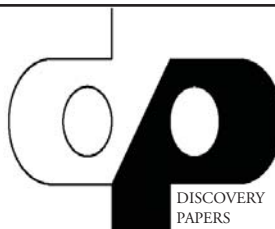


EMBRACING THE WORLD OF TRUTH

SERIES: WALKING IN THE MYSTERY



Catalog No. 110529
Colossians 3:12-17
5th Message
Paul Taylor
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Last week we started talking about the TV show *Extreme Home Makeover*. This is the show where a crew of people comes into a community to completely renovate someone's home who really needs it. There are basically four steps to this process. First, we are shown their existing home and how terrible it is. Then, we get to watch that home being demolished. Third, the work crew builds a new home that is beautiful and designed to meet the exact needs of this family. Finally, the new family is shown their home. The show always ends with the main host saying, "Welcome home."

We're in the midst of a series, working through the book of Colossians and this renovation project is what Paul walks through in most of chapter 3. Last week we saw the first two steps of that process. Paul gave his readers instructions on what to demolish about their lives. We saw two lists of sins to cast away and a resounding instruction to embrace truth in order to do so.

This week, as we look at Colossians 3:12-17, we will see the next two parts of our extreme church makeover. Paul will show us what to build. We will see a community that is brand new, designed from the ground up to meet our needs, and perfect for us. We also will be welcomed home into this new community. Last week we talked about rejecting the world of lies. This week we'll see how we can **embrace the world of truth.**

As we look at this passage, we'll see an instruction Paul gives to put on certain virtues. Last week he told us to put off certain things, now he's telling us what to replace them with. Then he talks about two different things that characterize the life of the believer in community. Two unique phrases that aren't found anywhere else in Scripture: the peace of Christ and the word of Christ. Finally, he sums it up with a grand conclusion to do everything we do in the name of Christ.

Once again, Christ is at the center of everything in this book. So now that we've done the demolition of the old stuff from last week, let's start building this new house that Paul has in mind.

Put On Christ

We'll start by looking at the first three verses to get a feel for what Paul is telling his readers to build in their lives.

Colossians 3:12-14:

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Notice right off the bat how Paul introduces this command. He starts off by reminding his readers who they are. "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved." This is who we are. This is what defines us as a community. We belong to God. He has chosen us. He has loved us. He has made us holy.

Last week we talked about embracing the truth of who we really are. Taking off our masks and being honest with each other. For Christians, there are two parts to what's true about us. We need to be truthful about the brokenness in our lives. But this is the other part of what's true: we are God's chosen people. We are holy. It's a mysterious tension, but they are both true. We are broken and we are restored.

As God's restored people, we are able to live a new kind of life. So Paul gives a list of five things to clothe ourselves with. This exactly mirrors the lists from last week of five sins to be thrown off. Two sets of five sins replaced by one set of five virtues. Paul summarizes this list by saying to put on love as the outer garment. That is the overcoat that connects all these virtues in a perfect bond. It's clear that Paul believes that being in Christ is a transformational experience. It changes our lives and it all has to do with Christ. If we can summarize what it is we are clothing ourselves with, it is the person of Christ. Christ is love. **Clothe yourself with Christ.**

I want us to notice something about these virtues: they are all relational. If you remember from last week, all

of the sins we are to lay aside were also relational. Now those relational sins are replaced by relational virtues. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. These are ways of being with another person. I am patient with you. I am kind toward you. I am gentle in my interactions with you. Paul is not describing you. He is describing how you interact with other people.

This has been one of the biggest shifts for me as I've studied the Bible over the last few years. I grew up in my spiritual life thinking a lot about being pure and holy. I heard a lot of teaching about sanctification and how to become more and more like Christ. I understood personal integrity as my primary goal. But as I understood it, it was mostly about me getting better. I was becoming more mature, I was sinning less, I was acting more like Christ. I certainly understood that God was the one at work within me. It wasn't my efforts. But the result was that I was getting better.

However, the more I have studied the Scriptures, the more I have found that virtually all the signs of spiritual growth in the New Testament are relational. They are not so much about me as about my relationships. What characterizes my relationships? How do I interact with people? What types of friends do I have? How do I treat my family?

The way I thought about marriage illustrates this. Early in my marriage, my whole goal was to be a good husband. But after some rough patches that I'll talk a bit more about later, my new goal is to love my wife. Being a good husband is all about me and my character. But compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience is all about how I treat someone else. In marriage, loving my wife makes it about her.

