

What are you wearing?
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Colossians 3:1-17 Common English Bible (CEB)

Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God's right side. Think about the things above and not things on earth. You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

So put to death the parts of your life that belong to the earth, such as sexual immorality, moral corruption, lust, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). The wrath of God is coming upon disobedient people because of these things. You used to live this way, when you were alive to these things. But now set aside these things, such as anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene language. Don't lie to each other. Take off the old human nature with its practices and put on the new nature, which is renewed in knowledge by conforming to the image of the one who created it. In this image there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all things and in all people.

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.

We continue and conclude today, our journey through Paul's letter to the Colossians. Again, a quick review:

- Paul thanks them for their commitment
- Paul reminds them that Jesus is the Messiah – they are reconciled to God through Jesus' crucifixion.
- Paul reassures them that they've got this – don't let pressures from outsiders discourage you. As Jesus said in Matthew 10:16, you are sheep among wolves; be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Today:

Paul talks about resurrection life. What life is like **NOW** since Jesus' resurrection has opened up a whole new way of living. You are being called to live **INTO** your baptismal identity, **IN THE LIGHT** of your future resurrection NOW. Will you put on the new clothes of God?

So many people look at this passage as an instruction manual of dos and don'ts.

Do these things:

- Be compassionate
- Be kind
- Be humble
- Be gentle
- Be patient
- Be tolerant
- Be thankful
- Forgive each other
- Love each other
- Teach each other

Don't do these things:

- Sexually immoral
- Morally corrupt
- Be Lustful
- Evil desire
- Be Greedy – which is idolatry.
- Be Angry
- Have Rage
- Have Malice
- Slander
- Use Obscene language

Easy right? Well, it's not that easy because it's too shallow. We can see in the Bible, that humanity struggles with following directions. That's because it's not as easy as following a rule – we have to go deeper. Paul says to focus on “things above” and not on earthly things. “Things above” refers to the new humanity, the new way of living.

We need the constant reminder that since we are raised in Christ, we have a new life. Paul isn't giving you a manual; this **ISN'T** a directive about **how to get to heaven someday**. Too often that's how it's preached and interpreted – it's misused as a license to blame others, point fingers and differentiate one's self as better than another.

No. Paul was talking about the here and now (for them AND for us). The “things above,” or “heavens” are where Jesus Christ currently rules over all of creation, sitting at God's right side,

but Jesus will return to earth to transform all things. Until then, right here, right now we are to live as NEW humans. Christ's death and most importantly Christ's resurrection gave us new life.

So, what does that mean? New life?

Yesterday, there was another mass shooting. Another one. By a young, white, male, American terrorist. Twenty people were murdered. Twenty-six people were seriously injured. AND, overnight another shooting in Dayton, Ohio where 9 were killed and also 26 injured. Social media has been flooded, yet again, with thoughts and prayers. This is not the new life of which Paul speaks.

There is a deep darkness in our society... There is something terribly wrong.

If we don't find words to address it beyond superficial sentiment, then we are contributing to this sickness.

We have a divided, violent, gun-soaked society. We're at verbal war on social media. We can't seem to disagree without being disagreeable. Our streets and offices and churches and nightclubs and public squares get spattered with more blood every day. More graves are dug every day.

We must talk about all of this. Again.

The conversation isn't just about guns, although that's certainly a huge part of it. We need to look at the bigger picture of how we've made violence our norm, how we endorse and encourage it in so many ways.

We shoot imaginary people in video games, treating killing as entertainment.
We normalize violence through our television shows, movies, and monuments.
When the killer is a white, American male we speak about mental illness as a root cause.

In the rare instances when the killer is NOT a white male, we speak about terrorism and having stronger immigration laws.

We sell guns as the solution — we need more “good people” with greater firepower and better aim. We need to arm school teachers and preachers.

Forget about God's everlasting presence; forget about wearing God's wardrobe of compassion and love -no, strap on a gun! Forget about rejecting rage, anger and malice. in guns we trust.

We applaud warriors and dismiss peacemakers as out of touch. To support peace as more important than weapons is naïve, it is weak. It is un-American, it is un-Godly.

We conclude that the one with the most bullets and bombs gets their way, so we spend mountains of money making more of them. We print money, we divert money away from food stamps and veteran's medical benefits in order to build a wall and strengthen the military block. We've reached the point where we can't send a loved one to school, to church, to work, to a mall, to a night club, or to a concert without concern that they could get gunned down by a deranged person with weapons.

How did we get so lost? How do we find our way? How do we live the NEW humanity of Jesus Christ, clothes in compassion?

