

Wear It

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Date: 27 November 2011

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] I would like you to turn back this morning to the reading that we shared together from Colossians chapter 3.

For those of you who are visiting today, we are continuing in a long-ish study on grace, on the theme of God's grace in our lives and the gift of grace and salvation and how wonderful it is and how transforming it is for us in our lives, even in our darkness.

But we are coming to the end of the study and I am also coming to the end of the year and my brain is becoming befuddled.

And so I could only think of two words to focus this sermon on from this passage. And it is the focus of grace but it is the focus for the rest of the passage really or the rest of the passage we are going to look at.

It is the kind of fulcrum point for the passage that we are going to look at and it is these words that we have in verse 12, therefore, as God has chosen people wholly and dearly loved, dearly loved.

[1 : 21] And that is really the kind of motivation and the focus of what I want to speak about today in relation to grace and in relation to this passage, because here Paul, having spoken to the church in Colossae, is motivating them to live out grace in their lives because they are dearly loved.

That is the motivation for them because they are dearly loved by God, by Jesus Christ in their lives, they are dearly loved. That is the motive, that is the power, that is the transformation that is in their lives.

Now everybody, I think everybody, that may be a generalization but it seems to me that everybody in life wants to be loved, don't they?

However they show that and some will show it in very different ways and some kind of rebellious wild ways will still be wanting to be valued, wanting to feel that they are worth something in life, that they will be noticed, that they are significant, that their lives, their life isn't just passing meaninglessly, not just going through the motions in their life, in a sense it's the blight of naturalism and of atheism that ultimately gives us no significance beyond the few years that we have on this life.

And even then it's a self-induced significance, that there's no ultimate realities and ultimate significance that we are just passing through this world.

[3 : 08] Everyone wants to be loved, but why doesn't it happen? If there's a common move in humanity for the one purpose of being loved, there's this great will and desire within people all in this direction to be loved, why doesn't it happen?

Okay, well if you've looked up your sermon notes today from the bulletin you'll see a great word. You'll have never heard it ever in your lives before, maybe unless you're really clever or you're maybe medical.

Is it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen because we are scruffulous. Okay? Why am I saying that? I'm saying that deliberately to draw your attention to something that we're not allowed to say anymore.

It just means that we're ugly. That's what it means. But if I just said that we're all ugly you would have just switched off. I thought yeah, well I've heard that before, I know that.

But really the reality is we don't know to a real degree acceptance and value and worth and significance in life because we're ugly towards one another because there's tension and battle and different aims and desires within humanity which Paul speaks about in the chapter in verses 5 to 10, the things that belong to our sinful nature.

[4 : 46] This which stops everybody from being loved by one another in their lives. There's sexual motivations that keep us from caring and loving and helping one another.

There's greed at the expense of others. There's malice and there's slander. There's anger, isn't there? And there's lying and there's selfishness at very core.

We have this conflict, we have this tension. We all want to be loved. But sometimes me being loved means shoving somebody else out of the way so that I can enjoy the attention of another.

And there's a battle and a tension and a confusion even in humanity that stops this reality from being a utopian reality for us that we can all enjoy significance and acceptance and value and being noticed because there's some people who want to take that away.

But above all because of our own hearts and our own selfishness. At best this desire and this longing to be loved is selective, isn't it? Selective.

[6 : 00] If we are being loved ourselves it means that we're going to ignore and not serve somebody else. At best it's insular, it's temporary. It ignores great need around us.

And is that it? We're scrabbling around trying to be significant and be loved and be accepted and valued and noticed and then that's it.

Is that all that life is about? Well we've seen and we know and we appreciate the teaching of God and the teaching of grace and what grace has brought into our experience and brings into our life.

And that gift of grace we have to say is a double edged heavenly gift. It's a double edged gift, isn't it? Because there's the recognition that if we are to face up to the gift of grace and God's love and God's redemption and God's forgiveness, we need to recognize also His justice and His relentless desire to deal with all of these sinful realities that separate us, not just from one another so that none of us are all happy together in a utopian environment, but that separate us more significantly from God.

It's a future that separates us from Him and He speaks about the reality of because of these the wrath of God is, can't we don't like that terminology?

[7 : 37] We don't like speaking about that. We think it's this great big hairy God in heaven with a big beard, it's coming down to slay everybody in his wrath, but we forget that it speaks behind these images that we have that we rebel against.

