

Live a life of love * Colossians 3:7-14

February 14, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Since today is Valentine's Day, I thought that we should take a break from our Encounters with Jesus series to talk about love.

And since Hallmark does a pretty good job talking about loving your *significant* other, I thought I'd talk about *all* the others because they're significant too and think with you about loving people generally. How do we do that? And why should we do that? Why is it important for us as followers of Jesus to be known as inherently loving people?

To answer those questions, we're going to look at Colossians 3, verses 5-14 and the best way to think about Colossians 3:5-14 is to think about a 'before/after' picture. You know 'before/after' pictures, right? The person who's overweight in the 'before picture' next to their skinnier more happy looking self in the 'after picture'? Or a rundown on shack as the 'before picture' and a beautiful renovation as the 'after'?

According to Colossians 3, that's the Christian life. Following Jesus is a before/after situation.

Before knowing Jesus, we all follow our own desires and do what's right in our own eyes. We ignore God and tell Him He's really not that important. We put our own will before His and Colossians 3:5-9 tells us the outcome – 'sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, lying' – all of these things flow from a heart turned away from God and all of these are characteristics that belong to the 'before' situation. We get ourselves into all sorts of messes.

Can you identify with any of that? I know that I can. Before I knew Jesus, I went my own way; I followed my own desires; some of those were good, some of those were not. And even though my conscious stung, I would tell myself that I was ok because someone else was worse than me.

You know what I was doing? I was creating a hierarchy of sin, thinking I was better off because someone else's sin was flashier than mine. But you know what? There's no hierarchy in God's eyes. ALL sin separates us from God. It doesn't matter if it's big a flashy like adultery or drunkenness or rage or if it's more socially acceptable like greed or slander or bending the truth to get your way. It's all sin. And it all separates us from God. We all have a 'before picture.'

But God, in His infinite mercy, because of His great love for us, refused to leave us there. He came into the world that He created, paid for our sin and offered us a brand new start. And when we turn from sin and to Him and receive His forgiveness then we become a brand new person. We become our 'after picture.'

Look at the second part of verse 9 – When you trust in Jesus, you are taking off your old self with all its grubby practices and habits and putting on the new self, which is being renewed in the image of God day by day.

When we put our faith in Jesus, we become a whole new person – the old is gone, the new has come – and that change is as irreversible as the change from a caterpillar into a butterfly. When you trust in Christ, you are a new creation! When you know Jesus, you are that ‘after’ picture that radiates with hope and holiness.

Maybe this is a good place to pause to say - where are you in this image? A caterpillar or a butterfly? A before picture or an after? If you have turned from sin to Jesus then you’re an after; if you haven’t, then you’re still a before. I want to encourage you – leave that old way of life behind, come to Jesus; let Him change you from the inside out and become a brand new person. Take off the old self and put on the new.

And if you’ve already done that... there are implications for how you live. The life of faith is not just one and done; it is constantly choosing to live in ways that are consistent with who we are in Christ. Look at verse 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.”

That’s what a Christian life should look like - the ‘after’ picture – life characterized by compassion and kindness and humility and patience and holding them all together – a fundamental commitment to love. That is what a Christian life should look like.

But admittedly, we’re not always like that, are we? And we know that there are some people who call themselves Christians who don’t even come close to that.

But that’s not the way it should be. A follower of Jesus who doesn’t live like a one is like a caterpillar who wallowed around on the ground for a while, then transformed into a butterfly capable of flying around and soaring into the heights and bringing beauty and colour into the world, decided he didn’t really want to do that and just went back to crawling around on the ground. A butterfly that acts like a caterpillar is just silly, isn’t it? And so is a Christian who acts like their ‘before’ picture.

If you have turned from sin and trusted Jesus, then you are a butterfly. The old is gone, the new has come and God is inviting you into a whole new life that reflects His character. God is inviting you to live out your ‘after picture.’ And verse 12 shows us what that looks like. Look at it again.

12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved (did you hear that?! If you have trusted in Jesus, then you are one of God’s chosen people. You are dearly loved. God looks at you as says ‘now there’s a precious person.’ Remember that – God loves you deeply).

And the verse continues – Since God loves you deeply, let that love overflow to others. Don't live the way you used to but put on values that are consistent with your new way of life. For example, verse 12 -

Since God loves you deeply, clothe yourself with compassion – put on a deep seated concern for other people – a willingness to sacrifice for their benefit.

Since you are dearly loved, clothe yourself with kindness – a generous disposition that is willing to help.

Since God loves you deeply, clothe yourself humility – the willingness to put others before yourself.

Since you are dearly loved, clothe yourself with gentleness – the ability to withhold judgment and meet people where they're at.

And since God loves you deeply, clothe yourself with patience – a calm confidence that doesn't need its needs met right away.

Since we are dearly loved, we are called to 13 Bear with each other - and sometimes in Christian community that's all you're going to get. God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, come from all sorts of circumstances and sometimes somebody's just going to rub you the wrong way – if all else fails, you might just have to tolerate them. As God's precious people, we are called to love even the most unloveable in our midst and...

to forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as fully as the Lord forgave you. This is a big call, but it's not without precedent. God is simply asking us to do what He's already done for us and to forgive as He forgave us.

And finally, verse 14 – 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

That's what the Christian life looks like – a life characterized by love – and I would actually go so far as to say that that's the takeaway for this passage – live a life of love.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you are a brand new person. The old is gone, the new has come – you have been loved and forgiven by the very source of all love in this world – God Himself – so, live a life of love. A life characterized by compassion and humility and patience and forgiveness.

Take a minute and ask yourself – is your life consistent with knowing Jesus? Are you living like the 'after' picture that you are or are you living the old way, like your before picture? If you're

still living the way you did before you knew Jesus, if your values are the still the same; that needs to change. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to live in light of who you are in Christ.

I remember in university writing this on a post-it note and sticking it up on my window where I'd always see it to remind myself before I went out – 'put on compassion and humility and gentleness and patience' – because that's ultimately how we love others.

It's not about cards and flowers and grand acts of affection – it's about day by day making decisions to act in ways that are consistent with who we are in Christ. It's all about living a life of love.

So I want to encourage you this week – maybe you'll want to put this verse by your coat rack – remind yourself just as you put on your jacket and your mitts, to put on love and patience and forgiveness because God has loved and forgiven you.

And you know what, I'm going to take it one step further and give you a real memorable image to take with you. Put on love like deodorant. I know you're going to laugh, but think about it. If you don't put on deodorant, you're gonna stink. And everybody's gonna know it. No one is gonna want to be around you. That's just the truth.

Same with love. If you don't put on love, you're going to stink. No one is going to want to be around you and they're going to think 'geez, these Christians are nothing but judgmental hypocrites. Where's the love that Jesus always talked about?' If you forget to put on love then you are forgetting to be who you are – a loved and cherished child of God.

But if you do put on love, what a joy it will be for people to be around you. There's no shortage of people in the world right now cutting each other down and telling half-truths and grumbling and complaining like it's going out of style. If you put on the love of Christ and treat others with it, you are going to stand out like a city on a hill. Can you imagine what a difference you can make in someone's life by loving them unconditionally? Love them the way God has loved you and they'll experience the love of God for themselves.

Live a life of love.

BENEDICTION:

14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2Cor 5:14-15 NIV).