

CCH Sermon Sunday 30th June 2019

"A closer look at the wardrobe"

V30

PRAY

STEALING, LIES, SPITEFUL BEHAVIOUR, BAD LANGUAGE, ANGER.

What an ugly list- it looks like an episode of EastEnders!! But sadly this is not a soap opera. All of us will have been on the receiving end of these at some point. And tragically all of us will have been on the giving end at some point too. And just because we are Christians, it doesn't mean that we are immune from this kind of behaviour too, and how sad it is when these things are lurking there behind the scenes in church life too.

Well this passage is a really helpful one because in it, Paul goes into detail about each one, and he gets really practical. In the words of last week, he doesn't just show us what filthy old clothes to take off, but he also shows us what beautiful new clothes to put on, AND he shows us the reasons for doing so now that we have been made new in our minds and hearts. So I've called this sermon "a closer look at the wardrobe".

I wonder which of these 5 things is going to be most relevant to you....

But before we go any further, I'd like us to dig briefly into verse 30. Because this verse stands out as a little different from these others, and it might help us to get our thinking straight before we dig in.

▲ Imagine a parent who has to come to prison to bail out a son or daughter who has got himself into jail for foolish behaviour. How sad he will be.

One of the most powerful motivators for changed behaviour is the distress that bad behaviour causes to loved ones.

I was mainly a good kid at school, but the few times I got into detention, I felt so bad for the sadness that I brought on my parents.

But did you know that God grieves our mistakes too. Remember that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and when we come to Jesus asking for forgiveness, God the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, and starts to change our behaviour from the inside out.

But v30 reminds us that we can grieve the Holy Spirit. We can make him sad. What a painful thought. He's the Holy Spirit who lives in us and guarantees that we are on the way to heaven. But he can grieve and mourn our sin.

So let's be a church that honours the Holy Spirit, that welcomes him, and pleases him, because we seek with his help to be holy. The Holy Spirit.

A church where the Holy Spirit is at work powerfully is not necessarily the most flashy or outwardly exciting, but it's the one where the people are becoming more and more like Jesus little by little every day.

So let's take a closer look at the wardrobe. And the sermon points aren't very clever today- in fact we're just going to work through each of these 5 areas, seeing what to take off, what to put on, and the reasons for doing so. It's going to be a simple grid with 15 boxes, but hopefully a helpful one!

1) Let's start with LIES

V25 Like last week's passage, where Paul insists in the Lord on godliness (v17), there's no room for lies here.

When are the times when you are tempted to bend the truth or hide the truth? Probably when someone asks you how you are really doing?

What's the positive? Speak truthfully. What a lovely change of clothes, from smelly old ugly lying, to beautiful elegant telling the truth. Let's have a culture at CCH of honesty and truth telling.

But Paul doesn't stop there, he gives us the reason.

We are all members of one body. You are a hand, I'm a foot, she's an eye, we thought about that in chapter 4. Different people bonded into one body. And so we can be honest with one another. We don't have to be worried about what another Christian will think, and paper over what's really going on in our lives. Christians have had the same experience of being sinners saved by grace to join Jesus' family for free! And Paul has spoken a lot about the harmony that should be in a church. Well you aren't going to have any harmony if we can't tell the truth to one another. Perhaps the truth about how we are really doing behind the Sunday mask, or the truth about where we have let each other down. We're one in Christ!

2) Then there's ANGER.

Is it ever right to be angry? Yes there's such a thing as righteous anger.

One of our passages we looked at in Mark, where Jesus healed on the sabbath had the words "Jesus looked *around at them in anger*, and deeply distressed at their stubborn hands, said to the man, "stretch out your hand"" , and it was healed. Or the time when he overturned the tables in the Temple, he was rightly angry.

It's OK to be angry when it's righteous anger at sin or injustice. The trouble is that most of our anger is that kind of selfish or sinful anger when our pride has been hurt by someone pointing the finger at us, and we lash out with a cutting payback or a sarcastic comment, or the anger that comes when someone who really annoys us winds us up, and then we snap.

Anger can easily enter into a family, when little stresses and frustrations build up like the strain along the San Andreas fault. And then there's an earthquake, and it can be very messy.

It's why this verse is so helpful in marriage. "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry". There have been a couple of times in our marriage where rather than letting things brew, and go to bed stressed, we've had to stay up late talking about things. Not always getting to the bottom of them there and then, but certainly addressing the sinful anger that can build up.

So in your anger do not sin. Why not? The reason...

Do not give the devil a foothold.

▲ picture being on the run from a bear (you might know the kids book "we're going on a bear hunt), and he chases you all the way home, and you think you've shut the door on him, but he gets his foot in the door, and you can't shut the door properly. He's in!

Well you want Satan to come into a church and muck things up? Easy- let your anger fester so that you start to lash out in anger at those you don't like and don't get on with. He's got a foothold.

Paul says don't let it happen. Take off the old, put on the new, don't give the devil a foothold. Holiness is a spiritual battle, and we'll think more about that in chapter 6.

3) STEALING.

Now if you're thinking, this is one I can switch off in. I haven't stolen anything ever. Ok not since shoplifting some sweets when I was a kid.