It speaks about His justice, His absolute perfect and pure justice without which this universe would completely and utterly crumble.

But His wrath is coming against our sinful natures and judgment comes against a sinful nature so it separates us from our God, from His love and from His justice, from His perfection and from this reality of knowing ultimate value and love as well as in this life.

And what we long for in our lives and what we long for in others is to get beyond that sense of mere, maybe theorizing or theologizing about this issue to where people will come to their recognition that primarily our needs are spiritual.

There are lots of outworkings of that, but primarily our needs are spiritual and can only be met spiritually and that like David until we can get to the place where we say against you, you only have I sinned.

[9 : 02] That's the key. Taking that position before God and our personal need for redemption that we can see His grace as it were, if I can, I'm not sure if it's right to talk about grace like this, but to talk about it as a double edged sword because His wrath is coming and we would never seek and look out for His grace if we don't see that both ultimately but also personally in the brokenness and in the lack of fulfillment and in the lack of love and in the hurt that we put onto other people and that we get from other people.

It's our recognition that all things are not well, isn't it, that drives us to God and for His grace, the truth and the beauty of God's grace.

Who is our life? Who is our hope? You know, we would despair. Do you look in the mirror? Everybody looks in the mirror, but do you look beyond the look in the mirror and do you sometimes despair?

You say, I can't change that nature that's there. I can't change that. Much though I would love to, I can't stop hurting people. I can't stop being selfish.

I can't stop these destructive emotions and feelings that are part of my existence. How are they explained? But Jesus says, good, because I take these and I deal with that nature that you can't change and buy my grace and because I love you and because I am just and have paid for these sinful realities in your life, I offer you significance and importance and value and love unknown because of who I am, that transformation.

[11 : 02] So His gift, the gift of God's grace so that we come to that place where we recognize we are dearly loved, that we are dearly loved by God.

That is the truth that changes everything. It's the truth that changes everything for us, that in our lives and our thinking, we through Jesus Christ and through His redemption, that we begin to grasp the fact that we are dearly loved as people, God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

And that becomes therefore our motive, doesn't it? It becomes our power because we are gifted His grace and it's transforming power in our lives, accepted eternally.

You want to be accepted? You want to be loved? Do we not? Are you going to stop today and think through that and peel back your dysfunction and my dysfunction and think through it?

Ultimately that's what it's about. Your choices, your behaviors, it's because you want to be accepted, it's because you want to be loved, it's because you want significance and value and belonging.

[12 : 18] Jesus is saying you're dearly loved. All of these things ultimately and exclusively are offered in salvation and in grace. That's what transforms us and it's not for the pew, it's not just for this five minutes that we're together, it's as we will go on to see, it transforms our lives out of here.

Nothing else will do it. Nothing else will not do it, theology will not do it on its own, standing on its own, ritual will not do it, culture will not do it.

It has to be grace. It has to be grace. It has to be this knowledge that Christ enables us to be transformed from within and to not only be loved but then to make that the foundation of all that we are and all that we see and do.

And so just for a few moments I want to look at, in the light of God's mercy, for us as Christians, having received His grace, having knowing that we are dearly loved in our lives, how do we live?

So how do you live as a Christian out here? I'm not really interested how you live in here. One can live as a Christian in here.

[13 : 41] I'm asking about out there, where you live 98% of your life, where you live for Christ, how does grace affect you?

How does it change you? How does it transform you? And we've seen that over many weeks but there's just one or two characteristics here and I remind you again, this is not about going out there to perform for God and to be accepted because of your performance and to try and make yourself valuable to God, you're already valuable.

Don't try and gain His favour, you have His favour in Christ. He's gone at the cross, He's known that darkness, He's known that utter and complete abandonment on the cross in order to be a redeemer and saviour.

He's risen victorious over death and the grave and sin and wrath. What does it look like? Well, there's one or two things. It looks dependent. It's a great chapter, Colossians chapter 3.

It's absolutely brilliant chapter that reminds us of the dependent life we have. Isn't that strange? We're given a gift, we're declared righteous, we're redeemed, we're forgiven forever, it's all been done, it's all been finished.

[15 : 04] Would you think the natural response would be fantastic? You walk away, it's all been done. But interestingly, the paradox of grace is it makes us dependent because we recognise the remaining battle and we recognise that grace has made us for God.