Like a lot of us, I've spent a lot of my life in school. I had two very different types of assignments in school; individual homework and group projects. Individual homework was all under my control. It may have been really hard—maybe the concepts were difficult, maybe I had to learn to manage my time to get it done, and maybe I didn't always enjoy the material. But it was my responsibility—under my control—and I received a grade for it. That is how I used to think about my spirituality. Of course God was the one empowering my growth, but it was basically about my performance.

Toward the end of my time in college, many of my classes were based around group projects. These could be fun at times, but for the most part, I found group projects far more complicated than individual assignments. We had

to schedule times to get together. We had to figure out who was going to work on which part. Some of us were better at certain things. Some of us worked harder than others. Some of us seemed to care more than others. But at the end of the day, we all got the same grade. It wasn't all under my control.

I think of my spiritual life now much more like a group project than an individual assignment. If I'm going to be compassionate, I need someone who is feeling pain to feel compassion toward. Compassion is not what you feel toward yourself. It's what you feel toward someone else. If I'm not involved in a community, who am I going to be compassionate toward? How can I put on kindness if I'm alone in my room? I need someone to be kind to. Kindness is something that happens in a relationship. So what about patience? If I'm going to be patient, then I need people around me that require patience. So where can I go to find a lot of people that require patience? Hmm. That's not too tricky? How about a church?

One of the things that I love about this passage is that Paul seems to assume that relationships among "God's chosen people, holy and loved" aren't going to be easy. I'm going to want to be abrupt and harsh, but will need to work hard at being kind and gentle. I'm going to listen to someone and think they don't know what they are talking about and need to work at being humble. People are going to annoy me and rub me the wrong way, and I'm going to need to be patient. People will experience pain and suffering, some of which they may have caused themselves, and I will be asked to feel compassion that may not come naturally.

Paul's instructions seem to assume that God's chosen people are often hurting, insecure, sensitive, overbearing, broken, difficult, and annoying. It's almost as if he's visited PBC himself! Why else would you need compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience? Paul has an honest view of what church life is like and he has a powerful recommendation on how to live within it.

In fact, as we move on in these verses we see that this type of realistic thinking continues. He starts out in verse 12 with a command: *clothe yourselves*. Verse 13 continues with two more verbs. The NIV translates them as "bear with" and "forgive." Those are good translations of the words, but what the NIV loses is how they are related to the instruction of putting on virtue. The sense of the original Greek is that this is how you go about clothing yourself. How do you act kindly? How do you be humble? By bearing with each other and forgiving each other.

These are really the two ways that you interact with people when things are difficult. When someone does something that doesn't make sense to you or that hurts you in some way or that makes you angry, you can do one of two things. You can overlook it. Or you can pardon them. You can bear with the person. Or you can forgive them.

Bearing with someone means enduring it. It means that you give them the benefit of the doubt. You overlook the ways they make your life difficult or that they didn't return your email or that they annoy you. You put on Christ by bearing with people.

But sometimes, even frequently, within a community, we will do things to hurt each other. Real things. We will exclude each other. We will talk badly about each other. We will be insensitive. We will forget about promises. We will judge each other. In short, we will do things that are really hard to overlook. These are things that require forgiveness. They require me to acknowledge that you did something to hurt me. It might have even been intentional. Maybe you're aware of it. Maybe you aren't. But I will be called upon to forgive you.

Sometimes people talk about the Christian community as if it's so wonderful and filled with love and it sounds as if there is never anything wrong that requires forgiveness. But Paul says that we will need to bear with each other. We will need to forgive each other. This is how we clothe ourselves with all the virtues he has listed. It starts with forgiveness.

My wife and I went through a difficult season in our marriage when it seemed like conflict dominated most of our time together. Both of us felt hurt, confused, disappointed, and angry with each other. During that time, we went through almost two full years of marriage counseling that was really helpful. I remember one conversation in particular during one of our counseling sessions. I was talking about something that Rachel had done that made me angry. I was going on and on about it. Part of what had made me mad was not just that Rachel had treated me a certain way but that she wasn't supposed to treat me that way. She was my wife. It's one thing for someone else to treat me that way, but she had an obligation to love me.

Our counselor asked me to describe how I felt toward Rachel and I said that she felt like my enemy. It felt like she was out to get me and it hurt all the more because she was supposed to be on my side, supporting me. My counselor then said, "Ok—let's say that she is your enemy in that moment. Let's say that you're right. She is out to get you.

What does Jesus say about how we treat our enemies?" And of course, I said, "well, we're supposed to love them." At that point something clicked for me.

