

Living in the Kingdom of Christ.

*A sermon suitable for the **Feast of Christ the King**, celebrated on the last Sunday of the Christian Year, being the Sunday before First Advent Sunday, or any other occasion when we consider the impact on our lives of living in the Kingdom of Christ.*

Anchor passage: Colossians 3:5 - 14

Scripture Reading: Col 3: 1 - 15

Introduction:

Today is the Feast of Christ the King. Are we properly dressed for this feast? Are we properly dressed to live as brothers and sisters of the almighty, awesome King of all?

Are spiritual rags appropriate for his Kingdom, or does Jesus have a dress code for those residing in his Kingdom?

Many years ago the first edition of a book called *Dress for Success* was published. The idea of this book was that what you wear has an impact on the measure of success you will enjoy. In corporate business, the target market of this book, this remains important to understand as one of a variety of factors that lead to success in business. Being dressed for success implies that our choice of clothes can add to our level of influence.

Generally clothes are not considered as important in today's society as before. We are a bit allergic to dress codes. Yet our choice of clothes remains an expression of who we want to be in this world, and as such remains of some importance. A simple style reflects our discipleship of the King of love, our gentle Shepherd. Elaborate choices in fashion can also express our desire to be recognized as influential, powerful or affluent members of society. It probably is a general truth that most people who feel good about themselves, want to look as good as they feel.

In Colossians 3: 5 - 14, Paul uses the idea of an appropriate dress code to highlight and explain the way in which we generally choose to live as Christians. Do we express what Christ has done for us in the way we live, we dress, we choose our life styles and set our preferences? Paul links the idea of a spiritual Kingdom dress code with certain behaviours.

If we believe that we live and serve in the Kingdom of Christ the King, whose glory and honour we remember today, it will be mirrored in the life style choices we make. If his Kingdom and his honour do not mean a thing to us, it will also be visible in the way that we live!

I do not believe that our preferences in fashion have much to do with our serving Christ in his Kingdom.. But I also believe that there is a definite, essential and appropriate spiritual attire for anyone who claims citizenship of the Kingdom of Christ.

1. We need to undress, yes, take off the behaviours of the Kingdom's enemies.

Colossians 3:5-10: ⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

We, the children of God, represent Christian attitudes and actions. Destructive attitudes damage our call as Christ's representatives in this world. We need to be living testimonies that the old sinful life has been replaced by the new Kingdom life. He or she who honours the King, will deal with life style choices in a distinctively Kingdom way.

Paul uses merciless words and definitions when he describes how we are to handle filthy ways of thinking and living. He tells us that they are to be put to death. These things are dangerous to our walk with Christ and must be destroyed.

In our text Paul gives us two lists, and they certainly are not complete lists, of things we do that embarrass our King. He points towards two lists of harmful behaviours. The first list deals with the sins of “faked love”. The second one lists the sins caused by a lack of humility, and we call them “the sins of selfishness”.

Consider for a moment the sins that come from behaviours of “Faked love”, meaning those attitudes that are the opposite of love, yet are often actions referred to by the world as “making love”. These behaviours often substitute real love with indecent behaviours. In the area of sexuality, these behaviours are presented by some as enlightened life styles, yet they represent the dress code of parading in filthy spiritual rags.

Firstly mentioned is sexual immorality. He refers to any sexual activity outside of marriage. It has a broad meaning but brings home the fact that some people “wear” sexual immorality within the context of every aspect of what we consider to be “our lives”.

Secondly he mentions impurity. It implies a dirty, filthy, unclean attitude of heart.

Thirdly he speaks about passion. It is a selfish, lustful desire to possess for oneself without regard for the welfare of the other person.

Fourthly he mentions greed. It is a desire to own much more than you need. Both the poor and the affluent can be greedy, just as both the poor and the affluent can be generous. The problem with greed is that it consumes you. Greed is here associated with idolatry, because idolatry is wanting anything more than God. And that is the end result of greed. It substitutes *things* for God. He also implies that sexual lust is a form of greed. It desires what you do not have and should not have.

Next, consider the attitudes Paul lists as “sins of selfishness”. The reason why we are trapped by the behaviours described in this list, is that it is the result of *an over exaggerated sense of self-importance*.

