

ROMANCING THE SAINTS AT COLOSSAE

Studies in the Book of Colossians

*“If Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the ‘church of Christ,’
then Colossians must surely be labeled ‘the Christ of the church’”
unknown*

Text
Colossians 3:5-11

Topic
Because we died with Jesus on the Cross we can daily put to death our
flesh and put-off the wardrobe of our old life

Title
“Cross Dressed to Kill”

Introduction

A number of celebrities have their own clothing line. Beyonce, Gwen Stefani, Sean Combs, Justin Timberlake, and Jessica Simpson to name a few.

Country music sensation Taylor Swift just launched a new clothing line available exclusively at Wal-Mart. Her signature item is sundresses.

If you watch any awards shows you know that they always ask each of the stars on the red carpet one question: “Who are you wearing?” Typical answers are Versace, Armani, and Vera Wang.

After reading our verses in Colossians we will want to ask ourselves, “Who am I wearing?” You see, the apostle Paul will use clothing as an illustration. He’ll describe certain characteristics of the way you were before getting saved as if they are old, filthy clothes that need to be put-off in favor of putting on thoughts and traits more becoming of a Christian.

It's as if we have two clothing lines to choose from:

1. We'll first read about the "old man" line of clothing. I call it the "Adam" line. It is those thoughts and traits that characterize our ancestry from Adam and Eve and their original sin. We're told to put-off the old man.
2. Then we'll read about the clothing of the "new man." It's the Jesus line of clothing we can put-on as born-again believers in the risen Lord.

Verses five through eleven mostly deal with putting-off the old man clothing of Adam. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Before You Go Out Walking Put Off Adam's Sensual Line Of Clothing, and #2 Before You Go Out Walking Put Off Adam's Social Line Of Clothing.

#1 Before You Go Out Walking
Put Off Adam's Sensual Line Of Clothing
(v5-7)

We've all seen someone, typically a young lady, dressed immodestly and thought, "What were her parents thinking letting her leave the house dressed like that?"

Or we see someone in a certain setting and can't help but conclude they are dressed inappropriately on some level.

Those people made a decision what to wear before they went out walking in the world.

So do we as Christians. In our case, spiritually speaking, we can decide what thoughts to think and what traits to exhibit before we go out walking. Our new life in Jesus Christ has provided us with a new wardrobe appropriate to our relationship with Him.

Before giving us the illustration of clothing, Paul reminded us of the doctrine that is the basis for our practical experience of walking with Jesus out in the world. Earlier in the letter he's established that we are identified with Jesus in His death on the Cross and in His resurrection from the dead. What happened to Jesus physically is applied to us spiritually. We are dead to

sin and the Law and alive to the Lord. Now it's time to apply the doctrine and make it practical.

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

“Put to death” is the word *mortify*. The best definition of the word is ‘to regard as impotent.’ We are to regard the old man as impotent.

Here is the key to living the Christian life. Because I died with Jesus I now have the power to put to death earthly, fleshly desires that would otherwise yield to temptations to sin. Although my unredeemed human body still longs for these things I can keep my flesh in the place of death by believing that my position in Christ provides me the power to do so.

It's a basic Bible teaching that has been eroded by our growing emphasis on outside factors and blame-shifting. Faith has been slowly replaced by our dependance upon things like psychology or medications.

A small percentage of Christians have what we call ‘organic’ problems. They have real chemical imbalances, real brain dysfunction. The majority of us do not. We are to receive the truth that we are dead and resurrected in Jesus Christ and believe that we have power to say “No!” to sin.

Paul said “put to death your members...” He was describing not just your physical body but what we are calling your “old man” or more commonly your flesh. There is something, some principle, that resides in your unredeemed physical body even after you are saved that longs to sin. The moment you become a believer you become aware of this struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. Paul is reminding you that you can *always* yield to the Spirit rather than the flesh. It's a choice - **your choice**.

