Colossians

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 15th November

Ephesians 4:11-16, Colossians 3:5-17



Eph 4:11-16 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. **Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,** from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The Colossians passage will be read in the context of the sermon.

Let's pray, Lord Jesus, enrich us with your Word, that we might rightly understand the Gospel of Grace, and rightly live in accordance with it. Amen.

A reminder of how ch 3 of Colossians begins. "Since then 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 of the earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ is your life appears, then you also will appear with him and glory."

It would be hard to find a passage the better blends our status and our responsibility.

- We are alive in and with Christ.
- We have the expectation of a glorious future.
- We live in the light of that, as we lift our eyes, hearts and minds above our current reality.

3:5-10 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you
sexual immorality,
impurity,
passion,
evil desire,
and covetousness, which is idolatry.

On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of it's creator.

I will not unpack the lengthy list of things in v5-6, 8-9, except to say it gives a list of things not fitting with our status as children of God, or our responsibility to live accordingly. I will touch briefly on vs 6. On account of these things, that is the things mentioned in v5-6, on account of these things the wrath of God is coming.

A word about the wrath of God. Obviously not a popular subject. One that is very often avoided and not just by non church folk. Is there a way though of seeing God's wrath in a constructive light?

Rom 1:18-32 is headed "God's wrath on unrighteousness." It talks of God handing people over to their behaviour as a sign of wrath. What of our current cultural climate in regards human sexuality? Many today undoubtably rejoice in their new found freedoms. Be they because of changed laws or changed societal attitudes.

And for sure discrimination, or hateful speech or behaviour on the basis of people's sexual preferences can rightly be challenged. That said our new found freedoms are probably not viewed as a sign of God's wrath. In Rom 1:28 Paul says this in v28.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done.” Paul is saying that God giving us the freedom to live as we like worst thing that could happen. It’s a sign of God’s wrath.

When I was a apprentice in the 1970s we used to go to block courses in Auckland for four weeks. One year a couple of the fellows thought it a good idea to make paper darts with sewing needles poking out the end and send them flying round the room while the lecturer was distracted.

Though I thought it a dumb idea, in end I up a dart and launched it across the room, just as the tutor, a large Scottish man, turned around. I, and I alone, got the full fury of the tutors wrath. That so often has been the story of my life. In hindsight, the fact I always seemed to get busted, probably saved from going down the wrong track, and a world of pain.

My point is this. The worst thing that can happen in life is when God is pushed out of the picture to the point where God says OK have it your way. Freedom is a double edged sword.

V12-15 “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” “And above all these put on 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 one body. And be thankful.”

One of the ways that the Internet has been monetised is by what’s called “rage baiting”. You post information with the intention. I’m making people angry. Angry people are engaged people. It doesn’t matter if the information is exaggerated or completely untrue. The aim is to engage, so you stay on that page, or disappeared on that particular rabbit hole, and that’s how Facebook or whoever makes their money. It’s also how the Internet has been weaponised and extremists groups are manipulated in various.

How different our world would be if the principles that Paul is talking about with the things that guided in shaped us. Forgiveness. Kindness. Meekness. Patience. Compassion. What a world it would be if we treated each other as God treated us not according to our senses but with mercy and forgiveness and grace. The only hope of that ever happening is if it’s done in the name and the power of Christ.

In our world of mass media, more than ever before, people need to see an alternative to the rage baiting, the disinformation, the manipulation, and especially now, as we are on the cusp of maybe the greatest social change the world has ever faced, under the influence of artificial intelligence.

Time to let our light shine folks.

To illustrate Paul's imagery of the putting of and putting on, I was tempted to start the service wearing my paint, glue and dirt covered overalls, and dirty gumboots. Then at this stage in the message swap them out for my current clothes.

If I had, it would have visually illustrated the point. Namely, that we who have died with, and have been raised with Christ are one with him. We put off the practices of the old life. We put on the practices of the new life.

We do our part if we want to make progress. About 6 months ago I signed up for a years gym and pool membership. I started well going three times a week. Then I hurt my back in the garden and stopped for a few weeks over a months ago. Trouble is I've got out of the habit.

