

Big idea: If we have 'put off', what do we 'put on'? And, what does the 'new man' look like in community?

FCF:

Application:

1. What should that look like?

What does a mob of Christians look like?

Paul is dealing with how God's people – Christians – should live. Last week, in verses 1-11, he dealt with what they should NOT be like. This week, in verses 12-17, he deals with what they SHOULD be like. In both cases, Paul's commands and argument can be summarised in the phrase, 'Live as you are'.

PRAY...

2. The clothes: 'put on' (vs.12-14)

I want to begin with two very important words, the most important of which is actually often not translated. Look at **verse 12 with me... READ.**

Paul could have quite easily written this verse as, 'Therefore, put on...'. It would have been a clear statement of what he expects in terms of Christian behaviour, a clear expression of the clear moral standard that Christians should hold to.

But, he has placed a very important explanatory statement at the beginning of verse 12 – literally, it reads, ‘therefore, AS God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on...’.

The key word is ‘as’. It is crucial word because it turns what would have read as a clear list of moral behaviour and good deeds into an expression of an identity that Christians already have. And I find it frustrating that most translations don’t include it obviously!!!

Paul’s point is very clear: being a Christian is **not** about good deeds, or being moral enough for God’s approval, or doing enough to earn God’s approval. Being a Christian is **not** about what you do, but **who** you are: a Christian is someone who accepts Jesus is the Lord of the universe.

Behind this truth are a whole lot of other truths – a Christian knows that they are naturally the enemy of God because they sin; a Christian knows that on their own they live under the rule of the devil and not God; a Christian is someone who knows that nothing they do earns God’s approval or the removal of his judgement of their sin. A Christian is someone who has come to realise that, left to their own devices, they are an enemy of God, unacceptable to him, and opposed to everything he stands for. No amount of good deeds is going to change such a person into someone acceptable to God. But, because Jesus has beaten death for them, and so satisfied God’s judgement of them – all by dying for them – and because they trust this man as the Lord of the universe – put simply, because they are so joined to Jesus that ‘his story is now your story’, then they are made acceptable to God (‘holy’), they

experience the love of God ('beloved') and they know that it is because of God's decision that this is possible ('chosen'). I

And, then, they express this identity in their behaviour – their behaviour expresses a reality that already exists by God's kindness, it does not create that identity. They 'live as they are'.

Which leads to the second word – 'therefore'. Because these people have an identity that turns on Jesus being their boss, their Lord, on being united to him, then their behaviour changes. The image that Paul uses here is the language of changing clothes – the external behaviour changes to show the reality of what Jesus as Lord means in these people's lives. As we saw last week, it is even deeper than this – it is the putting off of the 'old man', the old life as people connected to Adam. If Jesus is their Lord, then they must PUT OFF certain ways of behaving – the way they used to live – and Paul uses the language of changing clothes to describe this in verses 8 and 9. But they must also the PUT ON certain behaviour to express, positively, who they are – they must 'live as you are' – they have put on the 'new man' (Jesus) and so they display this in their behaviour.

Whilst last week focussed, in two lists of five vices, on what God's mob put off, this week Paul and Timothy focus on five virtues that they put on – **look at verse 12... READ.**

None of these attributes should surprise us – or any of Paul's readers. After all, taken together, they are almost a summary of the character of Jesus! Put simply, if you are the new humanity, then you look like the bloke who kicked it off – you reflect Jesus. And all

these attributes are community-focussed – it is very hard to display these virtues on a desert island or in a vacuum.

But in case anyone is wondering how this might look like in day-to-day community existence – and remember that all the personal pronouns here are plural ‘you’ – Paul and Timothy explain their practicality in two participial phrases that are really rather confronting – **look at verse 13... READ.**

Well, that is pretty confronting! On the one hand, God’s people are exhorted to ‘bear’ with each other. The community of God’s mob is not a flat community – we come with all the hills and valleys of our personalities and histories and foibles and idiosyncratic natures. And in this, we are to bear with each other. On the other hand, even more than that, we are to be ‘forgiving’ of each other. This forgiveness does not come with strings nor does it come with exceptions – did you see that it covers ‘complaints’ against each other. There is no statement that forgiveness can only come when someone has apologised first, or earned the forgiveness. No – God’s mob are told that their nature as God’s people is seen in how they forgive each other.

