

Your New Image
Colossians 3:1-17
Second Baptist Church, Memphis
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Bill Cosby talks about the difference between Mother's Day and Father's Day. He insists that the reason Mother's Day is so much a bigger deal than Father's Day is because Mothers are more organized.

Mothers say to their children: *Now here is a list of what I want. Go get the money from your father and you surprise me on Mother's Day. You do that for me.* Bill Cosby says: *For Father's Day I give each of my five kids \$20 so that they can go out and buy me a present—a total of \$100. They go to the store and buy two packages of underwear, each of which costs \$5 and contains three shorts.*

They tear them open and each kid wraps up one pair, the sixth going to the Salvation Army. So on Father's Day I am walking around with new underwear and my kid's are walking around with \$90 worth of my change in their pockets.

We are going to talk about putting on new clothes today. But it's something more profound than the typical Father's Day new boxer shorts, new white t-shirts, new tie stuff.

Since you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

I guess what hits me with this passage—and you may not have this problem— but what hits me is I am so caught up in the living of my life—the daily thus and so-ness of life, the daily things that have to be done—that it sometimes seems like I have forgotten that I have died—and that I have been raised with Christ, that my life is hidden with Christ in God.

When you're raised from the dead, that's a big deal. You know that's the symbolism of baptism. I used to struggle with this when I was a teenager.

I was baptized when I was in the fourth grade. And the passage that I just read was said by our pastor as a part of that baptism: Now you have been raised with Christ, you have died and now you have been raised with Christ. Set your mind on things that are above.

From that point on, I used to wonder about that. When I was a teenager, I used to wonder if I really had died and been raised with Christ. I didn't remember feeling anything real special when I professed my faith in Christ and was baptized.

In fact, the most memorable thing for me about my baptism was that we wore these disposable robes in the water. They were paper. And when I walked out of the water after my baptism, as soon as I reached the top of the steps this guy ripped off my paper robe and handed me a towel. It was like in his day job this guy was on a NASCAR pit crew.

And when I was a teenager, I used to wonder sometimes if my baptism had actually taken. I used to wonder if I really had been given a new life in Christ, because I didn't remember

really feeling all that different after I prayed with my pastor to invite Christ into my life or after I was baptized and they ripped the robe off of me.

I used to wonder about this business of being raised from the dead. You know, after you've been raised from the dead, you don't look the same, sound the same, talk the same, do the same.

But what do you do? How do you talk? What do you sound like?

I imagine I might have gone to school Monday morning after being baptized thinking, *Is anybody going to know that I've been raised?*

Should I dress up a little better than how I've been dressing? It wouldn't hurt.

Do I talk another way? Do I throw in a verse of scripture now and then?

What do I do at basketball practice?

Are they going to say, "Well, looks like he's been raised from the dead?"

How do you talk? How do you walk? How do you relate?
[Fred Craddock, Craddock Stories, 92-3]

Paul gives us some very specific instructions here in the third chapter of Colossians about what a group of people who have been raised from the dead look like.

Now I want to say something important here. I think the strongest warnings in the Bible are about legalism. No other issue—not pornography, not adultery, not violence, not homosexuality, or any of the other things that rile up Christians today the most inspired more fiery outbursts from Jesus than did the sin of legalism.

Legalism is a focus on what we do and do not do. Legalism is when we push restrictions on people while ignoring the fact that it is our new life in relationship with Christ that governs what we do and do not do, not a list of restrictions that other people want to impose on us.

And, according to Jesus, legalism is one of the worst sins that we religious people can commit. He hits on that topic time and time again.

But this passage does not mean that what we do and do not do is not important. It doesn't mean that it doesn't matter what we do with our lives. What it means is that what we do does not come before who we are.

What we do is not the primary thing. Who we are is the primary thing. First and foremost, I am a new person in my relationship with Jesus Christ. And because of that, I live my life in a different way.

In my Bible, this section of verses is subtitled, "Rules for Holy Living." I think it's a little more significant than that. It's about the question, So what do a group of people who have been raised from the dead look like? How do you talk? How do you walk? How do you relate?

Paul likens it to taking off one set of clothes and putting on another.

There is something very biblical, very spiritual, and very profound about the idea of stripping away, turning loose. There are images of stripping away and turning loose all throughout the Bible.

We had a profound experience with that picture of turning loose at Camp Second Friday night. Camp Second is of course our children's camp. We have it out in Moscow, Tennessee at The Country Place. This year we had 71 kids plus workers—so there were close to 100 people out there.