It's made us for relationship with God, that's what it's about. It's about bringing back the alienation, or taking it away rather, the alienation, bringing back relationship with God, created to be in relationship with Him, in loving relationship.

And see, the language of this chapter is amazed. You've been set your hearts on things above. You've been raised with Christ. Your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ who appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory. Ever as God's chosen people, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

Be thankful, let the word of Christ dwell richly in you. As you live in gratitude in your hearts with God, whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Adnausium!

[16 : 07] It's just repeated again and again. It's overkill, this language of dependence that He wants us to recognise in our lives.

Can I just ask very briefly, as I examine my own heart and as you examine yours as a Christian, is that a reflection of your life?

Is that a reflection of how you live your life as a Christian? Is it dependent? How would relationship be revealed? A loving relationship, even I know a human relationship, love would be revealed wouldn't it?

Just wanting to spend time. It's a very simple lesson, but we spend time with people that we dearly love, dearly loved. That is why the closest people that you lose, the ones that you feel about most, most of you here won't be able to grasp the emotion of losing Lorna.

I can't even, I never saw her on day-to-day basis for the last four or five years and I never did. I was a mother on a day-to-day basis, dearly loved. Can you imagine that He would never have talked and would not be dependent on one another?

[17 : 20] And in Christ then, do we say we're Christians? Do we give Him lip service? Do we thank Him for what He's done and then we never speak with Him again? Are we prayerless?

I can't get around the concept of a prayerless Christian. Doesn't need to be theology. Doesn't need to be special words. You're talking to your Redeemer.

You're crying out in need. You're safe in Him. Your life is hidden in Christ. I can't imagine a Christian who doesn't talk with his God, because that is why we've been redeemed.

I'm not saying that it's about spending quiet times on our knees. I'm saying that in our lives, praying continually with a spirit of recognizing God in everything, Christ, in all that we are and do prayerful together.

Even together can it be said for us that our lives are dependent on Christ, can it be said about it as a community, as a congregation? Isn't it so true that one of our greatest battles, I'm going to mention another greatest battle in a minute, and this is probably just biographical, autobiographical, one of our greatest battles is compartmentalization, isn't it?

[18 : 34] Apart from being a huge word to say, but it's just sectioning off. This is my God spot. This is where I'm with God. I'm with church.

That's definitely where I'm with God. Quiet times with God there. Now, and again, when I'm in trouble with God, my prayer triplet, I'm with God.

But what about the rest of our lives? What about 24-7, that we are with God, that we don't compartmentalize the reality of living with God in Christ?

Is our Christianity, we had a great time as leaders of the church on Friday and Saturday talking about mission and community, and it was so enlightening and so helpful, what Neil said anyway, and it is so true that he saved us to be a people, people together, and it's not about a Christianity, it isn't about coming to church and going from church.

Church is only the expression of our worship together. This is not our Christianity. Our Christianity is not individual life. Coming to worship together, go away in individual life, personal relationship with God.

[19 : 53] We are a people. We are redeemed to be a people. We live our lives for Christ, independence on Him and on one another. So, dependence is very important. But there's also this negative thing that Paul speaks about here, it means stop living for self and start living for others.

That is an outworking of grace and I'm asking you to look at your heart as I have to look at mine, whether we are coming to hear preaching just to be tickled for a few moments under the sound of the word, or do we wrestle with the Scripture and apply it to our lives and change and allow our lives to be transformed by His grace, stop living for self.

Holy Spirit uses different images in this passage where grace really is seen to have muscle, seen to be a fighting characteristic in our lives.

We are to put to death, He says in verse 5, whatever belongs to our earthly nature, that is the sinful nature. The sexual limerality in purity lives, very, you know, it's very clear cut, isn't it?

It's not exclusive, it's not exhaustive, rather. But He says put to death. He says verse 8, get rid of. Verse 7 says, stop walking in this way.

[21 : 12] And He's asking us to get rid of ingrass with the transforming power of grace, these divisive characteristics that stop us from being loved by God are experiencing His love, but also stop us loving one another.

Isn't that interesting? They stop us because they're about living for self. It's about putting self first. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, idolatry, then goes on to speak about lying, filthy language, malice, slander, rage, anger.

That's about our response to others, isn't it? How we deal with others, live with others. So the greatest enemies spoke about compartmentalization.

