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SERMON

The Extreme Makeover

Colossians 3:12-17

INTRODUCTION

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Today's scripture reading is from a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the new followers of Jesus in the city of Colossae. These newly minted Colossian Christians did not quite understand the cosmic significance of Jesus life, death and resurrection. Paul begins his letter by clearly affirming the deity of Jesus Christ and the critical importance of his teachings.

He further instructs the Colossian believers to strengthen their faith and understanding through the cultivation and practice of several Christian virtues. For Paul, there is a crucial connection between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. In other words; a true inner experience of God's grace, forgiveness and acceptance will quite naturally lead to outward expressions of loving-kindness toward one another and also foster a humble attitude of thanksgiving and praise to God.

This is a practical teaching. Paul lists specific behaviors that are **outward** expressions of a deep **inner** experience found in Christ. Wearing these Christ-like virtues every day, like a finely tailored suit, is essential to the life and vibrant health of every church, everywhere.

Hear this reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians Chapter 3 verses 12 through 17.

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**SCRIPTURE:**

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.

### SERMON *The Extreme Makeover*

#### **Happy New Year!**

You know, I don't even know what that means really. How is it that because the calendar flips to a new number starting a 12-month cycle in play once again that we all decide it's suddenly a new start to things; a fresh new beginning somehow. It feels kind of *manufactured* and maybe *manipulative*. Remember Y2K? A new century! They said all the computers will crash because no one programmed them to flip from 1999 to the number 2000, and as a result planes were going to fall from the sky, bank accounts would suddenly be drained electronically, and *wide-ranging chaos* will reign forever. Then, remember? The ball dropped in Times Square and suddenly everything was... exactly the same.

To me it feels all manufactured by our *collective psyche*. But on the other hand, it's nice to recognize a particular date where we all can come together at the assigned moment and agree that the day after tomorrow marks a new day! We kind of feel like we can start again. It's a time to envision and begin the extreme makeover - *A New You for A New Year*, a time to reflect on the past year, the good and the tragic, the successes and the mistakes, both personally and collectively. Top 10 lists are compiled for just about everything. Top 10 hair colors, top 10 YouTube videos, top 10 *awkward political moments*. Facebook just emailed me a "year in review" of ME - all my posts, pictures and videos from 2021 on Facebook, neatly arranged in a snappy timeline. I don't know why but *I'm a little afraid to open it*. I guess I'd rather *vaguely* remember the year 2021 rather than have my worst fears confirmed on the Internet in *living color*.

But ready or not, next Saturday night, on New Year's Eve, we tuck away the past and at the stroke of midnight, *ring* in the New Year, resolved to look positively and hopefully ahead to what's next. It's time to begin the extreme makeover that will mold us into the people we know we're supposed to be. We hope that as we arrive here again in 12 months that things will be better somehow than they are now. And I think that's why we wish each other happy new year. It's a blessing to one another on the future.

Many of us jump-start that blessing with specific resolutions. Do you?

According to *statistic brain.com* almost half of us do. So here's another top 10 list...

### **TOP 10 New Year's Resolutions:**

- 10 Spend More Time with Family
- 9 Fall in *Love*
- 8 Help Others Accomplish Their Dreams
- 7 *Quit Smoking ...* again
- 6 **Learn Something Exciting**
- 5 Stay Fit and Healthy
- 4 Enjoy Life to the Fullest
- 3 Spend Less, Save More
- 2 Get Organized
- 1 Lose Weight

Nice goals don't you think. Well, I don't want to bring you down but it turns out that most of us don't follow through in our resolutions. Nearly everyone starts strong. 75% maintain for a week. After a month 64% are left, and then after 6 months, less than half the resolutions are maintained. But before you totally abandon the idea of making a resolution consider this last statistic.

**People who explicitly make resolutions are 10 times more likely to attain their goals than people who don't explicitly make resolutions.**

In other words, there is a connection between specifically naming a goal and achieving it. Makeovers are hard. We tend to go about our life wanting to make changes, but any extreme makeover will create extreme tension and disorientation, and depending on your ability to hold that tension you will either give in to what was, or hold out for what is yet to be. Change takes willpower, intentional specific willpower to reorient to something new. And research has shown conclusively that willpower can be exercised, and over time, just like our muscles, you will grow stronger. You will adapt. Human beings have an uncanny ability to change.