And we had a wonderful week. I am so impressed with everything about it—the kids, the camp, the counselors and other workers. Every one of our counselors did such a great job, and I'm so grateful for their taking a week off and doing that. I wish I could name each one of them and say something about them.

Our theme for camp was "American Idol." We had clips from the show to illustrate different topics for each night, like fame, self-confidence, and judging.

On Monday night Elias and I talked about idols. We tried to help the kids understand what an idol is. It is some thing that you put your trust in more than God, something that you are more committed to than God. It's something that you can make or do all by yourself.

So it could be sports or good grades or your appearance or how you act or your friends. It's not that these are bad things by any means. It's just the place that you put them in your life—when you put your trust more in them than in God.

So we had the kids think about these things and each take a rock and write their idol, whatever it may be, on their rock. And then they brought their rocks up to the front before they left the worship time.

Then Friday night we had our outdoor worship time down by the lake. We had torches out there—it was real nice. And at the end of our time, we had the kids come up, take one of the rocks out of a bag, walk down toward the lake, and throw their rock—their idol—into the lake.

It was dark, so you couldn't see anything but each one throwing his rock, and then it would be silent for a couple of seconds, and then you would hear the plunk of the rock hitting the water.

The sound—plunk—one right after the other, was very powerful to me. I heard it 71 times Friday night, and each time it said to me, *Let it go. Leave it behind.*

I think from now on I'll always associate that plunk sound with letting things go, casting them aside, letting them go down in the water and stay there.

And so at camp this week we let some things go. We left some things behind.

When Paul is talking about the significance of baptism and new life in Christ, the turning loose or stripping away image he uses has to do with taking off a set of clothes. In verses 5-9, Paul talks about the clothes that we need to be stripped off.

Take off having sex with people that you're not married to.

Take off lust.

Take off greed.

Take off anger.

Take off malice.

Take off slander.

Take off the abusive language that comes out of your mouth.

Take off lying to each other.

And in verse 11 he talks about taking off all the old prejudices and barriers that divide people.

Because you have stripped off the old self with its practices.

And now once you've stripped down to nothing—in other words, once you've died to your old self—now you need to put on some new clothes. And this is what people who've been raised from the dead look like. This is how you talk, how you walk, how you relate.

Verses 12-17:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another, and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The headline in the Birmingham Sunday Mercury of January 7, 2001 read: "Worker Dead at Desk for 5 Days." This is how the article reads:

Bosses of a publishing firm are trying to work out why no one noticed that one of their employees had been sitting dead at his desk for five days before anyone asked if he was feeling okay.

George Turlebaum, 51, who had been employed as a proofreader at a New York firm for 30 years, had a heart attack in the open-plan office he shared with 23 other workers.

He quietly passed away on Monday, but nobody noticed until Saturday morning when an office cleaner asked why he was still working during the weekend.

His boss Elliot Wachiaski said, "George was always the first guy in each morning and the last to leave at night, so no one found it unusual that he was in the same position all that time and didn't say anything. He was always absorbed in his work and kept much to himself."

A post mortem examination revealed that he had been dead for five days after suffering a coronary. Ironically, George was proofreading manuscripts of medical textbooks when he died.

Can anybody tell whether you are dead or alive in Christ? Is it obvious whether or not our church is dead or raised again with Christ?

I guess what struck me about this scripture passage is the sudden recognition that that maybe my life doesn't look like the life of somebody who has been raised from the dead. I'm not sure.

How about you? Can anybody tell that you've been raised from the dead of your old self into a new life with Christ? Would anybody notice whether or not you're dead or alive in Christ?

I'll tell you how to make sure they notice. This is how you make it obvious whether or not you're dead or alive: change clothes.

First you need to take off your old clothes. You could just put on your new set of clothes on top of the old clothes, but that wouldn't look right, and the new clothes wouldn't fit right. First you need to take off your old clothes.

Take off having sex with people that you're not married to.

Take off lust.

Take off greed.

Take off anger.

Take off malice.

Take off slander.

Take off the abusive language that comes out of your mouth.

Take off lying to each other.

Take off the old prejudices and divisions.

First you need to take off your old clothes.

Then you need to put on your new clothes: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another, and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Put on your new clothes. Then they'll know. They'll know you're alive. They might even say, *Hey, nice outfit. Where'd you get that?*

And you'll say, *It's my new look, my new image. Actually, it's not just an image. It's the new me.*