One author put it like this: “The will of the believer must respond negatively to the impulses of the [old man] to use the physical parts of the human body for illicit purposes” (Wayne Gromacki).

To help you understand your choice he described the thoughts and traits of your flesh. Maybe if we see them for what they are we will be repulsed!

This first list of the thoughts and traits of the “old man” are things which are mostly sensual in nature.

“Fornication” is a general word for sexual immorality. “Uncleanness” is lustful impurity marked by entertaining filthy thoughts. “Passion” (KJV “inordinate affection”) is the desire to use another person to satisfy your own lusts. “Evil desire” is the craving that results from these things.

All you need to do is watch a little TV or read periodicals to understand that these four traits characterize the “old man.” Most advertising appeals to the sensual. *Those ad guys aren't dumb!* Neither are the companies paying them billions of dollars to get our business.

Not long after I became a Christian I was at a dinner with the other execs of the company I worked for. One of the guys, he was about sixty at the time, started in on the waitress. He was making suggestive comments to her directly and saying worse to us. I finally couldn't take it anymore so I asked him, “Jack, don't you have a daughter about the same age as the waitress?” He did and I knew it so I said, “How would you feel if a group of guys were sitting around treating her that way?” It shut him up until he got a little drunker.

What doesn't appeal to the sexually-sensual appeals to the next thing Paul listed, “covetousness, which is idolatry.” “Covetousness” is more than just wanting more. It is wanting what others have. It is labelled “idolatry” because ultimately it is a dissatisfaction with what God has given you. As you desire what God has not given you it crowds-out your love for the Lord Himself.

Colossians 3:6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

Not “these things” alone but the fact that mankind is in Adam. “Wrath” isn't uncontrolled anger. It is God's measured response in dealing with sin. God told Adam and Eve that they would bring death upon themselves and their offspring if they chose badly. Thus all who remain in Adam are “the sons of disobedience” and will earn the wages of sin, which is death - physical death followed by eternal ‘death’ suffering in Hell.

That was us before our spiritual makeover.

Colossians 3:7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

Scholars say that “in them” means *among them* and refers to nonbelievers rather than to these sins. This is who the Colossians were before meeting Jesus. They were controlled by the sensual and not the spiritual. They were just like everyone else.

Trouble is, Christians are becoming too much like everyone else. Internet pornography is a good illustration. The latest figures I could find were from 2006. A poll indicated that 50% of Christian men and 20% of Christian women described themselves as addicted to internet pornography. They defined “addicted” as visiting sites on an on-going basis.

In addition, 60% of the Christian women polled confessed having significant struggles with lust while 40% admitted to being involved in some sort of sexual sin within the past year.¹

Paul assumed that a Christian would never want to go back to living according to the sensual. That is the point he was making. Look at how others are living, on an almost animal level. Why go back to that when Jesus has given you so much more?

Implied, too, is that you won't be able to help others come to know the Lord if there is no discernible difference between you and them. If your life is dominated by the sensual what do you have to offer someone who is seeking to be delivered from the sensual? Emerson is credited with saying, “What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say.”

For your own sake, for the sake of your family and friends, and for the sake of those who are perishing, don't return to the sensual. Put to death those things! Your old man is impotent as long as you walk by faith.

#2 Before You Go Out Walking
Put Off Adam's Social Line Of Clothing
(v8-11)

¹ http://www.rawstory.com/news/2006/Poll_Christians_addicted_to_pornography_0814.html

The next list of thoughts and traits mostly involve your social interactions. It also formally introduces the wardrobe illustration.

Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

“Put off” as you would filthy, stained clothing. It is in a verb tense that calls for willful, decisive action. And it indicates you wouldn’t ever want to put on this stuff again. It can’t be cleaned up or covered; it must be discarded.