In case we missed it, Paul and Timothy tell us what that forgiveness looks like – **look at verse 13 again... READ.**

That is even more confronting! ‘Just as the Lord has forgiven you...’ – what a reason! That was forgiveness achieved and offered when we were dead in our sins, when we were actively God’s enemies. That was forgiveness achieved and offered not because we approached God, not because we apologise first nor because we

deserved forgiveness. That was forgiveness achieved and offered by the costly death of the One true Son of God, for his enemies. That was forgiveness achieved and offered at the very moment we deserved God's true and righteous and eternal condemnation. That was forgiveness achieved and offered that encompassed all of our sin, and removed all of our sin, removing it as far as east is from west. And THAT is the reason, and model, for the forgiveness that displays the nature of the 'new man' in God's community!

In winter when I go running, I layer up – I usually wear three or four layers. But the final layer, the outside layer, the layer that holds it all together so that I am warm and toasty, is my Windstopper vest. It tops off the layers and ties them all together to do their job. The final layer, the layer that binds all these attributes together, and enables them to do their job, is there in **verse 14... READ.**

It is hard to adequately describe – even understand – what this means. It seems that, at one level, love is the great perfecter and unifier and binder-upper. It ties all these attributes together and, through them, produces unity – without love, these attributes and actions are empty. On another level, love seems to be the ultimate attribute, the engine for the others, so that they exist to produce unity.

And the love that is being described here has already been experienced – did you see it back there in verse 12? And did you see its practicality there at the end of verse 13? If you need to understand this love that binds, and perfects, and unites and drives, just look at the forgiveness that you experienced in Jesus.

Just as Paul and Timothy exhorted God's mob to 'put off', so now they exhort them to 'put on', to be dressed appropriately in behaviour because they have put on the 'new man', the new humanity of Jesus. And it is a set of virtues that are displayed in forgiveness like Jesus forgave us, a statement of love that we too are to display.

Let me ask you three simple questions:

- Have you yourself experienced that complete forgiveness, achieved and offered by the sacrificial love of Jesus?
- If you have, do you display that same bearing with each other and forgiveness – without keeping a grudge, without demanding acceptable behaviour or apology, without expecting any response that affirms how nice you are, without speaking maliciously or in rumours?
- Are we a community of God's people well-known for our forgiveness and love, a forgiveness and love that reflects the very nature of the bloke we follow?

3. The culture: 'let the... of the Messiah' (vs.15-16)

In the early 2000s, the Sydney Swans started to win and win well. They developed a reputation for being one of the leading AFL organisations in the country. There have been many articles written about that change and development, but it seems that all of them focus on the cultural change at the club and the engines at the heart of that cultural shift. They developed a culture that was connected to their past history, which questioned what they were doing, which created accountability to each other, which was embodied by the

idea of the 'Bloods'. The cultural change was at the heart of this football change, and it was continually examined and affirmed.

God's people have been transferred. God's people have been transformed. God's people have 'put off' and 'put on'. What is at the heart of this culture that they live?

Culture can be simply defined as 'the way we do things around here' (REPEAT). We could debate that, make it more complicated and multi-faceted, but that is a working, and workable, definition.

Now that we have seen what God's mob looks like, what is their culture?

Well, look at verses 15-16... READ.

These are two parallel commands – they mirror each other, and they display a change from verses 12-14. Verses 12-14 were focussed on 'you' being something; here, in verses 15-16, the focus is on something being at the core of who you are. And the two commands mirror each other in their structure. Each has a 'let', each describes something 'of the Messiah', and each unpacks what this looks like.

As we look at them both, it is so very important to notice who is described as being at the heart of the culture of God's people – it is Jesus, the Messiah, the one God promised would come and roll back sin and restore the world. He is the Lord of this community (as well as the boss of the universe). His actions created this

community. His kingdom defines this community. It is no mistake, then, that he is the heart of the culture of this community.

