

Clothed With Godliness in 2018

New year's eve- the one day out of every year where people look back on everything they did in 2017 and ask the question: "How can I be better in 2018?" It's resolution time! I don't know how serious you are about new years resolutions. But would you agree that the most common new year's resolutions made every year have something to do with our health? People want to lose weight, stop smoking, eat better or get more sleep. People want to improve themselves. Did you know that some pretty major companies take those resolutions very seriously? In fact so much so that they'll actually pay their employees if they keep their healthy resolutions!

For example, employees at Wal-Mart who smoke have to pay \$2,000 more per year out of their own pocket for their health care plan. Employees at Microsoft get an extra \$600 every year to spend on either a gym membership or home exercise equipment. *American Express* pays an extra \$200 per month to employees who walk 2.5 miles every day. And I could list off about 5 other companies I found that do similar healthy based, bonuses.

These companies shell out all this money because it's actually cheaper for them than having employees who are regularly missing work because they're sick, employees who have low energy or little motivation, or employees who need more and more medications every year just to keep moving. Having healthy employees not only benefits the employees, but also the bottom-line of the entire company.

When it comes to our spiritual life, God obviously wants us to be healthy too, not only because it help us, but also because it benefits God's kingdom as a whole. But God works a bit differently, really in two ways. First of all, he doesn't hold out a reward and say, "If you meet certain benchmarks of Christian living, I'll reward you." No God *starts out* by giving you the reward. The moment the Holy Spirit brings you to faith, he calls you 100% holy and spiritually healthy and fit in every way. And he does that at the beginning so we can spend the rest of our lives living in light of it.

Secondly, his evaluation of our lives starts in a place no one else can see. In Psalm 139, King David invited God to "*search me ... and know my heart. Test me, and know my anxious thoughts; see if there is any offense within me.*" In the book of Proverbs, Solomon tells us that "*the lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of a man; it searches his inmost being;*" God searches our hearts. He knows our spiritual health. And while we can't judge one another's heart, our God does tell us that there are a couple of things which show whether someone is truly spiritually healthy.

And so friends, on the one day of the year when many people around the world are evaluating what their lives look like right now and what they'd like to see starting tomorrow, God wants us do the same thing with the part of our lives that is most important. What does it look like to be spiritually healthy? Paul tells us in this morning's text from the book of Colossians, chapter 3:

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You ever heard of the Polar Plunge? Every winter in the northern parts of the country, hundreds of men and women get their swimming trunks on and head out onto frozen lakes to take a dip in shockingly cold waters to raise money for a charity. They'll actually be doing it tomorrow on Lake Michigan in Milwaukee as they do every year.

I read about a man who puts all those plungers to shame. His name is Wim Hof. Wim's nickname is "Iceman." He is a Dutch adventurer who runs Arctic marathons in minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit- without wearing a shirt. He holds the world record for being immersed in ice for an hour and 44 minutes. In 2007, he survived 72 minutes outdoors in the North Pole wearing nothing but shorts. He says that he can do these incredible things because he is able to control his body temperature using an internal technique. Supposedly he's learned how to focus his body's internal energies and turn them into heat. What he does on the inside is what allows him to do some incredible things on the outside, even in the face of some pretty harsh elements. The way you and I handle the harsh elements of this life in a healthy, god-pleasing way, doesn't boil down to mind over matter. But it does take place internally. And it all starts by getting ourselves ready.

Think of it this way: before you start each day, you wake up, you get yourself ready for the day by getting dressed right? Well Paul says that before you go out into this world God wants you to get your heart ready by dressing yourself with **“compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, [and]... forgiveness.”** Each of these garments of faith is an important part of a healthy Christian life. But if you’re anything like me, you read through this list of things God wants for you, and immediately you’re confronted with some pretty difficult questions.

God wants me to clothe myself with **compassion** – which leads me to ask myself: if I see someone in need or struggling, am I doing all I can to help, or am I hoping that someone else will notice so that I don’t have to deal with it?