“All these” indicates anything that is characteristic of the old man. A few examples follow:

- “Anger” refers to an inward attitude of wanting to lash out at someone.
- “Wrath” is an outburst that acts upon your anger.
- “Malice” is having ill will towards another person. It is wishing the worst for them.
- “Blasphemy” can be against man or God. Since we’re talking about social things it probably is to be understood as against others. It reveals itself as slander and gossip and backbiting. It would certainly include any abusive speech towards another.
- “Filthy language” encompasses foul speech, coarse or rude humor, profanity, and obscenities.

It’s become fashionable for Christian ministers to be edgy and use explicit, coarse language, even profanity.

Not just ministers. A close listen to everyday conversations among believers can reveal a deterioration of language from just a few years ago.

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to one another...

A “lie” is any misrepresentation of the truth. Your tone of voice, your gestures, the look on your face, can all alter the meaning of your words.

As important as these things are, Paul was looking forward more than he was looking backward. This is what they were before. What they’d become was so much better, why put on any of that old man apparel?

He hammers home his point:

Colossians 3:9 ... since you have put off the old man with his deeds,
Colossians 3:10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

Paul mixed two thoughts together in these verses. When he said “you have put off the old man,” and you “have put on the new man,” he was referring to your permanent position in Jesus Christ. These are things done for you by the Lord at the moment you were saved.

Now, on a daily basis, you are “renewed in knowledge.” It describes the process of progressive change - doctrinally called sanctification - by which the indwelling Holy Spirit is transforming you day-by-day. He does it by “knowledge,” that is, by you getting to know and know about Jesus more each day by interacting with Him primarily in the Word of God.

The ultimate goal for you is to be transformed “to the image of Him who created him.” God created man in His image. That image was deformed at the fall when Adam and Eve sinned. Through salvation and sanctification it is being “renewed” until ultimately we are glorified and in Heaven.

In the mean time Jesus is the standard. He is what we want to look like. And by “we” I mean everyone; I mean every human being.

That is why Paul next stated that all human distinctions are spiritually insignificant.

Colossians 3:11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Let’s look briefly at each of these:

- “Greeks” was another word for Gentiles, and “Jews” referred, of course, to God’s chosen nation. We can be patriotic; in fact we should be. But from a spiritual standpoint there are no national distinctions. In other words, Christianity is not exclusive to any nation.

- “Circumcised or uncircumcised” refers to religious distinctions. In Paul’s day the “circumcised” were Jews while the “uncircumcised” were everyone else. While God definitely has a plan for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Christ is not exclusive to the Jew or to the Gentile.
- “Barbarian, Scythian” refers to cultures. While there are wide and sometimes wild cultural differences among the people groups of the earth, Jesus is the universal Savior of them all.
- “Slave nor free” relates broadly to overall social status. While we are trying to climb the ladder socially we are reminded that Jesus left Heaven to come to earth. Jesus climbed the ladder but in the opposite direction. *He stooped low to save us!*

“Christ is all and in all.” No matter who you are or where you are, Jesus Christ is the standard for you as a human being. You are to be clothed with the spiritual thoughts and traits that He was clothed with.

Often on our trips to Disneyland we’ll see groups of Buddhist monks wearing their characteristic saffron robes. It’s sort of comical and they seem a little out of place. I mean, what’s a monk doing at the happiest place on earth?

Christians can start to think that they look like people wearing saffron robes to nonbelievers. So we quite literally dress more-and-more like the world. We adopt its fashions - even if they are immodest. Then we start to put-on thoughts and traits that are reminiscent of the world. Then we convince ourselves that is the way to reach others - to be more like them.

I understand it; we all do! It’s called pressure, the pressure to conform.

Well, we should conform - **but not to the world!** We are to be conformed into the image of Jesus.

We can also get too weird. We can portray a Christianity that is legalistic and not only unappealing but unbiblical.

What should we do? Well, God’s Word is sometimes described as a mirror. We should look at ourselves in it and ask, “What am I wearing?”

If I have on any of the Adam line of clothing, I'm gonna want to put it off.
I'm gonna want to look like Jesus.

After all, it was when I saw Him as He truly is that I got saved. I didn't think He was weird. I thought and think He is wonderful.