One part of this culture is 'the peace of the Messiah' – did you see that there in verse 15?

Peace in this sense is not the absence of hostility, nor is it coexistence. Peace here is the restoration of the fullness of God's design for things – it is the restoration that comes from sin being dealt with, and the fullness of God's design being restored. That only happens when Jesus deals with sin – remember Colossians 2:9-10? Peace here is life as God designed it, in all its goodness. It is to 'rule' the hearts of God's people. It is non-negotiable. It creates a heartfelt and deep thanks – this is life as it should be. And it comes only because Jesus has dealt with the thief of peace – sin.

The other part of the culture is the 'message about the Messiah' – did you see it there in verse 16?

This is the proclamation of Jesus' identity, and the plan of God to deal with our sin through him. This is to 'dwell richly' amongst God's people, not in some forgotten way but deeply and richly and abundantly. This is to be the means by which God's people 'teach and admonish' each other, encouraging each other to walk with Jesus as boss, to 'live as you are'. This is to be the heart of how we sing, as a way of 'teaching and admonishing each other'. This is to be the source of great gratitude in our hearts as we consistently and continually come face-to-face with what God has done in Jesus.

As a way of spurring us to think about this in our day-to-day community living, let me ask three simple questions:

- Is this our culture – a culture that is centred on Jesus, and the peace he achieves for us, and the word which proclaims him? Or is our culture defined, and driven, by other engines?
- Is the peace of the Messiah expressed as a deep-seated satisfaction in – and the sufficiency of – God’s full design for his creation, restored in Jesus? Or, do we rail against God’s design, complain about God’s design, and seek to bypass God’s design?
- Is the word of the Messiah dwelling richly in us – as we meet for coffee, as we gather to do ministry, as we catch up one-on-one? Or have these become social occasions, distracted ministries, and catch-ups that meander for no good reason? Let me share one of my mother’s classic lines, as she greeted people: ‘Have you been reading your Bible, and praying?’ What a question worth asking, as we meet each other, and live as God’s community!

4. The constant (vs.17)

How do Paul and Timothy sum up this section which focusses on God’s community living as they are?

Look at verse 17... READ.

What an all-encompassing statement! Is there any part of your existence as the community of God’s people which this doesn’t cover?

The ambassador of Australia to America is Arthur Sinodinos. His job is to represent Australia in the USA. At every moment, at every point, in every part of his life – both public and private – Arthur Sinodinos must ask himself, ‘How does this reflect on Australia, and its reputation and interests?’

I think that is what Paul and Timothy mean as they command, ‘do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. After all, they have already commanded their readers to ‘walk with him as Lord’. They have already pointed out that we have been transferred and so transformed. They have already shown us that this means ‘putting off’ and ‘putting on’. Now, they state what this clearly means: all of our lives reflect on our Lord. And so as we do anything, and everything, our baseline question is, ‘How does this reflect on Jesus?’

Moreover, they give us an attribute that has run as a thread through everything they have said so far – ‘giving thanks to God the Father through him’. This is only possible because, as we heard in Colossians 1:21-22, we have now been reconciled to God. But it also reflects the very truth that our whole lives lie under the Lordship of Jesus – in all things, we are dependent upon him, and he provides all his people need by being their Lord.

In this, then, is the baseline constant in the community life of God’s people – all they do is considered as a reflection on Jesus and, in all this, they are persistently thankful because their Lord provides all they need – in fact, Jesus as Lord is enough!

So, here is the answer to our opening question – remember what it was?

What does a mob of Christians look like?

A mob of Christians is known for its bearing with each other and forgiveness, just as they were forgiven by Jesus.

A mob of Christians has a culture of the peace and word of the Messiah, where they delight in the restoration of the fullness of God's design, and are richly built up by God's word.

A mob of Christians constantly reflects on how everything displays Jesus as Lord, thankful always.

A mob of Christians lives as they are.

Is that us?