's not hard to see the command. Be thankful. What takes a little more digging is discovering the spiritual root of thankfulness. What produces gratitude? What enables us to keep on giving thanks even when life is hard instead of grumbling and complaining? The key is found in v. 16. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in your richly..."

What's the Word of Christ? It's the gospel. It's the good news of salvation from the wrath of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel is rooted in historical facts. Jesus really did live, die, and rise from the grave. But it isn't limited to historical facts. The gospel comes with a host of present implications.

Who Jesus is and what he did for us has something to say about how we relate as husbands and wives. Who Jesus is and what he's done for us has something to say about how we relate as employers and employees. Who Jesus is and what he's



done for us has something to say about how you relate to your friends, the food you eat, the movies you watch, and what you do with every dollar in your wallet.

So when Paul says, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in your richly,” he doesn’t mean, “Rehearse the historical facts of the gospel until you’re blue in the face.” He means, “Consider, meditate on, be affected and governed by the glory of Christ, the salvation he won for you, and all that means in every area of your life.”

One of the 7 shared values of every Sovereign Grace Church, across the world, is being gospel-centered. We want the person and work of Christ to occupy its rightful place in our thoughts, affections, and actions, not just our Statement of Faith. We want the gospel to dwell richly in us because it’s the gospel that informs and enables every virtue in the Christian life, gratitude included.

In a fantastic little book entitled, *Practicing Thankfulness*, Sam Crabtree writes, “Gratitude is the divinely given spiritual ability to see grace, and the corresponding desire to affirm it and its giver as good...Gratitude toward God is thus an indication that a person is spiritually alive, awake, alert.”

When the word of Christ dwells richly in us, we remember the death we deserve. We remember the life we have received. We remember that neither height nor depth nor angels nor demons nor things present nor things to come nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God.

We see how God works all things, even wicked things like the death of his Son, for our good and his glory. We realize all we have is a gift of grace. And the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to undeserved favor from God, all around us – in a good meal, a night of sleep, a working vehicle, a faithful spouse, a smiling toddler, a job that provides for our needs, and thousands of other gifts from above that would otherwise pass by completely unnoticed.

If you want to practice thankfulness, meditate on the goodness of God radiating outward from greatest gift he has ever given, the gift of himself. For he is kind to the ungrateful. As one of my favorite modern hymns declares, “What truth can calm the troubled soul? God is good, God is good. Where is His grace and goodness known? In our great Redeemer’s blood.”



So how do we remember and not forget his goodness? We remind one another of the gospel. We teach and admonish one another in the wisdom of Christ and him crucified. I exhort you to remember the implications of the gospel. You exhort me to remember the implications of the gospel. We do it through conversation, but we also do it through singing.

When you stand next to me or across the room from me and sing, "Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not, as thou hast been, thou forever will be," what are you doing? Having a private moment with Jesus? No!

You are teaching and admonishing me to remember (and not forget) that I am not alone in this world. There is a God in heaven, a faithful God, who never changes, who practices steadfast love and faithfulness to those who keep his commands. You are instructing me in the most important realities of the universe, spiritually governing realities that inform what I do with my time, my money, and my abilities. You're reminding me God is worthy of my trust. And that I was made to worship the Lord who laid down his life for me.

And guess what will mark a church that's centered on the faithfulness of God in the gospel? That sings lyrics focused on the glory of Christ? A church that diligently instructs and admonishes one another, through our singing and through our conversation, to remember Jesus and run hard after him? What will that kind of church be like? Paul tells us. It will be a body marked by thankfulness.

Because life is easy? Because relationships in the church are trouble free? No. Because we know King Jesus is sovereign, loving, and wise, and our hearts overflow with gratitude to him. Don't presume the word of Christ is dwelling richly in you. Test yourself. Could the people closest to you honestly say your speech is characterized by thankfulness or complaining? The solution isn't to try and see the glass half full. It's to be a people saturated with the word of Christ.

3) ACT AS A PEOPLE DEVOTED TO THE NAME OF CHRIST (v. 17)

Paul concludes his list in v. 17 with an instruction that encompassing all the virtues that come before it and all the virtues he left out. Remember, the list is illustrative, not exhaustive. V. 17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the

name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father through him." He won't let go of the giving thanks thing, will he? It's that important, brothers and sisters!

Here's what I want you to notice in v. 17. Notice how utterly comprehensive Paul is – whatever you do, word or deed, do everything. There's no down time. There's no me time. Jesus lays claim to every part of you, Christian, all the time, in every situation. Your thoughts, your feelings, your attitudes. All of it, Paul says, must be submitted under his rightful lordship. Either he is Lord of it all or not Lord at all.

Your decision will not change who God is. But it will determine how he relates to you. Is he for you and with you as a chosen, holy, and beloved son or daughter? Or is he against you and far from you because you refused to lay down your pride?

To do everything "in Jesus name" means to think, feel, and act as his representative, with his heart, his character, his attitude, and his priorities. It also gives us a very practical question to ask when we're trying to decide what does living out our identity in Christ look like in any situation.

F.F. Bruce, "But the question may be asked: 'What is the Christian thing to do here? Can I do this without compromising my Christian confession? Can I do it (that is to say) 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' – whose reputation is at stake in the conduct of his known followers? And can I thank God the Father through him for the opportunity of doing this thing?'"

That really is the ultimate test in so many grey areas of life. Can you thank God for what you are doing or watching or typing or saying? Am I representing him well as a mobile temple of the living God?

Paul's admonition to give thanks "to" the Father "through" the Son ends by taking us right back to Col 1:21-22, "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him..."

The only way we can have access to God and experience the joy of drawing near to him in grateful worship is through the work Jesus did for us. He's our mediator. He's our way of approach. We cannot saunter into the presence of the Holy and live. We must be cleansed. We must be restored. You must have your garments washed in

the blood of the Lamb. You must have a righteousness greater than all the good works you think you bring to the table. Jn 14:6, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

And if you do, brothers and sisters. If you approach the Father through faith in the Son – trusting his life, trusting his death, trusting his resurrection, to make you right with God, well then you can approach him with a glorious confidence, full assurance, knowing for certain our faithful redeemer has already atoned for all the imperfections in our thanksgiving, all the sins that stain our worship.

For we not only need cleansed from what we know is wrong. We need cleansed from the sin in what we think is right! I'm not saying it's impossible to please the Lord. I'm saying it is only possible through the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, a blood that washes even our most seemingly righteous deeds done in his name, that they too may be acceptable in God's sight. We act as a people devoted to the name of Christ, thankful that because of Jesus, we can really and truly live in a way that pleases the Lord.

CONCLUSION

The gospel that establishes our new identity in Christ both requires and enables a new kind of life in Christ. Jesus is the one who makes a new kind of life possible. How do we love one another? Through hearts ruled by the peace of Christ. How do we practice thankfulness in our relationships? Through hearts saturated with the word of Christ. How do we please the Lord in all our thoughts, feelings, and actions? We do everything in the name of Christ.

The peace of Christ, the word of Christ, the name of Christ – they are what make new life in Christ possible! There can be no true loving, no enduring thankfulness, and no life pleasing to the Lord apart from them. Which is another way of saying there can be no practice of Christian virtue, no new life in Christ, apart from the gospel!

Let us clothe ourselves with Christ in our attitudes and actions, my friends. And let us remember we can only do it because he first clothed us, giving us his peace, entrusting us with his Word, and granting us the unspeakable privilege of acting in his name. Let's pray and ask for the Lord's help!