Anger leads this list. Its about a deep bitterness of heart. This is an anger that grew so deep that it has taken root within our very souls. It defines us as an *angry* person.”

Secondly this list refers to rage, the result of anger and the outbursts of anger.

Fourthly malice is mentioned. It is an evil intent to do harm and injury to another person, because of anger, rage and hate.

Fifthly we are warned against slander. It simply means to speak evil of and to humiliate another person.

The sixth behaviour is filthy language. The Scriptures teach that we will give account for every word that we speak. We should be speaking words that are positive, that build up and not destroy, tear down or spread the stench of spiritual death and impurity.

Finally, we are taught “not to lie to each other...” Again, this testifies to selfishness to the extent that I, my view and my interest are more important than the truth. And Jesus called himself, “the Truth”. If we call ourselves Christians, yet we are liars, *we spread the perception that there is no integrity in the Kingdom of Christ* that we represent and in doing so we bring the very King we represent into disrepute in this world.

All of these attitudes and behaviours relate to how we, who have an intimate relationship with the King, act in our relationships with other people. These are the behaviours of the people of the Kingdom of Christ. They are a part of our old way of living outside of Christ. We need to “take them off” as they do not fit the spiritual dress code of Jesus for his followers. And they are part of the old you. We need to destroy these attitudes and acts. We need to kill them! They have no place in the Christian’s life.

2. We need to clothe ourselves with Christ the King.

Colossians 3:12-14 : ¹² *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* ¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

A dress code is about more than what we are not suppose to wear. It also states the minimum requirements of what we should and must wear. Christ does not keep us uninformed of his expectations of the attitudes and acts required of those who are citizens of his Kingdom, even here on earth.

These verses call us God's chosen people. We are also called holy. When God received us to himself through Christ, he declared us holy. We are holy because we have been set apart for him and because we belong to him. And finally, we are called dearly loved. The reason that Jesus came to this earth was because God so loved the world that he gave his Son, that whosoever believes in him, will live in his glorious Kingdom for ever. But the eternal life starts here. It begins now! God now loves you personally by name. He brought you into the Kingdom of the Son to have an intimate relationship with you. He therefore requires a certain life style of you. He instructs you to live a life worthy of his Son.

So, what should we wear as citizens of the Kingdom of Christ?

The first thing Paul mentions is compassion, a heartfelt concern for others and their best interests. And we should be kind. To be kind is the opposite of being harsh. It is the capacity to show grace in a loving way. Kindness is followed by humility. Humility is the opposite of pride. A prideful person is selfish and in love with himself and thinks that he is better than anyone else. But the humble person has a balanced view of himself and others and their needs. Humility makes it possible to have compassion and to be kind. Our conduct should reflect humility; simplicity and discretion go with humility as well.

Then, we have to be gentle. Gentleness is, amongst other things, a willingness to rather suffer injury than imposing it. A gentle person is concerned about the suffering of others. A gentle person touches the lives of others softly, with consideration, respect and love.

Patience comes next. For Christians, patience is an essential character trait. We desperately need patience before we can deal with others as the people of Christ, the merciful, gracious King. We are told that we must bear with each other and forgive. Without patience we will end up losing our temper, and become selfish and proud again. No, we are told to forgive as the Lord forgave us. He forgave us when we deserved his wrath and we didn't deserve forgiveness. And that is how we are to forgive one another too.

The key to Kingdom living, is mentioned last. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

The key to everything is love. Having the kind of love God has is essential for the spiritual dress code of Christ the King. Love empowers us to treat other people in the ways of the Kingdom of our Lord. Real and true love that comes from God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, ultimately makes it possible to live with Christ in his Kingdom, without embarrassing the King and dishonouring his Name.

Conclusion:

This is how we dress for gracious living under Christ the King. We take off the old and we put on the new. As we walk with Christ, we will find ourselves putting off the old and putting on the new more and more each day, until Jesus comes again and we are perfected in holiness and received into his eternal glory. There we will receive perfect robes of righteousness! Then we will truly come home under dominion of Christ the King.

This is the Word of God.

Thanks be to God for his Word.

Amen.