

**Laying Aside the Old, Putting on the New (Part 2) (Colossians 3:12-17) Pastor Richard Yu
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There is a standard of behavior that Christians are expected to adhere to. This expectation is not just from other Christians but from God. Jesus saved us in order to live a new life, not to keep living in our old ways. This new life is more than just quitting a few bad habits. It is a radical repudiation of all the wrong ways of the past. We must put into practice that which is entailed by the position in which we have already been placed by the grace of God. Though we were born again into Jesus Christ when we first accepted Him, Paul describes the renewal process in v. 10 in the present tense, as an ongoing process, which is characterized by putting off the old and putting on the new. This process takes time, active engagement, and willingness on our part.

In vv. 5-9 Paul described the old ways we must put off. Now in vv. 12-17 he discusses the new life we must put on. This new life is characterized by unity and love, derived from the grace of Jesus Christ, and culminating in submission to Jesus through deeds and worship. It's not enough to get rid of the old; we must replace it with the new. Paul entices us with this new life in order to get us to let go of the old, just as we entice children to let go of a toy by presenting something more attractive. We must take off the old dirty garments to put on saintly robes. But before Paul describes these saintly virtues we are to put on, he calls the Colossians holy and dearly beloved. We must remember that because of Jesus we are made saints. Just like Israel, we are made holy—set apart for God, not because of our own blamelessness, but because of God's grace, in order to live a life characterized by the holiness our position calls us to.

The virtues Paul lists are ways we can respond to our election by God's grace. And these virtues also play a role in maintaining the church community. The first is compassion, which means having a tender merciful heart that imitates Christ's mercy. But so often we are cold-hearted to those closest to us. We must show Jesus' love to everyone around us. Kindness is the word used in Luke 5:39 to describe the mellowness of old wine. We also see it in Matthew 11:30 to describe Jesus' yoke. Kindness is the quality of God that leads us to repentance (Rom 2:4), and in response we must live out this kindness toward others. Humility has a condescending and negative connotation in contemporary literature. It conveys the idea of being weak, to be made

nothing. But for Christians it reminds us of Jesus' obedience in His incarnation and execution. Humility is not merely thinking poorly of one's self, but rather the absence of self-exaltation and full submission to the lordship of Jesus. Gentleness is better translated as meekness. It may look like weakness, but it means strength under God's control. Just like the strength of a horse is controlled by the bit, God directs our actions. Patience means long-suffering in the face of insult or injury. It's more than endurance. Rather, it is based on faith in God and the knowledge that He is in control. We should remember the patience that God showed towards sinful rebellious man and respond by being patient with each other.

That leads to v. 13, which describes forbearance and forgiveness. This is patience with regard to interpersonal relationships. Forgiveness means more than just forbearance or tolerance, but active acceptance of those who wrong us. Don't keep records of wrongs, hold grudges, or retaliate. In response to God's forgiveness, we should forgive (Matt. 18:21-35). Finally, Paul talks about the supreme significance of love. It is possible to have some of the other virtues without love but impossible to have love without all the other virtues mentioned. Now we must remember that all these virtues are exercised within a community, often when interacting with difficult people.

The climax of the passage (vv. 15-17) speaks of the peace of Christ. This is more than absence of conflict. It means wholeness, experiencing the fullness of Christ. We must let His peace rule in our lives; let it be the judge of what is right and wrong. This peace must also be practiced in the body. Next, v. 16 talks about God's word dwelling in us richly. This means we must read it, meditate on it, and put it into practice. We may not understand it all, but we should act on what we do understand. This also is done in a community, through teaching and admonition. And once the word of God is received, it leads to joy and gratitude permeating our entire lives and expressing itself in praise in the community. Let this passage dwell in you that you may practice these virtues through active submission to the Spirit, so that we may live according to our position. When the old self resurfaces, remember God's grace and His transformative power, and be encouraged to participate in this renewal process.