

Colossians 3_1-14 Desire, discipline and delight

Previous message – **relationship or rules.**

Love or legalism.

Being a Christian is not just about following rules, trying harder, being a good person.

It is ultimately about a relationship with Jesus.

However....

Paul now goes on to say to these Colossian believers – here are some rules for Holy Living.

That is the title of the next passage in my old Bible – though the newer translation heads this passage with:

“Living as those made alive in Christ”

Paul gives them a list of things that should be diminishing and disappearing from their life, and a list of things that should be growing and increasing.

A list of do's and don'ts!

There are things that we are to put to death, and rid ourselves of, and take off (like a piece of clothing), and things that we are to focus on, and do, and put on in their place.

9: “take off your **old self** and its practices”

10: “put on your **new self**, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator”

Virtues and vices

Colossians 3:5-9 / 12-14

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage (*violent and uncontrolled anger*), malice (the wish to harm or upset other people), slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these **virtues** put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Two ways of doing this

Discipline

Delight

Discipline

In this passage, Paul is writing about virtues and vices and what it takes to become more like Jesus.

The image he uses is one of taking off and putting on clothes...
“clothe yourselves with” these virtues.”

Put them on.

And tie them all together with the greatest virtue which is LOVE.

And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment.

A virtue, put simply, is **a good moral habit**.

A vice is a bad moral habit.

Good moral habits are character traits that become woven into who you are....

When you have acquired a moral habit – a virtue – it becomes **second nature**.

Our “first” nature is the hardwiring of our biological bodies and operates without our thinking about it.

At this very moment, you are not choosing to breathe. You are not thinking about breathing. 99.9 % of the time, you breathe, and blink and digest your breakfast without thinking about it. Nature simply takes care of this.

The habits in our life that become “second nature” operate in the same way: they become so woven into who you are that they are as natural to you as breathing and blinking.

You don't have to think about these things – they come naturally.

What are some of the things that Paul tells us to practise in this passage? What are some of these virtues that need to be at the centre of our life?

To become second nature...

Compassion. Kindness. Forgiveness. Thankfulness. Self-forgetfulness.

Virtues. Good moral habits. Second nature.

Training versus trying

Los Angeles Olympics 2028

Imagine this. You are sitting at home one evening on the sofa watching telly and, in a roundabout way, you are actually exercising. Not only are you exercising your muscles by pressing the buttons on the remote control, but you have also bought one of those vibrating belt contraptions off the shopping channel that vibrates your fat while you are watching tv. The adverts have promised you that this will help to tone your midriff, and may actually lead to weight loss, accompanied by the correct diet and several hours at the gym each week (terms and conditions apply). You haven't got round to the diet and the gym yet, but you are hoping the flab-buster 5000 will do its work while you watch Britain's Got Talent eating cheese and onion crisps.

All of a sudden, right in the middle of this workout routine, there is a knock at the door. Ahhhh, that must be the Mighty Meaty Dominos Pizza you've ordered yourself. You unplug the flab-buster 5000, you drag yourself to the door, already salivating at the thought of that spicy salami, when, to your amazement, there at your door is Lord Sebastian Coe, ex-Olympic Champion and Head of the British Olympic Planning committee.

After a moment of shock and asking him if he is now working for Dominos, he tells you the good news. Following an in-depth survey and statistical analysis of the electoral register and school and medical records, you have been selected as being the ideal candidate to run in the 1500m at the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 2028, 4 years from hence. Congratulations.

You are amazed. You are excited. You knew you had bought the flab-buster 5000 for a reason. You put it on Facebook. You tweet. You ring a few friends. This is an amazing opportunity.

Fast forward a few years - as the Games approach, you are thinking a lot about the race ahead. You have lowered your pizza consumption to three thin-crust, half-fat cheese pizzas a week. You are now wearing the flab-buster 5000 five nights a week in front of the tv, and you have read several books on running and on the Olympic Games. You have a game plan. You have tactics.

You have the theoretical knowledge to win this race. You don't believe in overcomplicating things, so you have reduced your tactics to one key point:

1) You are going to try very, very, very hard to win the race.

You are aware that some of your opponents have other tactics. Some of them have been training six days a week for the past four years. But not you. You are going to try very, very, very hard to win the race and clothe yourself in glory.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training." (1 Corinthians 9:25)

Here is something that Paul wrote to young Timothy which actually shocked me a few years ago when I read it:

"Train yourself to be godly" (1 Timothy 4:7)

Do those words go together. Train...and...godly?

There is a world of difference between training to do something and trying to do something.

John Ortberg refers to this as the single most helpful principle he knows regarding **spiritual transformation**.

Whether it's becoming an accomplished musician, a linguist, a doctor, or a marathon runner, we are required to **train** for such things.

Learning to think, feel and act like Jesus is at least as demanding as learning to run a marathon or play the piano, and the crown or prize that we are aiming for is not a temporary one – it is eternal.

Some of us have bought into the myth that **godliness** requires **no effort**. Either because we think some people just have a godly

disposition and are born like that, or we think that we live by grace and Jesus has done it all and we live in the benefit of that. Or that, given enough time, we will simply drift happily into a serene state of godliness.