- Not so fast.
- It's possible to steal someone's reputation by slander.
- It's possible to steal someone's heart through unhelpful flirting.
- It's possible to steal money from the Inland revenue by not being totally honest with my tax return
- It's possible to steal time from my boss by using my work time for home emails.
- It's possible to steal time from others, by constantly being late.
- And yes it's possible to steal *stuff* too. Workplace stationery, small amounts of money from a relative, items from a shop that we accidentally forgot to pay for. People thought it wasn't serious back then, like they don't think it's serious today. But it is.

All of these are ugly old clothes that must come off, stealing that must stop.

No more stealing.

V28.

And here's the positive.... "But must work, doing something useful with their hands".

Isn't that a lovely alternative? The hands that use to steal now are put to good and busy use working hard in some DIY or artwork, or working someone's garden.

Why? So that they may help those in need. Stop stealing from others, and start helping. What a lovely reason to take off the old and put on the new.

You are a Christian now. Be who you are. Live the new life.

Quit taking, and start giving. You could be so helpful if you change what you do with your hands. Start practically helping those in church. One church I know has a whole ministry to do pract

Next we move from the hands to the mouth...

4th area) BAD LANGUAGE.

V29

Literally no harmful or rotten talk.

What do you do when someone is telling a lewd story, or sharing a titbit of news from the gossip columns?

- Don't get involved.
 - I know, people will think you are a goody two shoes. So what?
- You may look like you don't fit in, but you don't anyway.
- You are to stick out like a healthy thumb.
- Stop the rude language.
 - Stop the sexual banter.
- It's totally inappropriate for a Christian.

Instead, use your tongue to build people up.

Change the conversation to say something positive. Sadly that had to happen with me once...

▲ I'm sorry to say that I was once with a bunch of clergy and the conversation was getting more and more negative about a bishop (not one locally I should add). And then one of the guys said something positive, about something good a bishop had done. And it cut the banter dead. It was quite a rebuke, and we needed it.

And the reason. That it may benefit those who listen...

Do you know your tongue has such power to do good or evil. No wonder James says it's like a little spark that can cause a terrible and destructive forest fire.

Think about your speech. If something is gossip (even dressed up as a prayer point), or unkind, or could be taken the wrong way, don't say it! Bite your tongue!

Say what builds up. Speak the truth in love. You can really help or hinder a church just by the things you say. Be careful.

And finally, a kind of catch all in verse 31, I've called it ...

5) SPITEFUL BEHAVIOUR

V31

What's to take off? Well a whole list of things under spiteful behaviour.

Bitterness. Someone else gets better treatment than you at church. Don't be bitter. Suck it up! Jesus went to the cross. So what if you don't feel special. You are in Christ- you couldn't be more special.

Rage. Nicely putting on a Sunday face at church, but back home we are like a little kid kicking off about what someone else has done. Take off this ugly clothing.

Anger. The commentators say that might be a steady festering or seething of anger. More an iceberg than a volcano. Anger. Take it off.

Brawling. Or loud shouting. Come on this is a church not a pub. There's no place for fighting. Take it off!

Slander. Any form of abusive speech, particularly that which puts others down. Take it off!

And every form of **malice**. A kind of summary phrase- anger in all it's forms. Plotting how we are going to get our own back. Stop it.

You are making the Holy Spirit grieve. These sins are like a death to the Holy Spirit living inside you. Stop it.

And instead? Well these are the most lovely verses of the section.

V32.

▲ Can I ask you a question. What kind of legacy do you want to leave?

- To make money- enough for your kids to be comfortable
- To be famous- either on the TV or in the local area?
- To be liked by everyone, so that at your funeral they think you were nice.
- Or to be Kind and compassionate? Like God is.

Wouldn't that be a beautiful legacy. For people to say, she was so kind. She was so compassionate. I hurt her so badly, and she was so forgiving.

What a lovely thing it would be if CCH was known for it's kindness. Do you know how powerful kindness is?

It thaws the ice that can build up between Christians, and it can actually help non-Christians to come to Christ.

▲ I wonder if you've heard of Rosaria Butterfield. She was a lesbian activist and lectured as an English Professor at Syracuse University about queer theory.

And she once wrote a critique of an evangelical Christian group in her local newspaper. And she got a lot of responses. She would put the responses into one of two boxes on her desk. Fan mail and hate mail.

But do you know what. One man wrote to her who was a local pastor. And she said this about his two page response "It was a kind and inquiring letter, it was the kindest letter of opposition that I had ever received". She didn't know where to put it.

And that kindness, even though the pastor disagreed with her, led her to becoming friends with that pastor and his wife, and that friendship was hugely important in her coming to faith.

Kindness is so powerful.

But it's so difficult.

Or is it? The clue is in v32 and with this we finish.

"Forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you!"

It can be so hard to be kind. It can be so hard to be forgiving. There's more to say about this, and the Bible is filled with teaching about this.

But does it help to think about how kind and forgiveing God has been to us?

When you are thinking about how badly someone has treated you, have you ever thought how you have treated God.

- Someone was unfaithful to you. Well how many times have you been unfaithful to God?
- Someone was ignored you. How many times have you ignored God?

- Someone treated you like dirt. How many times have you treated God like dirt.

And yet, when any man or woman, boy or girl comes to the cross of Jesus, and turns to Christ in sorrow and sadness for their sin, turning from it, he forgives everything.

Every unkindness, every sin. Everything on this list.

So if God can forgive the millions that you owe him, can you forgive the fiver that someone owes you?

Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Let's pray.