The other greatest, probably the much, much greater enemy than that, is the greatest enemy we face is ourselves and is our selfishness.

What a blow, isn't that such a great blow? We want the greatest enemy to be the devil or to be someone else, to be some anti-Christ figure, someone outside of my life, some desperate, heathen atheist.

[22 : 29] That would be great to focus our attention on someone like that in our lives, but our greatest enemy, if we have been touched by grace, we will recognize our greatest enemy is our own hearts, is our selfishness.

So much of my life, I was saying this yesterday in Dundee, so much as I've grown older in the Christian faith, so much of my prayer and attention is focused on this recognition that selfishness, blights, ministry, blights, hospitality, blights, all that I do.

And it can be masked in such holiness, selfishness, amazing. It can come so much as an angel of light.

And yet selfishness is what stops us from loving God and it stops us from loving one another. It's really quite simple.

Do you regularly pray that God will remove selfishness from your heart? We say, Lord, take away the idolatry that is self-motivated.

[23 : 38] Take away the selfishness that I have towards my studies, towards my girlfriend, towards my boyfriend, towards my ambitions, towards my attitude to the church.

Take away my selfishness. That is the root cause of all the division and destruction that we face in our lives, is our selfishness, not Joe Blog's behaviour.

It's us. It's us. And so we have by grace to get rid of self and we then start living for others. And with this, I'm sorry I'm going on longer than I intended, start living for others, because that's grace, isn't it?

Grace is empowering us, strengthening us to not live one way because we have God's power to change our hearts and to start living another way.

And so He says, dearly loved. And I say, through the Scripture, dearly loved, wear it. Wear grace.

[24 : 40] Start wearing it. Put it on. And start living it. Let's stop living in shadow lands and live grace and continue to live grace.

Dearly loved, wear grace. It's a gift from heaven, but it's made for your everyday life and for mine when we leave this building.

And in the rampant age of individualism that we live in, it's an important message. Stop living for self, start living for others.

Individualism is the curse of the church and it's the curse of the gospel, where we argue as angels of light that my Christianity is all about me and my God and the doorpost.

And well, I just go along with church anyway to worship. That is not the gospel of the New Testament. It's not the gospel of truth.

[25 : 46] We are saved into God's community of people, therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. It's not clothing yourself with compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience for yourself to look in the mirror.

It's in our relationships with one another. Does sometimes our desire to be individual Christians with a relationship with God, don't need to church, I can worship Him on Arthur's seat, of course we can.

Is it just a cloak for selfishness? Because we don't want to get muddy? Well, you will if you go up on Arthur's seat, if it's wet. But you don't want to get dirty spiritually.

You don't want to mix your life with others because it's messy and people's lives are messy. One of the other things we talked about yesterday about community is it's not idealized. It's not everyone skipping along in the Daisy Meadows saying that they love one another and isn't it super and easy.

It's hard work community. It's hard work because it pulls into it our very gut. I'm going to say about it in a minute, it's powerful social community, neighborly outworking.

[27 : 02] It's not just me and my God in my own way and I'll just happen to tag church into that. Start living for others, that's grace. And He gives us these characteristics, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

I haven't time to go into them. But just very briefly, compassion. I think in the old Bible that used to be translated if I'm right, one or two here will correct me if I'm wrong.

Bowls of mercy, that used to be called. Now we think that's a funny phrase, bowls of mercy. But it's a very descriptive phrase and it's one that we would get gut feeling from.

You know, you're moved from within at the plight of somebody. That's what compassion is. It's not about looking in the mirror. It's about looking at others.

It's a great antidote to selfishness. Even in our own suffering is when we see and look at others with the eyes of Christ.

[28 : 02] We sung about that in the Psalms, Psalm 77 about the compassion of Christ or of God. It's a great antidote. When we look at others and we see their need and it moves us in our hearts.

That's what graced us. It's a miracle and he provides that for us. Hugely counter cultural grace and kindness to follow on from it in verse 12 is really just the act of compassion.

It's just showing in practical ways the compassion that you have for other people in the same way that Christ has gone the extra billion miles on our behalf in kindness to the cross, isn't it?

And as we understand what he's done for us, it motivates how we then live for others. I think it's an undervalued gift and characteristic in the Christian church.

Kindness seen as kind of flabby and soft. That's for weakness. Kindness. It's not at all in humility where we have a true opinion of ourselves, giving credit where credit is due and where is credit due for us as Christians to the fruit of the cross.

