

Text: Colossians 3:1-14
 Title: The Garments of Grace
 Date: January 11, 2008
 Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved...” Colossians 3:12

The essence of what Paul is saying in this Scripture is this:

“Since you are Christians, act like Christians.”

God by His grace had done so much for the people to whom Paul wrote, just like He’s done so much for us. Paul told them that through faith in Jesus Christ:

- They had died with Christ on the cross (Colossians 3:3) – in Jesus’ death their penalty for sin had been paid.
- They had been raised with Christ at His resurrection (Colossians 3:1) – in Jesus’ resurrection was the promise of eternal life for them and power to live that new life right now.
- And they would be appear with Christ, when he appeared (Colossians 3:4) – their life was already connected to Jesus and when He returned they would appear with him.

Their past, their present and their future were all covered by God’s grace in Jesus Christ! Notice how this parallels what Paul said about baptism in Romans 6:3-4.

He also told them that by God’s grace, their old life of sin was gone and they had been given a brand new life that would reflect the image of God. (Colossians 3:9-10) Last week we talked about how baptism is a two act play in which these truths are portrayed. In going under the water we’re picturing the burying of our old life in the death of Jesus and in coming up out of the water we’re picturing our new, resurrected life that is empowered by the living, resurrected Jesus Christ. (cf. Romans 6:3-4)

Here in his letter to the Colossians, Paul told them that they were:

- “chosen” by God – God’s unmerited favour was poured out on them.
- “holy” to God – God had set them aside to special to Him.
- and “loved” by God – God’s grace-love had been poured out on them.

THEREFORE, he told them – live like God’s children! “Put on” the character of Jesus...

“Put on ...” the garments of grace

As I mentioned last week, one of the ways in which the early church marked the baptism of new believers was by giving them a new set of clothes to wear.

Those new clothes symbolized the spiritual reality that in baptism they were declaring that they were leaving their old life behind and were committing themselves, as Paul wrote to the Romans, to...

“...walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4

Baptism is a pledge; a pledge to live a new life for the glory of Jesus Christ. That pledge invites a question for those who have been baptized. I asked last week and I'll remind you of it this week: **“How is your baptism going?”** That question can be asked in a different way: **“How do those new clothes fit?”** This morning I want us to think about those new **“garments of grace.”**

Some years ago, I attended a conference at First Baptist Church in Cranbrook, B.C. The speaker was a man named Scotty Smith who is pastor of a church in Franklin, Tennessee, which numbers among its members many Christian musicians whose names you would know if I mentioned them. Smith was speaking on God's grace from the Book of Romans and I was captivated by what he said.

Smith wrote a book entitled, The Reign of Grace. The subtitle of the book captures his focus: **“The delights and demands of God's love.”** The essence of his study is the question: **Now what?**

“If you've experienced God's grace, now what?”

He took the title of the book, The Reign of Grace, from what Paul wrote in Romans 5:20-21...

“Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5:20-21

Smith wrote: **“God's grace isn't just an empathetic gathering for hurting hearts; it's no mere pep rally for the glad-to-be-forgiven; it's way more than a support system for recovering legalists. It is a reign through righteousness unto eternal life. (Romans 5:20-21) Indeed! God reveals the splendor of his glory and the power of his gospel through oaks of righteousness grown from acorns what were once infected with sin and death.”** (*The Reign of Grace*, p. 42)

Grace is intended by God to be a transforming agent that works in our lives to make us look like Christ. This is what the Apostle Paul wrote to Titus:

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age....” Titus 2:11-12

I remember being intrigued by this Scripture years ago. It so clearly says that saving grace is changing grace. In other words, the same grace that brings us the gift of eternal life also works in our lives to make us look more like Jesus. To use theological language, God's saving work and sanctifying work in our lives are simply two sides of the operation of the same grace.

What struck me years ago was the truth that if I claim to be saved, then my life should give evidence of the God's grace at work changing me. Now, I'm not talking about instantaneous perfection. Paul says that grace is "training" us to say "**No**" to sin and "**Yes**" to righteousness – Paul is describing a process of listening to the voice of God's Spirit and obeying Him that fills an entire lifetime of spiritual learning! But "in this present age," in my lifetime, on this earth before Jesus comes again, if I've been truly saved by God's grace, there should be evidence that I've been learning to listen and obey. And here me carefully: **if there is no evidence of change towards Christ likeness, then it's correct for me to ask myself whether or not I've been truly saved.**

How does God reveal the glory of His grace in us? **What does the "reign of grace" look like?** Let me recommend Scotty Smith's book to you, but this morning I want to focus on just a few things.

In the passage we read this morning, Paul identifies over **eight** character traits that give evidence of the presence of God's saving & changing grace at work in our lives. You'll find others throughout his writings in the New Testament.

This morning I want to touch on just **four** Biblical character qualities, four "garments of grace," that clearly reflect the reign of grace in our lives.