We need prophets like the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who forced us to **confront the ways we glorify guns and violence** and thus create a "morally inclement climate" in our culture. He also challenged the many religious leaders who refused to speak up. Religious leaders have often shied away from prophetically challenging their communities to do better. It's not appropriate to preach politics from the pulpit. Stay in your lane. Church leadership however, must not look the other way when it comes to our culture of violence. Jesus was political – he spoke out, he overturned tables, he said enough is enough, put down your sword.

While the pulpit is a good starting point, we all need to be promoting this conversation. We need to say in as many places and as many ways as we can: This must change. Enough is enough. We must put away our weapons, stop glamorizing violence, and give up our infatuation with conflict.

If we don't say it, then our faith is nothing more than noise.

Jesus lived in times that were soaked in violence, weapons, and conflict. Romans killed for domination and pleasure. Crucifixion was commonplace. The religiously observant also advocated violence — death by stoning for breaking certain rules. Jesus told everyone to drop their stones, put away their swords, resist the temptation to treat anyone as an enemy. Jesus' followers should use their hands to heal wounds, not to wield weapons. We need to hear that message again and again, even if it's widely unpopular in our culture.¹

When we're told to wear God's wardrobe of compassion, kindness, humility, patience and love, it means addressing big, global problems, as well as smaller, local ones. It means speaking out and taking action. Living the new life where we focus on "things above," means that life must be re-examined and transformed. We must live as if the new creation arrived when Jesus rose from the dead.

¹ Adapted from <https://sojo.net/articles/whens-last-time-you-heard-sermon-about-gun-violence>

This is a good time to throw in the story of the Good Samaritan. You've heard that story, right? A man is robbed by bandits and left for dead. A priest and a Levite walk by, literally cross the street so it's even easier to ignore him. Then a Samaritan comes by, sees the injured man and helps him. The Samaritan not only helps to bandage the man's wounds, but Jesus tells us that "he extended compassion so far out of the ordinary, we respond "no way." The care and the cost of what he gave the man was so over the top, we're meant to be incredulous."² We're supposed to be incredulous because of **who** the players are in the story.

A modern-day equivalent to this story would be having "a confederate flag waving Trump supporter who listens to Rush Limbaugh and rails against flag-burning liberals ruining our white culture" being beaten and robbed and the savior who extends over-the-top compassion is Nancy Pelosi¹. What?! That would never happen! You could flip-flop the characters, say a "tree-hugging Bernie supporter that was beaten and Mitch McConnell was his savior" and you'd be expected to have similar incredulity. Such extreme compassion, by such diametrically opposite people? Never! We are NOT supposed to expect this. It pushes our imaginations.... but it shouldn't. That's not living in the new creation of the resurrected Christ.

When you put on the clothes of God's wardrobe, for whom are you doing it? The priest, the Levite, the Samaritan? Do you wear humility and kindness for co-workers, church friends, or maybe family members? What about wearing kindness for that bigoted high-school classmate on Facebook that just loves to push your button? How about wearing truth for the hundreds of child refugees living in American concentration camps? How about wearing justice for the hundreds of people murdered by gun violence just this year? What do we choose to wear?

It feels like we're losing the ability to be compassionate for anyone other than who we like or with whom we agree. We're forgetting that in the new image there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, citizen or refugee.

In verses 3 and 4, Paul says, "you died, and your life is hidden with Christ. When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory."

What exactly does this mean for us.....your life is hidden with Christ?

It refers to the fact that through Christ's redemptive work, we are inseparably linked to him. Christ is with us and within us here on earth AND we are also united with Jesus, where he sits at the right hand of God. We need to remember that we already exist there – now!

"We face divisions today along ethnic, social, racial, gender, economic, political, military, familial, and geographic lines. Fortunately for us, the God who hides is still the God who guides

² "Why has the United States lost its capacity for compassion?" https://davidbahr.weebly.com/#_ftn2

us to the Christ inside us. "Christ is all and in all": that is a broad statement the Paul makes. **It makes all the difference.** If Christ is in all of us, then we all are guided at some level by the same Spirit, larger than us. If Christ is in all of us, then our older way of relating *can be* superseded by our new way of trusting. If Christ is in all of us, then we are all searching for God's revealed direction together."³

This world is demanding to say the least, but we can triumph if we live in the present, together as a new humanity, remembering that Christ is in all of us.

Let us transform ourselves by consciously putting on the armor of God known as love. Let us reject rage, hate, bigotry, anger and malice. Let us stop ourselves each morning to take a moment and choose to wear compassion, love and peace; do it proudly and loudly, knowing that we are strong, and we are focusing on things above.

AMEN.

³ David Gray Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16)