This Colossian Church that Paul is writing to had resolved to follow in the way of Christ, this new spiritual wisdom. They had resolved and agreed to an extreme makeover and began to practice a faith that was about forgiveness and freedom, about God's love instead of judgment and condemnation. "The way of Jesus" was attractive and a brand-new understanding of God, so the people resolved to become a church. And like our New Year's resolutions it started out great. Earlier in the letter Paul praises them for how far they have come, how noticeable and positive change has been. But as time wore on,

some were giving up, and returning to the old ways. Anger, rage, malice and slander were creeping into this emerging community like a poisonous snake to reclaim these new converts. I'll bet about half the people simply slipped back into their old habits. Probably unconsciously they were returning to the old ways, deceiving one another, cheating one another and asserting power over one another just like they used to. What had begun so sweet and genuine was quickly turning sour. So, like a fitness coach, a life coach, or a loving spouse, Paul pleads with them not to give up on the resolution, what he calls "the new self". He writes...

*"You have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed." (3:9&10)*

Putting on this "new self" that Paul writes about is a specific choice, like picking out a wardrobe in the morning. It begins as a resolution to be conformed to Christ, to follow in the way of Christ, to drop all those dirty, tattered, old rags of anger and malice in exchange for a whole new wardrobe. To put on a "new self" is an intentional and specific decision to shed the behavior of the past and try something radically, daringly different. This is THE extreme makeover. So, he tells them how to exercise this new self, how to perceive through the natural tendency to slip back to what was. He knows that after a while, this new way of life will begin to habituate into a life of joy and thankfulness, a life without guilt or fear, or the constant need of approval, a new self that disarms raging resentments; a life where forgiveness is easily received and truly given. But like any successful resolution, this makeover will take specific and intentional practice. So here is Paul's

### **5-step extreme makeover program.**

Notice how one leads into the other.

1. **Recognize that you are God's chosen one, holy and beloved.** When you simply realize that God loves YOU unconditionally and claim that as true you begin to change. You don't need a fully articulated theology. You simply believe and trust that God is for you. Then you can begin step two.
2. **Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.**

A recent study strongly suggests that the clothes we wear affects both our body and brain. Our choice of apparel can alter our psychological state. Researchers found that if you wear a white coat that you believe belongs to a doctor, your ability to pay attention increases sharply. But if you wear the same white coat believing it belongs to a painter, you will show no such improvement. So Paul tells us to intentionally put these clothes on. Say to yourself, today I will wear compassion instead of judgment, a hat of kindness even when I'm feeling mean. Today I'll wear a belt of humility instead of self-justification, meekness instead of power plays. Today when I notice I'm annoyed, I'm going to put on a vest of patience. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, and see the makeover take hold.

3. **Bear with one another.**

*(Even and especially the most difficult ones; the unbearable.)*

4. **And, if anyone has a complaint, forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.** This hard practice is so very essential. Forgiveness is the central core of **Jesus** message. It's also in the prayer he taught us to say and we say it every single week...  
*"Forgive us our trespasses AS we forgive those who trespass against us."*

5. **And finally, #5 - Above all, clothe yourselves with Love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.**

If you can view your world through the lens of **Love**, in all things, you will discover the secret of all wisdom, **meaning**, and purpose. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself."

In the end, **Love** is all that matters.

If you choose to follow Paul's 5-step extreme makeover plan, he promises that "the peace of Christ will rule in your heart." and this will cause you to be thankful. You will overflow with gratitude for God, thankfulness for your loved ones, and even appreciation for your enemies. Joy will be the bedrock on which you stand. Of course, we will make mistakes...but then, we can put on that forgiveness outfit.

The way of Jesus is NOT about perfection, but this extreme makeover does require that we trash the old tattered rags of rage, vindictiveness, self-justification and resentment.

With practice and intention, we will grow into our new wardrobe.

Little by little as a new self, that is really our true self, will emerge.

We don't need the flip of a calendar date to begin. And we don't need to abandon our resolve on the days we fail. We simply need to begin again. When you resolve or determine to put on the new self, you're TEN times more likely to succeed. And since it is December 26th and twenty-twenty-two is about to begin, it's kind of a nice marker.

Happy New Year.

AMEN & AMEN