The Grace Garment of Gratitude

"And be thankful." Colossians 3:15

When we realize that we have nothing but have been given everything...

When we come to see that we are deserving of wrath but have been given mercy...

When we grasp the reality of our spiritual bankruptcy but comprehend the immensity of our inheritance in Christ...

What other response can we have but gratitude for all that God has done for us.

Gratitude for our blessings.

We've been reminded this morning of the plight of many of our brothers and sisters who live under persecution. It should move us to give thanks for the freedom to worship when so many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world are unable to do so.

The other night I was out walking and I smelled the scent of wood burning from someone's fireplace. It moved me to thankfulness – thanks that I had the health to be out walking to enjoy that fragrance when I know so many who can no longer do so; thanks that I live in a free county and a community where I can walk at night without fearing for my life when I know there are so many who live in fear; thanks for the beautiful evening and the stars when I know there are so many who are unable to thank God because they don't know Him. It was a simple thing, just the aroma of burning wood in a fireplace, but it moved me to thanks.

But it also made me realize how little time I spend simply saying thanks to the Lord for all His blessings: for my wife and children, for a great church family, for the godly Christian heritage of my parents, for the privilege of living in a country where opportunities abound.

Why should I be so blessed? The only answer is: Because of grace.

But even more than all these blessings, why should I have the blessing of eternal life?

Gratitude for eternal life.

Jesus once asked...

**“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?
For what can a man give in return for his life?” Mark 8:36-37**

Good health is great; a great job is a gift; a wonderful family is a blessing; a free country is a privilege – all these are good things but one day we will have to say good-bye to all of them and what will become of us then? Without eternal life, everything comes to a disappointing and tragic end.

We try to soften the reality of death by concocting sentimental alternatives to eternal life:

- “Your memory will never fade.”
- “We will always remember you.”
- “You'll live forever in our hearts.”

But I prefer the frank honesty of David who wrote in Psalm 103:

**“As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.**

But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments." Psalm 103:15-18

David points to the only thing that lasts forever – God's love. And if by faith in Jesus Christ we have been connected to God's love, we will live forever! Death doesn't have the last word and life doesn't end in tragedy – it gets better!

If you're a believer in Jesus, you will live forever! Not struggling and straining for joy and hope as we do now, but in perfect peace and love.

Joanie Yoder writes for Our Daily Bread, the devotional booklet we distribute. In one of the daily devotions she wrote about a young man she had led to the Lord. He was excited about his new-found faith and consumed God's Word as he grew. But one day he came to Joanie with a question. "Why me?" he asked her.

Joanie thought, "Oh no, he's been infected with grumbling Christianity." She girded herself to address his self-pity, but he went. "Why me?" he repeated. "Of all the people God could have brought to Jesus Christ, why did he choose me?"

He wasn't grumbling, he was, as the old hymn writer (Charles Wesley) put it, "lost in wonder, love and praise" for the gift of eternal life.

When was the last time you thanked God for His blessings and for your salvation? When was the last time you put on "the garment of gratitude"?

The Grace Garment of Humility

"Put on... humility" Colossians 3:12

Humility is both the key to receiving grace, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble," (James 4:6) and the evidence that we've received it.

One of the reasons that humility isn't a highly esteemed character trait is that we often confuse it with self-deprecation that denies that there is any good or worth in us or in anything we could do.

Let me illustrate the difference between humility and self-deprecation. Someone comes up to you and tells you that something you did for them or said to them really blessed them; they saw God at work in you and through you.

Self-deprecation would say: "Oh, I couldn't have possibly done or said anything that would be such a blessing. No, you must be mistaken. God couldn't use a person like me. I couldn't do anything like that."

Humility would say: “Thank you for sharing that with me. It’s so encouraging to know that God can use even me to accomplish something like that. Praise the Lord.”

Do you see the difference? I find it hard to receive a compliment and I tend a little to self-deprecation, but I’m trying to learn humility. When someone comes to tell me that something I’ve done or said has been a blessing, I say: “Thanks for telling me that it was a blessing in your life. It’s encouraging to know that. Praise the Lord.” I want the person to know that their words of thanks are appreciated and that they really mean something to me. And I want them to know that whatever good they received from me really came from God’s grace working through me.

That’s the “vertical” dimension of humility – recognizing that the good we do really comes from God.

But there is also a horizontal dimension to humility in our relationships with others. One of the worst forms of pride is spiritual pride, an attitude that I am more holy, or righteous, or faithful, or obedient than others.

I ran across this poem the other day that really cut to the heart of the issue:

**“I dreamed death came the other night
And heaven’s gate swung wide.
With kindly grace an angel fair
Ushered me inside.
And there, to my astonishment,
Stood folks I’d known on earth.
Some I’d judged and labeled as
‘Unfit,’ ‘Of little worth.’
Indignant words rose to my lips,
But never were set free
For every face showed stunned surprise --
No one expected me!”** Anonymous

We’re members of God’s family because of His grace, not our merit. The surprise in heaven will be real but thanks be to God for His surpassing great grace – I’ll be there!

