

Our oldest son did his primary schooling at Taupaki Primary School, near Kumeu. Taupaki is a Full Primary, meaning it teaches from year one to year eight. Children go straight from Taupaki to high school.

Our other boys all went to Blockhouse Bay Primary. Aside from the fact that BHB Primary isn't a full primary (it only teaches years one to six), the other major difference between the two schools is the BHB Primary has a uniform.

When our eldest first went to Taupaki, I didn't have a high opinion of full primary schools. I didn't go to one; I went to Highlands Intermediate in New Plymouth – so I believed going to an Intermediate school was better. But after our son's experience at Taupaki, I changed my mind.

Likewise, when we came to Blockhouse Bay, I thought a primary school having a uniform was odd. Now I see their advantages. I recognise there are both advantages and disadvantages to uniforms, but one thing they do – which I think is an advantage – is they make students identifiable. Here in Blockhouse Bay, it's easy to recognise which children go to which school, whether it's the Primary, Intermediate, or Secondary Schools.

Today in our final look at the book of Colossians, Paul uses the metaphor of clothing to describe the Christian life. Following Christ is not only a matter of holding certain beliefs, but also akin to new clothes, a new lifestyle, one that is countercultural, and counter-self.

In chapter one of his letter Paul made some radical claims about Christ in an effort to correct false teaching that had entered the church in Colossae. Paul claimed that Jesus Christ is the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,” and by Him “all things in heaven and on earth were created.”¹ Christ is also the “firstborn from the dead,” and one day we will be like Him. He is also the One “through whom” God “reconciled” to himself “all things,”² and salvation is found only through Christ.

Then, in chapter two, Paul tackled the consequences of this false teaching. Because the Colossians had been taught that Christ's work on the Cross

¹ Colossians 1:15–16

² Colossians 1:20

was insufficient to save them, they needed to add to Christ's work: they had to do something more if they wanted to be saved. So, they'd been taught to worship angels and treat their bodies harshly; to celebrate the Sabbath and be circumcised.

Paul rejected these claims, urging the Colossians to let no one take them "captive through philosophy and empty deceit,"³ nor to let anyone condemn them "in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths."⁴

Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection God has completed the work of salvation. There is nothing we need, or can, add to Christ's finished work.

Today, in Colossians 3, Paul argues that these radical claims about Jesus – His divinity, His creative work, and His salvation – demand a radical obedience in response to God's amazing grace.

As one writer has said: "A cosmic Savior deserves a cosmic response. The Sovereign Christ doesn't just summon his friends to an orthodox faith in him. He also invites us to a lifestyle that properly reflects his followers' deep gratitude to God for his rescue of us."⁵

According to Paul, this new lifestyle to which Christ calls us is like a whole new wardrobe.

Paul begins by saying,

*So if 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.*⁶

There's a cliché about some people, that they're "so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good." It refers to people who have an unhelpful form of spirituality, one that neglects others and the practical realities of life.

³ Colossians 2:8

⁴ Colossians 2:16

⁵ <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-07-28/colossians-31-11-4>

⁶ Colossians 3:1–3

But according to Paul, this is precisely the mindset the Colossians need. They have been “raised with Christ” and their lives are “hidden with Christ in God” – in a very real and spiritual sense – they are already with Christ. So now they need to “set [their] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” Paul is not advocating a spirituality that neglects the affairs and responsibilities of this life, but it does seem he is saying that a correct mindset in life *is one* that is focused on “things above” – that is on Christ, and spiritual realities – not on things on earth.

Please forgive my bluntness, but today, if we’re in danger of anything, it’s that our minds are set solely on things on earth. We’re more interested in our families, our jobs, our bank balance, the next holiday, purchase or entertainment, and we’re totally lacking in any sort of heavenly mindedness.

If we’re destined to live forever with Christ – if that is your hope – then in the vast reaches of eternity, the attractions of this life will be seen in perspective. We will realise our desire for more trinkets was trivial.

We might turn the cliché around and say that the real danger is that we’re so earthly minded, we’re no heavenly use.

But if the Colossians, and if we, are to be able to do what Paul says next, then we need to be focussed on Christ, because what comes next requires a renouncing of selfishness, and a whole new mindset (see Romans 12:1-2):

“Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).

“... get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.”⁷

I don’t follow fashion, but I do like new clothes. However, I find clothes shopping tedious and tiring. I don’t like going into changing rooms and

⁷ Colossians 3:5–10

taking off my shirt to put on a new one, and then showing it to Jenny, only then to have to go back into the changing room, to take off the new shirt, and put back on my old one – just so I can go and pay for the new one – or get another shirt, and repeat the process.

However, it's obvious when clothes shopping that you do have to take off your old clothes before putting on new ones. You can't just put new clothes on over the top. They wouldn't look right.

Paul uses the language of 'putting to death' in verse 5, and of 'stripping off' in verse 9, to describe the 'unclothing' of the Colossians, of anything that is 'earthly' or of their 'earthly nature.'⁸ Paul's two lists are extensive, the Colossians must rid themselves of fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, in the first list, and anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language and lying, in the second.

Lists like these occur in several of Paul's letters,⁹ and such 'vice lists' are often accompanied by 'virtue lists' (see Colossians 3:12).

Here in Colossians these lists are possibly another way of combating the false teaching in the church. The false teachers had emphasised spiritual experience and the worship of angels, but these lists point to the need to faithful obedience in everyday life.

Furthermore, the false teachers focused on the behaviour of the individual, whereas, particularly in the second list, Paul focuses on the community – anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language and lying, all occur in community.¹⁰

I'm not going to spend any more time going into detail about the nature of these vices – Paul felt it sufficient to simply list them, so I'll leave it to the Holy Spirit to say anymore to you if necessary.

⁸ So, the NIV translation of verse 5

⁹ See for example: Romans 1:25–31; 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:10–11; Ephesians 5:3–4; 1 Timothy 1:9–10; 6:4–5

¹⁰ David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 218

Once the Colossians have ‘unclothed’ themselves, they are then to ‘clothe’ themselves with the “new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.”¹¹ Paul describes what this ‘new clothing’ looks like in the following verses:

*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.*¹²

I recall many years ago in the Baptist church I attended in New Plymouth, that a missionary came to speak at church, and what I noticed, as a young person, was that their clothes were out of date.

To stretch the metaphor of clothing a bit further, and to use some old-school slang, the ‘old clothing’ or vices which Paul describes are “so yesterday” for those who seek to follow Christ.¹³ God desires us to take the vices so we can put on the virtues of love and kindness.

But there is a twist, because according to the values of our world, being compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, forgiving, and loving, is also ‘so yesterday.’ These are not the values of our world. They are countercultural, and counter-self; they make us uncomfortable, and others comfortable.

And yet, these are precisely the clothes God wants us to wear, because these are the clothes Jesus wears. They’re our ‘uniform.’ They identify us as followers of Jesus.

¹¹ Colossians 3:10

¹² Colossians 3:12–14

¹³ <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-07-28/colossians-31-11-4>