

Colossians 3:12-17

¹²Therefore, as God's elect, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone else. Forgive, just as Christ forgave you. ¹⁴And, in addition to all these things, put on love, which ties things together in perfect unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ control your hearts, to which you were also called, in one body. And be thankful.

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And everything 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.

The Indwelling Word

I.

From South Dakota home to Michigan on the day before the winter solstice—a day short on daylight. Darkness reigns at this time of the year. It's a totally appropriate time of the year to celebrate Christmas. The many hours of darkness each day serve as a reminder to those who think about it of the darkness of sin and unbelief in the world. A darkness that is hopeless. A darkness that *nothing* can overcome.

But something *did* overcome it. Some *One* did overcome it. The gospel for Christmas Dawn, which served as the sermon text on Christmas Eve, says of Jesus: "In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. ⁵The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4-5, EHV).

Our Christmas celebration every year is a celebration of a new world. With Christ's birth, the world moves from darkness to light—from death to life. Paul talked about this movement earlier in this letter to the Colossians: "The Father rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14, EHV).

II.

Do we ever *need* rescuing!

In Colossae there was a problem with a group called the Judaizers. Their idea was to force many rules from Judaism and the Ceremonial Law of the Old Testament on New Testament believers. To be a Christian, they said, you need to *do* a whole bunch of things—things that bring you closer to God; things that make you right with God.

Human nature wants nothing more than to make us feel exactly that way. The conscience lets us know that there are many things we have done that God doesn't like. Certainly some people ignore the conscience, but they do so at their own peril. God hates sin. The Psalmist says: "The arrogant cannot stand before your eyes. You hate all evildoers" (Psalm 5:5, EHV). Strong words. God hates evildoers. Your conscience proclaims you an evildoer. If the conscience is weak, God's Moral Law is there to remind and reinforce the conscience.

The second table of the law outlines all kinds of sins against fellow human beings: lying, cheating, stealing, disobedience, abuse of God's gift of human sexuality, greed, hurting and harming others by word and deed, and on and on. The first table of the law shows us that every one of those sins against our fellow human being is a sin against God, as well. We constantly and consistently put our own evil deeds and desires in first place in our lives and supplant God with things and people—we create thousands and thousands of gods for ourselves.

God's Moral Law—both in the conscience and the written form—show us how helpless sin makes us. The Judaizers told the Colossians they had to *do* something to make themselves right with God. The Moral Law shows us the hopelessness of the situation.

No matter how arrogant we might have once been, thinking we might be able to do something to make ourselves right with God, the Moral Law shows us that God can and should have nothing but hatred for us all. We are evildoers.

III.

“Therefore, as God’s elect, holy and loved...” (Colossians 3:12, EHV). The paradox of Christmas is that God elected us—chose us to be his own—even while in his perfect righteousness he hated us because we were evildoers. God didn’t want to leave us in the condition of hopelessness and helplessness.

You and I are so precious to God that he did something far more profound than to *overlook* sin. He abolished sin. He went far beyond even that. “God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21, EHV). God made his One and only Son, Jesus, become the personification of sin itself. Jesus took the full wrath of God’s hatred that was directed at all evildoers on himself on the cross so that we could become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

The Christmas Dawn gospel says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, EHV). The Word that was God, who was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever, is Jesus. That is the Word that Paul speaks of today: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16, EHV).

IV.

“Therefore...” (Colossians 3:12, EHV). It’s a very simple word that begins today’s lesson from the Apostle Paul. It’s a word that is easy to overlook as you go on to read and hear the rest of what he has to say. But it’s a very important word.

“The Word became flesh and dwelled among us” (John 1:14, EHV). The little Baby of Bethlehem came to light up your world. He came to become sin for you so that you could be the righteousness of God. He came so that you wouldn’t be hated by God the Father as an evildoer, but that you would be God’s own dear child.

“Therefore, as God’s elect, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone else. Forgive, just as Christ forgave you” (Colossians 3:12-13, EHV). There is a response to God’s call and election. You are his own; you are dearly loved. Paul gives what we call a gospel imperative—he tells you to *do* something, but it isn’t the kind of directive that insists that you “have to” do something to make yourself right with God, but something that is “natural” because of the indwelling word in your heart.

“Clothe yourselves” is the gospel imperative, and a whole list of things follow that explain how you do that. Have heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility gentleness and patience. Bear with one another through thick and thin, through pandemic and pestilence. Always remember that you have *been* forgiven for Jesus’ sake, so it is natural to forgive others for their flaws and faults, too.

“And, in addition to all these things, put on love, which ties things together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:14, EHV). Love completes the Christian attitude. Love others the way Christ loved you.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And everything 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” (Colossians 3:16-17, EHV). There is always much to give thanks to God for. Give thanks to God in your psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, whether virtually or in-person. Thank God for his goodness.

The days are already getting longer, however imperceptible it might seem so far. The Light of the world has come. He did his work. He lives on in heaven, but he also lives in you. Live for him throughout the coming new year and always. May God bless the indwelling of his Word in you. Amen.