But as Dallas Willard says: “Grace is opposed to earning, it is not opposed to effort.”

As he reiterates: “becoming Christ-like never occurs without intense and well-informed action on our part.”

The term that is often used for this type of training is “**spiritual disciplines**” or “spiritual formation”. They include such things as: meditation on scripture, prayer, fasting, solitude, silence, thanksgiving, giving, sabbath-keeping, and so on.

Spiritual disciplines are activities in our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.

An example:

You are a great worrier. You worry about anything and everything. You lie awake at night and worry. Worry, if you like, is negative meditation. You are fixing your mind on an issue and thinking over it, around it – again and again and again.

The Bob Newhart school of counselling to those that struggle with worry would give the following advice: “Just stop it”.

But you can't just stop it. Not by direct effort.

What you can do is exercise spiritual disciplines which, over time, will help you to displace worry with the right kind of thinking and faith in Jesus.

Meditation on/memorization of scripture is one spiritual discipline that you can develop in your life. As Rick Warren says: If you can worry, you can memorize scripture.

Remember our definition of a spiritual discipline is:

“An activity in our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”

Power of displacement or a greater affection.

We can't just stop worrying by direct effort, but we can exercise the spiritual discipline of scripture memorisation as a starting point for counteracting that worry.

We might start by learning scriptures that actually refer to worry and anxiety and move on from there. Then, in the middle of the night, we change the record, from negative meditation, to positive meditation. You end up being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Each of the spiritual disciplines works in this way. It counteracts something in our life: something that we do that we want to stop doing. Something that we don't do that we want to start doing. We call these sins of commission and sins of omission.

Just trying harder won't cut it. We need to train ourself to be godly.

“So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. ¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness.”
(Colossians 3:12-15 MSG)

Colossians 3:12-14

“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and

patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Compassion

Compassionate hearts – “bowels of mercy”

Tenderness of heart or tender mercies

Tenderly merciful people

Kindness

“So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness”

Be kind to one another. Love languages. Gifts. Touch. Words. Thoughtfulness. Put on this piece of clothing. Practise until it becomes like breathing.

The Archbishop Trench, the prime mover behind the Oxford English Dictionary, says the Greek word translated “kindness” here is a lovely word for a lovely quality.

It was used to describe wine that has grown mellow with age and has lost its harshness.

Practise acts of kindness. Put on this garment. Be the kind of person who is known for their kindness. Let it become second nature to you.

Forgiveness

“quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you.”

Quickly. Completely.

“Love keeps no records of wrongs...”

And bear with one another.

Bearing with one another

Not a false picture of community – but the reality of living with and rubbing along with other Christians.

To live with the saints we love/Oh that will be glory./But to live below with the saints we know/Well, that's another story.

Thankfulness

“And cultivate thankfulness.... Let every detail of your lives – words, actions, whatever – be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.”

Thank God whenever and wherever you can.

Thank each other. Catch each other doing things right.

Thank you. That meant a lot.

It totally affects the way you feel.

Let it become second nature to you.

Self-forgetfulness/humility

“dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place”

Help each other to win – to prosper, to be successful... Content with second place.

Compromise and a willingness to give way – to prefer one another...

It takes practice.

Discipline and ...

Delight

1-4: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts on things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2 Set your minds on things above**, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now **hidden with Christ in God**. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Thomas Chalmers: “Idols cannot be uprooted, they can only be replaced.”

“The expulsive power of a new affection”

Can't just stop it! You can't just deal with this stuff by willpower.

We all have a need for something to worship – we were made to worship.

“The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

Put to death/kill off/take off

You can only do this if you have set your heart and mind on what is above!

Think about Direct your mind to....

You have died and you have been raised with Christ!

“**Delight** yourself in the Lord and he will give you the **desire** of your heart!”

Epithymian – inordinate desire “evil desires”

“whatever is true, whatever is noble....think about such things!”

You cannot worship and sin at the same time...

Change your perspective – displace your affections...

Let delight in God direct and change and fulfil your desires

Community group questions and discussion points:

(Let these guide you, but don't feel the need to answer them all!)

1. What is a virtue and a vice? What are the vices that Paul tells us to put to death (or take off) and what are the virtues that he tells us to put on?
2. If a virtue is a good moral habit, how can we develop these in our life?
3. What is the difference between trying and training?

4. What do you think Paul meant when he told Timothy to train himself to be godly? How do we do this?
5. What role do spiritual disciplines have, and how can we develop them?
6. Dallas Willard: "Grace is opposed to earning, it is not opposed to effort". Discuss!
7. How can we develop the virtues of kindness and compassion in our lives? What would this look like?
8. What do you think Paul means when he says that we should "bear with one another"? What does that look like in reality in a church setting?
9. How can we cultivate thankfulness?
10. Read verses 1-4. What do you think it means to set our minds and hearts on things above? How do we delight ourselves in the Lord (at which point he will give us the desires of our heart)?