God wants me to clothe myself with **Kindness** – Do I treat people as they deserve? Or am I willing to show genuine kindness; to treat someone with love no matter what they do or have done to me?

God wants me to clothe myself with **Humility** – Am I willing to put myself below everyone else? Which is what Christian service is about right for both men and women? **“Submit to one another out of love?”** When I serve is my goal to be right or to be noticed like a proud Pharisee – or to humbly give self sacrificially, daily washing the feet of everyone else, like my Lord did for me.

God wants me to clothe myself with **Gentleness** – When I face conflict with others: with my spouse, my child, or my fellow Christians, will I react with anger and hostility, or give a calm and gentle response as I let Christ’s example exude from me.

God wants me to clothe myself with **Patience** – When things aren’t going my way, am I going to take things into my own hands, or leave it all in God’s, trusting him, no matter how long he’s taking?

And finally, Paul says God wants me to clothe myself with **Forgiveness** – This one is particularly difficult and that’s why Paul sets it apart from the others by dedicating all of verse 13 to it.

When someone has hurt me, how do I respond? Do I require a condition to be met before I cancel the debt? Do I require a quota of apologies be made and restitution paid before forgiveness is granted? That’s not forgiveness according to how our God works is it?

Forgiveness is particularly difficult, because forgiveness always comes at a cost to *me*, not the person I’m forgiving. And that’s the part that seems unfair. When I forgive someone else, it doesn’t cost them a thing. Me on the other hand, it costs me everything: it costs me my pride, it costs me any conditions I wanted met, in other words, when I forgive, I’m setting aside any possibility of justice being done in my favor, for the sake of my fellow man, because Jesus did that for me. And that’s hard. Just like all these things are. And when we read through this list, there’s not a single one of us here who is perfect at any of them. In fact we all fail at each, often.

But remember what we talked about earlier. God wants you to be spiritually healthy. But he doesn’t set up a reward system for meeting these benchmarks. The reward is the first thing he gives you. He says, “Here, here is forgiveness for every time you’ve failed! Here is peace, peace that’s yours in my son Jesus. So now go! Live it!”

If you look at the verses just before these today, Paul tells us to live as those who know they have been made alive in Christ. God started out by giving us the reward. He’s made us healthy. And once you’re healthy, you don’t want to go back to being sick do you? That’s why Paul says, **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.** For someone to be ruling, in control, they have to be there at all times. If we want Christ to rule in our hearts, we can’t just come to hear his Word for one hour of the week and expect that the other 167 hours will be ruled by his presence.

Paul says, **“let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.**

Christ dwells in us, Christ rules our hearts, when we’re not ashamed to talk about Jesus with our children. We let the peace of Christ rule our marriages when we take the time to have a devotion with our spouse and talk

about Jesus love for us and how that love can be exemplified in our relationships. And the peace of Christ shows itself among believers in a church when each finds ways to humbly serve not to be recognized, not to have a voice, not to have an agenda passed, but to build up one another in the Gospel. For it's in the Gospel that we find the ability to "***put on love,***" as Paul says; unselfish, caring, humble, and compassionate love.

And that's because we see it so plainly in Jesus. He didn't come to be served, but to serve; not to be loved, but to love; not to be pampered, but sacrificed. In the first verse of our text, it not only says that God has chosen you to be holy. It says, "***Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.***" This year, God has chosen you, of all people, to be loved. He makes you spiritually healthy.

And he wants you to feel that spiritual health he gives you every day, which is why the best advice he gives you on the Eve of this new year, is to let nothing get in the way of the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly every single day. For when Christ rules in our hearts, compassion, kindness, patience, humility, gentleness, and forgiveness, those all become the Godly clothes we naturally wear as healthy Christians.

This new year, keep the newborn Savior in your hearts, remember the humble road he took from Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's cross to redeem you. And when you live in light of that, you'll find that "***whatever you do, whether in word or deed, you will do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.***"