

January 5, 2025

“A New Year (You?) Approach”

Colossians 3:12-17

Intro:

Hands up everyone who got clothing of some sort for Christmas. I bet you were pretty glad to receive those presents, right? I also bet that as a kid you were less happy about one of your precious gift slots being taken up by a pair of socks.

Getting clothes at Christmas (or other gift-giving times) is an interesting thing. Often it is an opportunity for the person giving you the gift to exercise some stylistic creativity, buying that fun item that they might not purchase for themselves, but think would look great on you. It is also a great opportunity for you to have your own wardrobe expanded in ways you probably would not have gone if you were picking items out yourself. Usually, those things go well together, and you get to enjoy a new expression of yourself through style.

My Dad was a teacher, and he taught in the era where male teachers wore a shirt and tie to work – and often a suit jacket of some sort. He was not an adventurous person when it came to tie choices. Almost all his ties were some sort of brown and had a paisley pattern to them. One year for Christmas I thought it would be a great idea to buy him a tie that was fun and not brown. So, I bought him a couple of novelty ties so he could show that he had a fun side as well.

To his credit, he wore one of the ties to church...once. After church that day, he took the tie off, handed them both back to me and said “Son, I really appreciate the thought behind the ties, but I just can’t wear them.” And he went back to brown stripes and paisley. Which, I guess wasn’t so bad because he was happy with his boring ties, and I got two new fun ones, which I was more than happy to wear.

Clothe Yourself:

What does all this talk about gifts and clothing have to do with this morning's sermon?

Well, we have just started a new year, and at this time there is usually all sorts of talk about new habits, new patterns, new diets, new exercise regimes, plans, hopes, dreams, and so on. Most people look at the start of the new year as a fresh start for themselves as well. They look ahead with hope to a year full of promise, with thoughts like "this will be my year" bouncing around in their minds. For some people, it is a signal for a new style, a new job, a new outlook, a turning over a new leaf in habits or hobbies. Just as the gift of new clothes at Christmas can be start of a new style, the start of a new year is often an opportunity to reimagine the "style" of our lives and to make changes.

This is the general concept that Paul is getting when he writes to the believers in Colossae to "clothe themselves" in a new manner. Sometimes we use clothes to hide ourselves, as a shield against people really finding out who we are. Or we use clothes to project an image of who we would like to be but really aren't. Neither of those things is what Paul is encouraging his readers to aim for. In the passage from chapter three that we just read earlier, he is telling his readers to dress in a manner that reflects their true nature – the new nature that has been given not from our own desire, but from God as we embrace being chosen by Him.

What is this new style that Paul is talking about? Paul likes to use the phrases "old self" and "new self" when talking about the changes in people when they embrace Jesus. The old self is the self of selfishness, lies, slander, greed, and desire for things of this world: money, importance, power, etc., to name just a few. In Col 3:9, he says that we have "stripped off" that old nature, and now we are to "put on a new nature" that reflects Jesus as we get to know him better. Many of you have heard this before, but before you tune out, consider whether this is something that you have done fully, or only partially.

The new year is the perfect time to take a new approach to your behaviour and how you are "clothed". New Testament scholar Jerry Sumney states the challenge

this way “Put on the New Self (or, Since You Have Put on the New Self, Act Like It)”¹

We have been given this new self, but have we really put on all the pieces of the outfit? Maybe at some point we did, but then we got hot and took a layer off, or thought it got dirty, and we needed to put aside to get washed. Or maybe, you picked up an old piece of clothing and put it on because it was convenient and easy. Paul says that we are to be renewed as we learn to know Jesus and become like him.... This means that as a follower of Jesus, the more we get to know him, the more we should look like him in our words and our deeds. We can't look like him if we keep trying to wear our old clothes.

Act Like It:

What does this new style look like? Paul gives us several areas of guidance. They aren't new to most of us, but perhaps they are forgotten, or we haven't paid much attention to them lately, or they have been overwhelmed by all the external things this world bombards us with.

Our new style should be marked by tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You will note that these sound very similar to what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, and starting next week we are going to dive more deeply into what he is talking about there. For today, I want you to note that these 5 areas are not isolated traits that we need to work on individually, although we do need to be consciously aware of how we behave in relation to each of them, but that they are all by-products of what he says in verse 13: “Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” Paul is not saying here that we need to tolerate every manner of sinful behaviour in others. He is saying that we need to recognize that no one is perfect, and to remember that we too are flawed, but that Jesus has still forgiven us. So, instead of condemning

¹ Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 209.

someone because they are flawed, be kind and have some patience with them. Allow Jesus to work in their heart, just as he is working in your own.

Secondly, Paul says that above all, we should clothe ourselves with love, and to let the peace of Christ rule in our lives. Back in the late nineties early 2000's, it was trendy to preface almost every Christian decision with the phrase "WWJD" or "What Would Jesus Do". It is a fine phrase, except that there are many situations in our day and age that the Biblical account of Jesus just doesn't speak to, and so we don't always have a clear answer to "What would Jesus Do?" Instead, Paul is saying here that we should ask, and act on, "How would Jesus love?" Or maybe simply ask ourselves "Does Jesus love this person?"

Conclusion:

It can be hard to get this straight in our own lives. It is easy to fall back into old and bad patterns. Patience and kindness, love and forgiveness don't always come easily for us. We have to work at putting them on again and again, and then keeping them on, as the new clothing that Christ offers us. To that end, Paul suggests something a bit more unusual. In 3:16 he suggests that studying together – which is why being a part of a Grow Learn Connect or Prayer Pod group is important, is how we build wisdom in these matters. On top of that, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (this was the foreshadowing of praise choruses!) to God is good for keeping our hearts lined up to the character of Christ that we are supposed to be reflecting.

So, sing praises to God! Set your minds on Christ and allow the graces you have received from Him be the graces you extend to those in the world around you.

Let's pray.