There will be times in my marriage when my spouse is out to get me. There will be times when she tries to hurt me. There will be times when I try to hurt her. That acknowledgment of reality was incredibly freeing to me. I had felt like I wasn't able to say that because it wasn't supposed to be true. In a Christian marriage, we are supposed to love each other. How could my wife be my enemy? But there are times when she is my enemy. And there are times when I am her enemy. Rachel and I have grown a lot in our marriage since that time. God has brought us into a great season of being able to love each other. Part of that growth has come from each of us learning to love when the other is our enemy. Once again—the truth sets us free.

Because marriage is a little picture of what is true among God's people, we face the same dynamics around here. We are supposed to be the church. But there are times when we will betray each other. There are times when we will hurt each other on purpose. At times, we will be out to get each other. There are times when we will become enemies of each other. Paul does not sugar-coat what it will be like to be a church. It will require forgiveness. It will require that we have difficult conversations with people who have hurt us. It will require love.

So as Paul so commonly does in this book, he brings it back to Christ. Our forgiveness is based on the fact that Christ has forgiven us. We have disobeyed him. We have hurt him. We have rejected him. We tend to forget the magnitude of our rejection of Christ. This is why if you were with us for our Good Friday service, we play the part of the hostile crowd at Jesus' trial and we demand that he be killed. This is what God forgives us of, our rebellion to put Christ on the cross.

Because he has forgiven us, we can forgive others. God's forgiveness of us didn't come easily. It was painful; incredibly so. It took discipline and courage not to back down at the last minute. It left scars. This is the real picture of forgiveness. This is what is asked of us if we are to live as a community.

Invite Christ In

So Paul started out with the instruction to put on clothes of healthy relationships. After tearing down sexual sin, anger, and lies, build up your community with

compassion, humility, and the like. After speaking really specifically about how to treat each other, he once again brings things back to Christ; first, with an attitude and then with an activity.

Colossians 3:15-16:

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

There are two parallel instructions here that Paul gives the community. They are meant to be understood together. The first is an attitude. The second is an activity. Taken together, it's a picture of the community inviting Christ to be the center of their relationships. The instruction is for us to **invite Christ in**.

His first instruction is to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." This is a unique phrase. Nowhere else in the New Testament do we find the phrase "peace of Christ." There are places where we hear about the "peace of God" and "peace of the Lord," but this is the only reference to "peace of Christ." What is this peace?

Earlier in Colossians, Paul describes how Christ himself made peace. In Colossians 1:20, Paul said that Christ made peace when he reconciled everything to himself. In Ephesians 2:14, Paul says that Christ himself is our peace because he destroyed the barrier between people and reconciled all of them to God.

So the peace of Christ is not primarily an inner feeling. It's not about feeling good or calm or at rest. It's about two groups who used to be at war coming together as one. This is peace as compared to war. Not peace as compared to being stressed. That's the attitude that Paul wants for the Colossians; for their interactions to be characterized by peace. This is what happens when you forgive each other in the same way that Christ forgave you. This is what happens when you clothe yourself with all of these kinds of virtues. The peace of Christ rules in your heart.

I know what it's like when I don't have this attitude. There are times when I'm tired, frustrated, or upset with someone and my heart is not ruled by peace. It's exactly the opposite. I'm ready for a fight at any moment. My guard is up and I'm just waiting for someone to say something. This happens for me more at home than anywhere else.

I usually don't realize I have this attitude until something happens. Some small thing will make me react much more than I should. I'll realize that I came into the situation ready for conflict. My hand was over my holster and as soon as someone budged, I was ready to draw and fire.

Paul says not to have this kind of attitude. Don't walk in with your hand hovering over your holster. Walk in peacefully. Wave the white flag. Look for reconciliation. This is the peace of Christ. **Invite Christ in** by allowing his peace to define your relationships.

Paul begins by encouraging an attitude of peace and then moves on to an activity. The second phrase is to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Once again, we have a unique phrase that we don't see anywhere else in the New Testament; the "word of Christ." We see the "word of God" and the "word of the Lord." But this is the only place where we find the "word of Christ." Fortunately, Paul gives us more detail about what he means by the word of Christ dwelling within us. It's basically the two things that we've done this morning. We talk about Christ and we sing about Christ.

First Paul says that the word of Christ dwells in us as we teach and admonish each other in all wisdom. This is what Paul said he did for the Colossians. Back in Colossians 1:28, Paul refers to him and his colleagues by saying "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." This is what Paul does as a pastor and apostle and shepherd of God's people. That makes sense—this is what you expect your pastors to do, right? Admonish and teach.

