

Today we're going to be talking about the Christian church – not the church as an institution, but the church as the gathered people of God. And not the church, with all of its blemishes and ugliness, but the church as Christ intends us to be.

You see, we've been talking (in part) about the coming Kingdom of God, and **the hope of glory**ⁱ that we are saved to.

Back in 1:13, we read:

^{1:13} He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

We have been delivered **out** of the kingdom of Darkness, and into the **Kingdom** of Jesus Christ.... But the Kingdom of God, is something which is both now, but not yet... The Kingdom of God doesn't **fully** come, until the Day of The Lord, when Jesus will return and judge the wicked, and establish His New Kingdom forever. And the only ones who are in this New Kingdom, will be the saints who have been eagerly waiting for Jesus to return.

That's the finale, but the Kingdom of God begins now, in the form of the church. The Christian church, is the worshipping community of those who belong to Jesus... If you belong to Jesus, you are part of the Christian church...

You know, even a lot of people who call themselves Christians today, hate the church... Or don't want to have anything to do with the church...

- Some of them, it's because they've been hurt and sinned against by others in the church. And there's unforgiveness.
- Others, it's because they don't want to have to love the people in the church (who aren't so easy to love),,, and we're going to be touching on some of this stuff today...

Last week we talked about how we as Christians (Disciples of Jesus), take off our old self (with its evil practices), And we put on our new self, which is being renewed in the image of Christ...

Now, can you imagine, how wonderful this would be, to be a part of a community, **who** have taken off the old self (with all its wicked ways) – taken off:

- anger;
- wrath;
- malice;
- slander;
- obscene talk;

And imagine that this community has put on Christ... This isn't airy-fairy-wishful-thinking – this is the Christian church as we are meant to be... Now, all of a sudden, the church is sounding pretty good, isn't it...

This is what God has chosen us for... And He **has** chosen us. V12 says: ¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved....

Do you realise, this is how the church of Christ / Christians / Disciples of Jesus are being described: **God's chosen ones, holy and beloved....**

Now, the challenge for us, is to **stop thinking individually...** We've become a generation, who, "I don't want to hear about everybody else – I want to hear about me"... And we preachers are very willing to dish that up, because that's what people are increasingly wanting to hear...

I want to hear that:

- I am chosen by God
- I am holy;
- I am beloved..."

And we do the 'pump-me-up' ...

But this isn't being said to an individual – this is being said to a church. This is telling me more about others (and us together), than it is about myself...

- The Church are God's **chosen ones**;
- The gathered, worshipping community of Christ, is **Holy**;
- The fellowship of the redeemed are **beloved**...

Alright, so the church is being described: **God's chosen ones, holy and beloved....** But have you connected the dots here yet??? In the Scriptures, this is how Jesus is described...

- Jesus Christ is described as **God's chosen one**, and so is the church;
- Jesus Christ, is described as **holy**, and so is the church;

- Jesus Christ, is described as **beloved**, and so is the church...

And that shouldn't come as a great surprise, because last week we heard that **Christ is all, and in all**. (talking about the church). And this is what makes Christian fellowship beautiful and wonderful... As we take off the old sinful self, and put on the new self (being renewed in Christ) – Less of the flesh; More of Christ...

Christ is in You; and in you; and in you...

And the love of Christ in me, loves you; And the love of Christ in you, loves me...

This is how the church is meant to be – a beautiful, beautiful expression, of God's Kingdom, here on earth... And as such, the church is like a foretaste of the coming Kingdom.

Last week, we had 2 separate lists of (what we call) 'vices', that we are to take off, and not be characterised by any more. This week, we have a list of virtues, that we are to put on:

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved

Compassionate hearts. BTW, the Greek word isn't "hearts" – it's actually "bowls – innards"... With Christ in us, as the church, it is right, and beautiful, for us to feel gut-wrenching compassion for those who grieve, and for those who hurt. It's a deep, deep sensitivity to the needs and emotions of others.

And we put on **kindness**... Not a mask of “niceness”, but genuine kindness... Taking time to be with people, and not tearing others down; and

Humility: Humility, is a lowliness of mind...

We live in an age where “humility” is often seen as a weakness... And there’s all sorts of programs to lift anybody who might suffer from having low self-esteem...

The result of this:

Sociologists today, are telling us, that we are becoming a generation of narcissists, where we think so highly of ourselves, and put ourselves above others...

Whereas: Humility, is about having a sober judgment of ourselves, and not pretending that we’re lowly, but being keenly aware, that in Christ, we are one...

- The spiritual gifts I have – they’re no better – they’re just different to the Spiritual Gifts You have...
- I’ve been born again, and so have you.
- The old self wasn’t worth saving – the old self was killed, and now me (like you) – we have Christ living in our hearts.
- How can I be better than you? I can’t be any better than you, because Christ in You, is pretty hard to beat, and the only good in me, is what Christ has done.

But it’s not just individual humility we’re talking here – we’re talking about the humility of the Christian church... Sadly,

many churches today, have jumped right into marketing... And churches are selling themselves, “We’re the best church – come to us...”... Join this church, and be the best that you can be...

As a church, my hope is that we are filled with humility... When you’re inviting someone to come to church, let them know that we are a church who are keenly aware, that we are the wretches, that Jesus died to save... And so together, we are becoming a new creation in Him. That’s all we have to boast about.

