

Sermon: Dressing Up

Text: Colossians 3:12-17

Introduction:

I want you to imagine two towns that are ten miles apart from each other.

In one of the towns, the behavior of its citizens is a perfect reflection of the list of things described in **Colossians 3:5-9**. It was a very “worldly” place, where things had been allowed to go unchecked for many years. There were absolutely no standards of appropriate behavior when it came to sexuality. Modesty was viewed as a draconian thing of the past. People wore what they wanted to wear (if very much at all), and did what they wanted to do. Lust was celebrated as a good thing. The unbridled desires of the heart were seen as fun in the purest sense of the word. The law of the land was “you be you and I’ll be me.” Greed was good. Anger was the way you got your point across. Children were taught (by example) to swear and curse while still in the cradle, and it was actually viewed as comical when elementary-aged kids ridiculed those in authority and used foul language that made their parents blush. If you wanted absolute freedom from rules and restrictions—this town was for you!

Down the road ten miles was another town that couldn’t have been more opposite, with a completely different vibe. People were, for a lack of better words, more pure. Kindness was visible everywhere you went. Wives loved and respected their husbands. Husbands adored and honored their wives. Children had a unique innocence, and treated their parents and those in authority with respect. There just didn’t seem to be any anger. People honestly deferred to each other. They listened to each other, and were very willing to apologize if they had caused an offense. Churches were full, and the singing was loud and heartfelt.

Which town would you rather live in?

There will always be some cynics who say they would prefer the first. People are free there, they’ll say. People are having a good time. Sure, they might lose friends now and then. There might be some who can’t look after themselves and may get hurt—but that happens everywhere. The huge upside is that people are free to do their own thing, and every weekend is a party worth working for! And as for the other town ten miles up the road—that place is for wimps and prudes! Weak and “all religious.” It’s a big show. They can’t stand up for themselves—always saying “I’m sorry” and going around singing hymns all the time.

I’m sadly describing the way so many in our society think. And it’s a perfect reflection of the contrast that Paul outlines in Colossians chapter 3. The practices that Paul outlines in the first town (Col 3:5-9) result in communities (families, towns, entire cities) tearing themselves apart. Sound familiar? We’re seeing it all around us. Unbridled sexual license and untamed rage results in the breakdown of relationships at every level. Yes, some might fool themselves into believing they’re having a good time in a world like that. But again and again, in moments of truth, they will admit that they are lost, confused, lonely and bitter.

Which leads us to the kind of people that Paul calls us to be in **Colossians 3:12-17**.

Examination:

- Read **Colossians 3:12-17**

- There is a difference between character and behavior. Behavior is observable. It's our outward, visible actions. Character is who you are when nobody is looking. How are these six verses a description of the distinctive Christian CHARACTER that God calls us to embody?
- In verse 12, Paul refers to the Christians in Colossae as “chosen,” “holy,” and “dearly loved.” What is easy to miss in this is the fact that this is exactly how God refers to the Israelites in the Old Testament. Look at each of these passages, examining how God describes His people:
 - Deuteronomy 7:6-8
 - Deuteronomy 14:2
 - Deuteronomy 26:18-19
- In verse 12, Paul returns to the metaphor of putting on clothing, as well as in verse 14. How helpful do you find that metaphor?
- The five virtues listed in verse 12 are all set in the context of relationships—living in community with others. Discuss each of the five virtues that Paul singles out. Talk about what the opposite of each of them would be.
- This isn't the only place in Paul's letters where we find a list of virtues. (e.g. Galatians 5:19-23) Why do you think Paul makes these lists of virtues in the way that he does? Do you find them helpful?
- How do these virtues defuse contentions and complaints against us from fellow Christians? How do we react to others who might criticize us?
- What's the difference between bearing with each other—and forgiving each other?
- Is forgiving others a command? How does this sit with you? What example does Paul use to illustrate the way we are to forgive others? Are there other places in the teaching of Jesus where we see this call to forgive? (hint: look at the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6)
- In what sense can love be like an outer garment that covers and binds together all the other virtues? (v. 14)
- Verse 15 refers to the peace of Christ as something that “rules in our hearts.” In other words, peace is in charge. How can Christ's peace become a “boss” or an “umpire” in our hearts? What happens if our hearts are not dominated by Christ's peace?
- What are the effects of letting the Word of Christ dwell richly in us? (v. 16) What does this achieve in addition to “wisdom” and “teaching”?
- Thinking of your own life and experience, do you sing hymns, psalms, and songs from the Spirit with thanksgiving in your heart, or do you sing in church simply out of duty? If you don't sing at all—why not? Should you?
- In what sense can everything we say or do be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?
- Are our prayers normally directed to God the Father, through our Lord Jesus?

Application:

Be conscious this coming week of doing and saying everything in the name of Jesus, with thanksgiving in your heart. Ask yourself: “Am I representing Christ in this choice?”