Here's the thing. Are my puny arms and legs going to develop muscles if I don't train and discipline them? If I don't go to the gym, I cannot expect to build my strength. Likewise, if I don't consciously, actively put off my old self, and put on my new self my spiritual development will be stunted.

V15 "and let the peace of Christ rule in your heart to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful."

In the strict context of the passage that verse is linked to the unity that we have as a part of the body of Christ. "There is no longer Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian, slave or free add Christ is all and is in all."

"let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts." So often when people are wanting to avoid anything religious, and Christianity in particular, they raise things like the Crusades, or Catholics and Protestants.

Now aside from the fact that in both those situations it was more about politics than religion, the point the gospel makes is in Christ nothing should divide us and we should have peace and harmony with each other.

Peace on a social level as we let the prince of peace peace bring peace. Peace also if we wanted to apply it on a personal level. Peace that comes in knowing our sins are forgiven. Peace in knowing that God is sovereign.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds and the knowledge of love of God and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

The peace of God is somewhat supernatural. As we trust and hope in God, and hold to the gospel, we have peace that only Christ can give us. And like putting off and putting on sets of clothes, we have some say in regards that peace settling upon us. “And let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.”

Sometimes when I’m anxious, I push that anxiety out of my heart and remind myself who I am in Christ. And who it is that is in control, ultimately. As I do that the anxiety dissolves and peace fills the gap that I have made.

As we finished our mini series of Colossians. I want to focus on verse 16 and 17 drawing in a vs from Eph 4.

Col 16-17 **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,** teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts 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.
“speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,” Eph 4:15

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” We are to apply the same principal involved in “putting off” and “putting on.” God works with us, as we work with him.

- We put off ungodly behaviour and we put on godly behaviour.
- We let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

How? We let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.

It will not happen without some effort and perseverance on our part. I’ve said before, if there’s a lack of people in pews today, it’s because there’s a lack of preachers in pulpits today.

Church very often is treated as if it is a form of entertainment where our emotions are stimulated and we have to feel something. Not that we don’t at times feel things, but we can’t rely on feelings.

Much, much, more profitable is that our thinking is expanded, and our understanding is shaped by gospel truth.

Romans 12, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Philippians 2 “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

If we were to unpack our reading from Ephesians 4 we would see that Paul focusses on particular things as he calls us to unity of faith.

- To knowledge of the Son of God.
- To maturity, as we reach the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Listen to the list Paul gives. “He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers”. There are many more gifts. Why list just those 4? Because they are all linked to the Word of God and that Word being spoken into our lives.

Apostles. prophets evangelist, teachers. We can not live rightly unless we understand rightly. We cannot understand lately unless we spend time in the word of God. That word that is both profitable and powerful.

- Profitable because it is a mess of salvation.
- Powerful because as the gospel proclaimed God's very power is experienced.

I said it last week. For I’m not as ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation for all who believe.

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” It would be ridiculous to say you could have a big bank balance if we never made any deposits. It’s simply a fact that to be rich in earthly terms, will generally mean investing and saving. The more deposits we make the richer we become.

So too in respect of the word of God. The more deposits we make, the more we get the word of God into us, and allow it to shape us, the richer we will be in good works.

2Tim 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

God breathed life into his representatives way back in the garden. God instructed them in the way of life. A way they chose to regent. But model has not changed in respect to God breathing that which is profitable into our lives.

And our having to choose whether we are animated and empowered by what God is giving us.

“All Scripture is God breathed.” Says Paul in 2 Timothy. “I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation for all who believe,” says Paul early in Romans.

God desire to breathe life into our hearts, minds and spirits through his Living and active Word. It might not be the most trendy way that God works, but it is the most productive and profitable.

Let the Word of God dwell in you richly. Make deposits. If you are banking on everything happening on a Sunday morning, try eating once a week and see how well that goes.

I am as much a student of the bible now as I was 40 years ago. If you want to know who gets the most out of my sermons, it’s probably me because it means I’m in the word 12-15 hours a week. Add to that my personal devotional time reading 4 ch a bay so I can cover the OT one a year and the NT and psalms twice a year.

I’m always making deposits. I hope and pray that proves productive and profitable to those who listen. But again try eating one meal a week, and see how well that goes?

Let the Word of Christ dwell richly as you make your own deposits.

Let’s pray.