How is the garment of humility fitting in your relationship with others and in your relationship with God?

The Grace Garment of Forbearance

“Bearing with one another” Colossians 3:13

Paul links bearing with each other with forgiveness in Colossians 3:13 but they are different. "Bearing with each other," means to "put up with" one another. It means to overlook the faults and thoughtless acts of others. It means controlling the emotional storm that threatens to take control of our relationship with that person.

Paul gives us the motivation for forbearance...

"with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love" Ephesians 4:2

Often it's the "little foxes" that gnaw away at our relationships and bring distance and discord: they always forget our birthday; they never close the door; the sound of their voice grates on our nerves; they're always late; they never ask us what we'd like; they assume too much; they don't think enough.

Husbands and wives need to bear with each other.

Children and parents

Pastors and congregations

Employers and employees

Students and teachers need to put up with each "in love."

Robertson McQuilkin was president of Columbia Seminary in South Carolina but at one point he was also head of a Christian high school and he recounts this story.

"Martha and Deborah stormed into my office to demand that I fire Miss Strange. They were right. I should not have hired Miss Strange, and I planned to let her go at the end of the year. But how could I tell that to these student leaders in our Christian high school? ... We turned to Luke 6 and read:

"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." Luke 6:27-

38

"Do you love Miss Strange?" I asked. The question caught them off guard. They sputtered, "Who could love her?"

"OK. Maybe you can't. But can you obey the next command: "Do good to those who hate you?"

"Well," Deborah responded haltingly, we could. But I'm not sure we want to." Martha nodded agreement.

"Ah, you can't control your emotions, you can't love, you say, but what you can do, you won't. Is that what I hear?"

They exchange glances. “Well,” Martha, the leader, responded, “we’ll try.”

“How about the next command? ‘Bless those who curse you.’ That means you should say nice things about Miss Strange. OK?”

They erupted in unison: “There’s nothing nice to say.”

“Come on,” I said, “you can find something nice to say about anyone. You can even say of a dead dog, ‘What strong white teeth!’”

They smiled. “Well, we can try.”

“And the last command?”

“Oh, we’ll do that, all right. We do it already.” They were ahead of me, having already read the next command, “Pray for those who mistreat you.”

“No, no,” I said. “This doesn’t mean you pray she’ll get fired. It means you pray for her welfare.”

“I was afraid of that.” And they grumbled out of the office, muttering something about the outrageous demands of the Christian faith....

About three weeks later, Martha and Deborah burst into my office one afternoon with an astonishing announcement. “Please don’t fire Miss Strange. She’s the neatest person!” (Moody, November 1994)

This room is full of neat people! Some of them might not seem so to you right now, but if you choose loving forbearance, God’s grace can give you eyes to see them the way God sees them. And don’t forget – He’s giving other people the grace to see that you’re a neat person, too!

Is there someone in your life to whom you need to apply the grace of forbearance in love? Remember, God in his grace puts up with you. You’ve been graced by Him. Now what?

Finally,

The Grace Garment of Forgiveness

“and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” Colossians 3:13

While gratitude might be the most natural garment of grace that results from our experience of God’s grace, the garment of forgiveness is the one that most

convincingly evidences the presence of grace at deep levels in our lives. This garment is the most divine.

Roberston McQuilkin writes of a man named John.

“John’s sister was murdered. John did not take the law into his own hands; he let the court settle the matter. He had forgiven, hadn’t he?”

Fifteen years later, God uncovered a cancer in his spirit that was eating away with resentment and bitterness. Would he let go? Could he let go?

Returning home one Friday night, John didn’t tell his wife of his battle. She might encourage him to do what he could not – forgive. In silence, he struggled alone.

The following Sunday, he told his large Sunday school class about his failure to do what he had taught them. Well taught, they responded that he had no option, that he must let the resentment go. He told them he could not, and abruptly dismissed the class.

A worship service followed. During the invitation, John found himself at the altar, weeping. When he looked up, he was astonished to see, gathered around him, his entire class....

At the time of the murder, Christian friends had suggested that if it were left to them, they would buy a gun and put a stop to the killer’s spree. John rejected the idea and thought that was full forgiveness – not exacting the just penalty. At last he discovered the other side, the emotional side. In Webster’s words, we “cease to feel resentment against.” Forgiveness involves the subjective “letting go,” not merely the objective cancellation of the debt.” (Moody, November 1994)

How’s the grace garment of forgiveness fitting in your life? Is there ongoing resentment that keeps forgiveness from being all that it should be in your life? Are you still tied by bitterness to that person and that event? Will you let it go?

Remember, God in His grace has forgiven you over and over again. You’ve received his grace. Now what?

Pray with me.

- **Prayer of Blessing for Baptismal Candidates**
- **Song:** Be Thou My Vision
- **Benediction**