

Christ Above All Series – Love and Forgiveness
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We are preaching through the book of Colossians in a sermon series entitled Christ Above All. Last week Pastor Joe preached a great message entitled “Change Your Clothes.” He reminded us that to mature in Christ – we need to change our clothes! We must take off the soiled garments of sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed. Along with anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language and lying.

We used to walk in these ways but not any more... When we were saved we died to our former way of life and our life is now hidden with Christ in God. Because being a new creation in Christ means that the moment you accepted Jesus - all His righteousness became yours.

Now you must change your behavior to line up with your new status. It’s not about attaining righteousness; It’s about being righteous. It’s not about doing; it’s about being. You are righteous in Christ.

Today I am preaching on Love and Forgiveness. Our text is from Col. 3:12-14 Paul begins with one really important word: *Therefore...* Whenever there’s a therefore you want to find out what it’s there for.

So, Paul says THEREFORE, - now that you are saved, now that you are a righteous in Christ, now that you have taken off your soiled clothes, now that you are putting away ungodly behaviors...because we’ve done all that - THEREFORE - Or NOW - we need to do this. And the passage continues...

...as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

So, we’re taking off one thing and putting on another.
 We’re setting aside one thing and embracing another
 We’re laying down one thing and picking up another.
 We’re putting off our former way of life and putting on a new way of life.
 We must take off and then put on.

The image here is that of taking off old smelly clothes. It’s like the man who prided himself on never having to change a dirty diaper. When asked how he accomplished that, he smiled and said, “Oh, it’s actually pretty easy. I would just put on a clean one right over the dirty one!” That’s what some of us try to do, but it’s pretty evident to everyone.

We try to act loving and forgiving, we try to cover up our dirty clothes with clean clothes but everyone can smell - I mean see - our cover up.

You can't fake it. You can't clean up the old man. You must annihilate him. You see you can't put on until you take off.

The old man is part of the old life, the "dirty diaper," if you will. We cannot just cover that up. We must completely "rid" ourselves of the old man so that we can "put on" the attitudes and actions of Christ. Ephesians 4:22-29 says:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Here's what Paul is saying – If we're a Christian...then we should act like it.
Our behavior should reflect Christ.
Our attitude should be like Christ.
Our lives should be an example of Christ.

That's what Paul is trying to convey in verse Col 3:12 when he says... *as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.*

Those who are holy are the chosen of God; and those who are chosen of God, are holy and should act holy.

If we're going to say we're Christians then we should behave like a Christian.

If we belong to God that should be evident in how we live our lives.

That means we love when it's hard to love. It's easy to love someone when they are doing what you want, but what do you do when they hurt you.

Verse 12 says *clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

Paul gives us specific behaviors to put on. The Greek word here for compassion means bowels or intestine. This is referring to an inward affection. It comes from deep within. It's not just I'll say the right words or put on a good show. Instead this is the most tender, genuine, heart-felt love and concern...even when someone has hurt us.

Because we have an enemy that wants to use others to hurt us so he can conquer and divide families, friends, marriages, and churches. If he can get us to respond out of hurt he knows he can tear us apart and destroy our relationships.

A couple of Sundays ago I heard a sermon by Jentzen Franklin that really touched me. It was titled “Love Like You’ve Never Been Hurt.” I love that title because most of us do the opposite. We love like we’ve continually been hurt.

Instead of showing compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...we are mean, rude, prideful, harsh and intolerant. Someone hurts us and we write them off and shut them out. Then we avoid relationships because we don’t want to get hurt.

Listen, we all have issues in our families and friendships. Everybody makes mistakes. We all sin. None of us are perfect. We just don’t know how to love like we should.

As a result, we’re going to hurt others and they’re going to hurt us. We continually fall short of loving as Christ loves. Much of the time we fail at love and end up hurting ourselves and others. But love never fails.

The question is what do we do with our hurt?
 Our tendency is to close our hearts to others.
 We try not to be vulnerable so we won’t be hurt.
 But a heart that can’t be hurt is a hard heart.
 Instead we must allow ourselves to be hurt and forgive when it happens.

That might mean picking up the phone when someone hasn’t returned your texts or emails. That takes humility. Because we are responding in the opposite spirit. We may be feeling rejection, but were choosing to give acceptance.
 It might mean saying I love you when someone has shut you out of their lives.
 It might mean refusing to shut them out.
 It might mean never giving up on them and not judging them for their mistakes or failures.
 It might mean not saying I told you so. That takes patience and forbearance.
 You see love never fails.

I want you to hear this today. Satan wants to destroy your family. He wants to tear you apart and make you feel unloved by each other.

When this happens, someone has to be the bigger person. That means swallowing your pride and reaching out to them. It’s called reconciling. To reconcile means to restore to friendship. 2 Cor. 5:18 says:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Relationships are so important to God that he gave all of us the ministry of reconciliation.

Think about it...It’s impossible to love apart from involvement with others. Love can’t exist in a vacuum.

I'm not saying there isn't a time to set boundaries and to separate from abusive friend or family members. Obviously, there are times when we must do this.