[29 : 13] We serve, we serve society and you live in a dog eat dog world. You live in a world of the X factor and of young apprentice, a world where it's about power and self assertiveness and get what you can.

But that's not the way of the cross and that's not grace, humility and gentleness. One thing I may be wrong because it's getting to the end of the year, but if I remember right I didn't have time to look into this, but gentleness is very similar to the word meekness and meekness biblically has often been taken to be weakness, you know, gentle Jesus meek and mild.

Kind of, you know, Jesus and sandals kind of tapping about the place. Meekness is not that. Meekness comes from the breaking in of a wild horse.

It's controlled strength. Do you ever call a horse that has been tamed? Would you call that weak? No, sir. I wouldn't get near the back of a horse.

I wouldn't get near a horse full stop, whether it was tamed or not. But meekness is controlled strength, the will of the horse is being controlled by another to do the master's will.

[30 : 37] And so in Christ we follow Him in gentleness and we serve others considering their needs before our own and it's followed up by patience.

And that is linked as he says in that verse, bear with one another, patience, following on, verse 13, bear with one another, forgive whatever grievances you may have. You see there's an interesting link between patience and forgiveness.

So we're to forgive one another, that's grace at work. We're not to be revengeful as Christians or resentful as Christians. That's the hardest thing.

Why? Because we're also ugly. At one level or another, we're selfish in our lives, so it's the hardest thing to be forgiven.

But as we're told here, that over all these things, I wore my big black overcoat today to church, because it makes me feel like a minister.

[31 : 34] And it's good in the winter and I've got a coal coming on. Big overcoat, covered all my clothes. And so here he says, in verse 13, over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity.

All I need is a belt, which binds everything together. And so love and grace is the great belt that binds all these characteristics together.

I don't think it's free for us to say, well, I'm quite compassionate, but I'm not so great on forgiveness. The grace of God binds them all in greater or lesser degrees in our lives and how you respond tomorrow when a crisis comes.

How will you respond? How will you deal when you're unjustly dealt with tomorrow by your boss? When things go badly wrong, how will you deal with it in grace as you depend on him and as you look to him?

So where are you and where am I today? Where is an individual today? Are you just that, an individual, me, my life?

[32 : 44] I'll keep my distance. I'll remain uncommitted. I can't be bothered with the hassle of what grace means as I work out in the lives of others and serve other people.

I want to remain private. I want to keep God at arm's length. I want to be a lone ranger. That's what I want to be.

Grace doesn't let me do that. I'll stay away and I'll hide my theology behind it or I'll hide my lack of understanding behind it or I'll hide my lack of feeling behind it.

What are we going to do if you're not a Christian with this grace which alone transforms and gives life? And as a church, what are we going to do with this grace?

The mark of the church is that you'll love one another. That is the mark of the church. You'll know that you're my disciples by how much you love one another.

[33 : 49] That is the mark of the church. Grace lived out with one another. It's the mark of discipleship. Grace that is compassionate and kind and humble and gentle and patient with one another.

And the Christian community, that is what spurs on others to see the reality of the Christ who dearly loves us.

Do the people around you in your life, the people that are close to you? If I was to take the five people closest to you in your life, take them into another room and say, who are the five people that this person is closest to?

No, that's not going to work, is it? If I was to take someone else in and I was to ask this someone else about someone else, who are the five closest people in their life?

They would be able to tell that, wouldn't they? People know who your best friends are. That's what I'm trying to say. People know who your best friends are, don't they?

[35 : 04] They know who's important to you in your life. They know who you are dearly loved by and who dearly loves you.

Do they know your Savior though? Does your life reflect that you're dearly loved by Jesus? That's a very bad way of what I was trying to say.

People know that your dearly loved is grace at work in our lives out of this building, is it? That's the challenge and that's the question that I ask myself and you must ask yours.

That's power, heads and prayer. Lord forgive us for when we don't recognise and realise who you are and the transforming power of grace in our lives, forgive us for that, we pray.

And bat your spirit and through your power will you transform us today. There are any who are not Christians in church today, may they not put it off a moment longer, but may they come to Jesus Christ, bow the knee, speak to people who are Christians here and ask them what must they do, but may we have Christ on our lips and in our hearts as we worship and not just as we worship formally but in all of our lives.

[36 : 32] Amen.