Paul also says that this is what you do with one another. This admonishing and teaching doesn't just come from those with titles or leadership positions. It happens from within the body. This is actually one of the things I love most about being at PBC. This has always characterized us. We are not a fancy restaurant church. The pastors aren't working hard all day to prepare a nice meal so that you can come consume it. That's how a lot of churches operate though. We're more like a pot-luck church. We believe that the Spirit is at work in all of us. We all bring something to contribute. There are times when different ones of us assume a more formal teaching role, but all of us are charged with carrying out the ministry of being God's people.

There is a phrase "ministry of the saints" and the idea behind it is what Paul is talking about around here. We strive to be a place where you are doing ministry. We are all involved in God's work in this world. We never want

to default into a position where a bunch of people get together on Sundays and pay a few people to do ministry.

In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul says that God gave the church pastors, elders, and apostles in order to prepare his people for the work of service. The role of a pastor at PBC is to equip you to do ministry, not to do the ministry ourselves. That was a ground-breaking idea when I first came to this church. We minister to each other. That's why Paul says that the basic activities that he does in churches—admonishing and teaching—is to be the activity that people within the church do for each other. What does it mean to let the word of Christ dwell among us? It means we are teaching each other.

It also means that we are singing together in worship. Paul says to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. There probably isn't too much of a distinction between these words. Scholars have a hard time coming up with clear categories that these words fall into, but the point is that there are different types of songs to be sung. There is a variety of music. All of them should be used in worship.

We should be singing all types of songs—that is letting the word of Christ dwell among us. We should appreciate different types of music and that's what we strive to be around here. We aim to include different worship elements so that we can appreciate variety. We are not a cutting edge contemporary music church. Nor are we a traditional classical music church. We try to do a little bit of everything.

Our worship leader, Jake Dodson, is on vacation this week so I thought this would be a great time to talk about him without embarrassing him. Every week we sit together to plan out the Sunday morning worship service. We do our best with God's guidance to identify themes, think of creative ways to connect with God, and put the morning schedule together in a way that will help us to be drawn toward God. Working with Jake on this every week is a huge privilege. He is gifted at being sensitive to the flow of a morning and picking songs that highlight themes of the morning as well as usher us into a fuller experience of worship with God. Listen to this quote from his vision for music ministry on our website.

The songs that we learn and sing at PBC are chosen to provide a broad sweep of both musical variety and lyrical expression that lead us all to a deeper understanding of God's magnificence (a never ending work!). We love to sing both the rich lyrics and robust theology of hymns from many eras, as well as the clarity and timeliness of many current worship

songs. These efforts enable us to have a fuller palette of materials with which to worship God. Sometimes we sing with a quiet reverence, sometimes we sing songs of longing for God's will to be done, sometimes we sing loud songs of celebration! Often we'll do all of these in the same service.

In all of this variety, the ultimate aim is to give glory to God and build up the faith of all who gather here in worship.¹

This is what Paul is saying. Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as a way of allowing the word of Christ to dwell among you richly.

As we build up this house, that is the people of God, we clothe ourselves with love. But within this house, we keep an attitude of peace—the peace of Christ guides our interactions. And the word of Christ is ever-present with us. We teach each other about Christ. We encourage each other toward him. We admonish each other when we're getting distracted and we sing together. This is the church.

Drink Your Coffee in the Name of Christ

Paul concludes with one final all-encompassing instruction. Listen to how he sums everything up.

Colossians 3:17:

¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

What more can be said? Here Paul explains exactly what it means to walk in the mystery of Christ. Everything that we do, whether it is something we say or do or think or believe is done in the name of Jesus as we thank God the Father. This is the life that we want to live. This is what it means to walk in Christ.

What I love about this instruction is that it is so completely comprehensive. He doesn't say to come to church and pray and go to your small group in the name of Jesus. He doesn't say that your religious life is lived in the name of Jesus. In fact, Paul doesn't seem to care much for religion at all. He says that everything we do should be done in the name of Jesus. He says to take our daily activities—the things we already do and say—and to do them in the name of the Lord Jesus.