But in many instances, someone has to take the first step towards reconciliation. That might mean repenting and asking forgiveness for whatever wrong you have done. It might also mean forgiving the other person...even if they don't think they've done anything wrong...even if they don't ask forgiveness. This is what Paul is saying in verse 13:

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

One thing that helps is getting an understanding of what forgiveness is. You see forgiveness is not making excuses for the person who hurt you. It's not minimizing the hurt. It's not saying it wasn't wrong. It's not pretending nothing bad happened or sweeping things under the carpet. It's also not allowing people to treat us any way they want. Forgiveness is letting go of my right to get even or to punish them or to hope that God teaches them a lesson. It means we release others from whatever we are holding against them.

In verse 13 Paul connects forbearance and forgiveness. The two go together. Forbearance means to put up with someone, or to be willing to endure their behavior. It also means to be willing to help them. We can't do this if we have unforgiveness.

Having said that - I know it's easier said than done. But here's one thing that really helps me when I can't forgive. I remind myself how much God has forgiven me. I think about all the hurtful things I've done to God and others and how much I've been forgiven...and that really helps me. I mean how can I be unforgiving when I've been forgiven so much?

Listen to Ephesians 4:32 -

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

How has Christ forgiven us? Freely and repeatedly, so we should forgive freely and repeatedly.

I know this isn't easy. I realize that forgiveness is a process. I also know that forgiveness requires dying to self. But we must forgive others if we want to experience forgiveness.

Some of you have had terrible wrongs done to you. Someone may have betrayed you - cheated on you - abandoned you - divorced you - abused you - ignored you - rejected you - or lied to you. Those things hurt.

And you have a choice today. You can choose to not forgive. You can hang on to the offense. But if you do, you will be choosing to stay in pain. You will be choosing to give the power to the person who hurt you.

Or – you can choose to forgive and release God’s power in your life. Forgiveness does not change the past, but it will change the future and it will change you! If you can’t forgive, then be willing to be made willing.

And if you look at verse 14 Paul give us the antidote for unforgiveness. He also shows us the only way to have compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Paul says over all these other virtues put on love. Love is the outer clothing that covers all the rest.

1 Peter 4:8 says:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

If we have love all the other virtues will flow from our love. Every ounce of compassion, every act of kindness, every moment of humility, every gentle word spoken, every second of humility, every time we show patience, every ability to forgive... are all set in motion by love.

If you have love you will get it right every time. You won’t have to figure out what to do... love always knows what to do.

Even if someone hurts you. It hard to get it right when were hurt. We naturally want to pull away or hurt back. But if we have Jesus on the inside of us then we have love. This is the time to show it.

I’m telling you, you can do it. Not in your own strength. You will fail every time.

But if you look to Jesus, if you draw on His love that lives in you, if you die to yourself and let Jesus love through you...you can be the instrument of healing and restoration to others.

You see our actions and our words can either heal or they can destroy. They are like Nitroglycerin. Nitroglycerin is used for two things. It can be taken when someone is having a heart attack to save a life or it can be used to blow something up. The same compound can either heal or kill.

The same is true of our words and our actions. What we say and do can either heal or kill. We may not like what others do. We may not approve of their choices or their lifestyle or their beliefs or politics or their attitude, but we still must love them. We don’t have to like them... but we must love them. Love is the mark of a true Christian.

You see it's easy to love when people do what we want them to do. But what about when they don't.

Not that long ago someone that used to go to Grace said some really awful things about me and our church on social media. They told a lot of lies. My first reaction was to defend myself but almost instantaneously I felt the Holy Spirit speak to my heart. I felt genuine sadness and nothing but love and forgiveness for this person. Jesus said in Luke 6:32-33:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that.

Do you ever wonder about that person at work that just gets on your nerves all the time? What about that friend that keeps taking advantage of you. How about that spouse that drives you up the wall? Or that child that won't listen?

Your response is like Nitroglycerin. You can either bring healing or bring destruction by how you react in times like this. And this is really cool. After Paul instructs us to love he says this in verse 14:

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

The power of love is that it binds everything together in perfect unity. The word bind is referring to a girdle which is a garment that fits very tightly and causes all the rest of someone's clothing to be bound closer to the body. So, when we wear the tightly fitted girdle of love, then all the virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness will be bound closer to our body.

The phrase perfect unity in the KJV is translated *bond of perfectness*. In the NKJV it says bond of perfection. This is referring to maturity.

So, if we put the two together we see that when we clothe ourselves in love all the virtues of Christ will be tightly bound to us and will result in Christ like maturity in our lives.

This is a beautiful picture of love and forgiveness.

Today, will you take off the filthy garments of sin and put on the garments of love and forgiveness?

In closing, I want each of you to think of someone you need to love and forgive. Before you leave today will you determine to reach out to that person or persons and make things right with them?

I conclude with that challenge.
Let's not just be hearers of the word and not doers.

Let's be ministers of reconciliation!
Let's forgive those who hurt us.
And let's love like we've never been hurt.

Let's pray.