Meekness: gentleness / being considerate. Meekness, is **not weakness**. Meekness, is strength and power, under control. As a church, God gives us strength, and by His Holy Spirit, He controls the strength that is in us...

Now, humility and meekness, are virtues I believe the church needs to re-discover at this time...

e.g.

With Covid, and Government mandates, and rules and regulations,, not many of us like them... But I’ve been hearing preachers in churches, basically calling for revolution – they’ve been saying

*“We’ve gotta stand up to the Government
we’re not going to take this.*

We’ve gotta stand up;

We’ve gotta fight;

We’re not going to let them take our freedoms!!!!”

Where’s the meekness/gentleness/humility????

And try as hard as I can, I cannot, for the life of me, picture Jesus standing up and saying the same thing... Can you??? Can you imagine Jesus standing up the front of this church and saying, "Righto, we're going to go and protest and tell the Government that they're no good, because they're taking away all our freedoms..."

That's not the Jesus I know... This is the Jesus I know:

1 Peter 2: (ESV) ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

That's the Jesus I know... Meekness and humility, rather than standing up for His own rights...

and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another

I'm going to let you in on a little secret... Pastors of churches have a bit of a secret code EGR... You see, there's always people in a fellowship, where there's Extra Grace Required.. Some people are:

- easy/hard to love
- Some folk: if it was in any other setting, they are so different to ourselves, that we would probably never even meet them, never lone associate with them...
- a little odd;
- unpolished / even prickly...

But in the church, they've been chosen by Christ too. They're chosen; Holy; beloved

And so EGR – *patience – bearing with one another*

In the church, Christ is in all, and so we're patient with all, and we bear with all.

But of course, there are times, when we're going to need to **forgive...**

The church can only be the church of Jesus Christ, when we are a people who **forgive**: V¹³ *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.*

He doesn't say "might/can/may" forgive... If we are a people who have experienced the forgiveness of our Lord, we **must** also be a church who forgive...

One of the most confronting parables Jesus told, was the parable of the unmerciful servant... Do you remember that one?

The King forgave his servant an enormous debt – one that couldn't possibly have been repaid... But after he was forgiven that debt, he went to one of his fellow servants who owed him, and demanded restitution... And when he couldn't pay, he had his fellow servant thrown in jail... But when the king heard of this, he was really angry, and he said to that servant:

Matthew 18:(ESV)³² 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.

And then Jesus said: **³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."**

That's why we as a church forgive each other, because Jesus has forgiven us. And if Jesus is truly in us, and if we are becoming like Christ, we too, are forgiving – it's in our DNA. And our forgiving others, is critical, because our very salvation depends upon it...

That's pretty cutting, when we realise that many people who withdraw from fellowship, make that decision because they cannot forgive someone in the church... Or they go to a different church because they don't want to have to forgive, or because they don't want to have to bear with those who they find it hard to love...

But as the church, that's what we do, because that's what Christ does, and Christ is in us.

V¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

I like to think that I keep this pretty well hidden, but I don't have a lot of fashion-sense – I'm not a particularly snappy dresser... I mean, I've noticed the way the super-preachers at mega-churches dress, and I just don't seem to have their pazazz.. I mean, they look so cool, don't they, with their black t-shirts and dark jeans... and they're so muscly aren't they – they must spend hours every day, in the gym, sculpting their bodies...

But I do know something about dressing – a belt is pretty handy – it keeps your pants up and your shirt tucked in... (not fashionable to have your shirt tucked in)...

But Paul's been using clothing images – take off the old self – put on the new self... And the difference between striving for transformation, and genuine transformation, is Love. Love, is the belt that binds everything together, in perfect harmony...

This is what makes the church stand apart from any worldly institution – love. Jesus said:

John 13:(ESV)³⁴ **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.** ³⁵ **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**"

- Compassion, isn't 'pretend', when we love;
- Patience and bearing with one another, is perfectly natural, when we're filled with love;
- kindness;
- meekness;
- humility...

All held together with love.

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

The peace of Christ, is what the church has been called to... Not peace, achieved by avoiding other Christians (because I don't get on with them), but peace rules in our hearts – the peace of Christ, shapes how we think and what we do – the peace of Christ, drives us to be this fellowship of love and forgiveness, and oneness in Christ...

And be thankful.

We have so much to be thankful for, don't we...

And on that note, we're going to pause, and we're going to pick this up again, next week, as we continue to explore **how** the community of Christ, becomes the community we've started to picture.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
we want to thank You,
that You have saved us to something
so much better than what we were.

And Lord, we want to thank You,
that You've been opening our eyes,
to the beauty of Your church.

How strange it is,
that we pray for Your Kingdom to come,
and yet we so rarely think to appreciate
the beauty of Your Kingdom,
expressed in Your church.

Lord,
help us to appreciate Christ in our brother and sister.
Help us to love one another,

to the depth that You have called us to.

And may we be a church of

- gut-wrenching compassion
- kindness;
- humility;
- meekness;
- patience
- bearing with one another
- forgiveness;
- and where all of this is bound together, with the Love that comes from You.

Lord, may we be a witness for You, through this,
and may Your peace rule who we are,
and what we do,
as the one body.

Amen.

ⁱ Colossians 1:27