For me, this made me think of drinking coffee. It's

something that I do pretty much every day. I have a coffee routine in the morning to make a cherry mocha at home that my whole day pretty much hinges upon. There's nothing particularly spiritual about drinking coffee. But Paul says that whatever I do, I should do in the name of the Lord Jesus. There are other places in Scripture where we are instructed to change the things that we do. But here, we're simply instructed to go about our normal routines, not to do them normally, but to do them in the name of the Lord Jesus. **Drink your coffee in the name of Jesus.**

This means that when you leave here and get in your car, do so in the name of Jesus. When you have dinner tonight and watch *The Simpsons*, do so in the name of Jesus. When you try to drive to work tomorrow, but sit in traffic, do that in the name of Jesus. When you sit in a boring meeting, deal with a difficult coworker, or endure another lecture in class, do those things in the name of Jesus. There is no divide between your religious life and your "regular" life. When we walk in the mystery of Jesus, that covers everything.

This instruction might sound overwhelming at first, but for me, it has given me a great deal of freedom as a Christian. Everything I do, I can do in the name of the Lord Jesus, assuming it doesn't violate his commands. I know a lot of Christians who are worried about whether they are pleasing God. We want so badly to live lives worthy of God and we work so hard at figuring out whether what I'm doing really does please God. But the more I study the Scripture, the more I find that there is great freedom within it.

One of the things that has happened for me as I've gotten older is that there are more and more responsibilities that I'm involved in. More and more people that I want to spend time with and things I want to do and I just can't do it all. Sometimes I spend a lot of time worrying about what God wants me to do. Does he want me to lead more Bible studies? Does he want me to read to my kids more? Does he want me to plan trips for college students or young adults or take my wife out or pray? The truth is that I think he wants me to do all of those things, but mostly he wants me to live my life in Christ.

I spend so much time trying to figure out what I should do, but the reality is that God is far more interested in how I do them. I'm worried about doing the right things. God's focus is that I'm doing them the right way.

I have great freedom to make decisions and do things that I want to do as I invite him into it. I can take my kids out on a boat in the name of the Lord Jesus. I can lead a

men's Bible study in the name of the Lord Jesus. I can relax, watch a movie, and eat ice cream in the name of the Lord Jesus. Walking in the mystery of Christ means being in him whatever I'm doing. He will guide me. He will make it clear to me if there are directions he wants me to go. My main responsibility is to invite him into everything; absolutely everything. To see him transform my life and to find him in all that I do.

Conclusion

Last week we began looking at two passages that together I compared to an episode of *Extreme Home Makeover*. Last week we saw the old house exposed and demolished. We saw that embracing truth is how we lay off our old self. The truth sets us free.

This week we've seen the happy part of the show. We've seen a brand new house being built for us to inhabit as God's people. Paul has shown us how we build ourselves up as a community. What are the relational virtues that we must value and practice if we are to be built up into a healthy community of Christ? We saw that those values are based on bearing with each other and forgiving each other. We will not be a perfect community; we will hurt each other. But we can forgive because we know the forgiveness of Christ. We can be a place where peace rules our hearts and the word of God lives vibrantly.

When we do that we become a community where everything is centered around Jesus. All that we do, we do in his name.

Next week, we'll see Paul applying these principles of life in Christ to very specific relationships: marriage, work, and family. We'll continue to see how to arrive at this beautiful house that God is building us into, as his people.

For now we're left with this picture of a functioning community. One filled with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Where we forgive and are forgiven. Where the peace of Christ guides our actions. Where the word of Christ dominates our activities. Where we learn to walk in Christ in everything, no matter what we're doing. This is God's vision for us as a church—for Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto. This is what he is building us into. So that one day, he will return and we will greet him into his church with a resounding, "Welcome home to Peninsula Bible Church."

NOTES

¹Jake Dodson, <http://www.pbc.org/music-and-arts/music-ministry>.

Interpretive Translation—Colossians 3:12-17

Since Christ is all that matters, you have to treat each other differently. You are the people that God has chosen. He has made you holy. He loves you. So just as you took off the dirty clothes of your former life, put on the clean clothes of this new life. Those clothes are compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

When things get tough and feelings get hurt, you are patient with each other and you forgive instead of taking revenge. You forgive each other because your Lord forgives you. Love makes your outfit complete. Love enables you to grow into maturity as a community.

Allow Christ's supernatural peace to guide all your interactions with each other. After all, God created a body, not just individual parts. And thank God he did! Allow Christ's message to lead you into a vibrant life with each other. Teach each other and point each other toward that life. Sing all sorts of songs together that focus you on Christ. Let the gratitude in your heart be expressed in song.

Finally, everything you do should be done with Christ in mind. Everything you say. Everything you do. Everything. When you live like that, your life gives glory to God because of Christ.