

Sermon: Put on the Lord Jesus Christ

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, September 6, 2026)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The journey of faith is not at all a linear path. Taking one step forward and two steps back is not unusual. Getting turned around and lost in a foggy mist are all part of the journey. Finding one's way forward, back to the right path, requires attentive listening to the Spirit of God, and with a bit of luck.

Back when I was a commodity futures trader working on the floor of the Montreal Exchange, I was having a time of my life. The money was flowing, the hours were short, the stress elevated but manageable. It was a dream job for young men in their prime. I had just gotten married to Daisy, and life was good.

But the life I was having was what one would call it 'a double life'—the one that she was fully aware of. You see, during the workweek, I devoted myself to the life, the culture of the trading pit—the swearing, cussing, alcohol, drugs, and after-hour parties in high-end strip clubs. I justified all of it as perhaps a bit shady but totally necessary business networking—got to keep up with the boys if one wants to stay afloat in this highly competitive, zero-sum game.

But by the weekend, I resuming being a good husband, a family man, a faithful Christian—teaching Sunday School, leading youth group, even got myself elected as a deacon of the church. I was good at segregating the two sides of my double life, as I seamlessly cross from one back to another, like clockwork, like putting on and taking off clothes, at will, with ease. People from either side of this divide did not cross path; they did not know how I actually lived, except for one—Daisy, my newly wedded wife. To be honest, I don't know how she was able to stand me at all, to tolerate that old-self, let alone to love me.

So when I read these words of the Apostle Paul, in Romans 13:12, our Scriptural passages this morning, "Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light", and a few verses later, "Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ," I can't help but ask: What is going on here?

Is Paul suggesting that we can 'put on', or in some other translations 'to clothe' Jesus, at will, with ease? And if that is indeed what he is saying, then could one perhaps 'take off' or 'unclothe' Jesus with equal ease, at will?

Brother and sisters in Christ, we come again to the Book of Romans, as we continue to meditate on the practical theology according to the Apostle Paul. Duality seems to mark this passage, with a sense of urgency, as in it is time to wake from sleep; the night is far gone and the day is near; for salvation is near. To be sure, salvation is already and continues to be an achieved fact for the believers, through the life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But salvation has also its future oriented component, as theologians often call it, the eschatological hope of the second and the final coming of the Lord. Only at the return of the Saviour will our salvation be complete.

It is in such a 'here but not yet' phase that Paul cautioned the believers to not loose heart, not to become complacent, as though a life of godliness automatically follows faith. It doesn't, for there is one additional act that one needs to take—that is to 'put on' Jesus Christ.

Now, in the Jewish mindset, to 'put on' is not simply 'to clothe' oneself as with a piece of garment. In anticipating of the coming day of judgement, OT writers speak of being 'clothed' with virtues or with the Spirit. We see this in Judges 6:34, when the spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon before he went on to win a great military victory. The verb 'to take possession' in the Greek translation is 'to clothe', it denotes of being surrendered to something or someone. We see similar usage in 1 Chronicles 12:18, when the Spirit of God came upon Amasai, a grand chief, the verb 'came upon' in the Greek translation is 'to clothe'.

So in the same logic, when Paul speaks of to 'put on', he is referring to the act of surrendering oneself, willingly, to something or someone else. Putting on the armour of light is essentially to become light, so as to repel the darkness all around. Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, is to become like Christ, to be united with Christ, to dwell in Christ, and to speak and act for Christ. One does not do this lightly, but with vigilance lest the flesh prevail.

The redeemed may be tempted, but they must not give thought as to how the old-self can be satisfied. Rather, they ought to be on a constant reckoning of oneself as dead to sin and alive in God, and alive in the Spirit of God. Once one begins to put on Christ, one continues to do so until one is thoroughly imbued and in union with Christ, to the glory of God. Amen.

In his book *The Year of Living Biblically*, A.J. Jacobs, an American journalist and author recounts his experience of trying to adhere to all the Bible's laws, commandments, ordinances and rules for one full year. Not just the major ones like the Ten Commandments, but some real obscured ones like in Leviticus 19:19: "*Nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials.*"

So over a year, this secular, agnostic, and not particularly religious observant Jewish man began to grow an unruly beard, wore only white clothes made of unmixed fibres, tithed his income, prayed regularly and observed the Sabbath. He didn't think stoning an adulterer in the 21st century would be a good idea, so he tossed tiny pebbles at them as an symbolic gesture. The book is light-hearted, funny at times, certainly an interesting read.

There is one particular theory he grappled with during the one-year ordeal, that is cognitive dissonance, which states in part "if you behave in a certain way, your beliefs will eventually change to conform to your behaviour." As Jacob recounts, "If I act like I'm faithful and God loving for several months, then maybe I'll become faithful and God loving. If I pray every day, then maybe I'll start to believe in the Being to whom I'm praying." And his experience over the year certainly leans towards that theory holding true.

Cognitive dissonance really digs at this age-old debate of what comes first—one's actions or one's beliefs? If one should pose that question to Paul the Apostle, I wonder how he might respond? I suspects he will say neither. Action doesn't come first, nor does belief. I suspects Paul will say that the love of God is what comes first.

In the Presbyterian denomination, we practice infant baptism. It is a wonderful tradition, a sacrament of the church, and I am always moved greatly, to tears even, whenever I have the privilege to participate. For infant baptism is a bold, unflinching declaration that what come first is the love of God for humanity. It proclaims that even before we know of God, God comes to us, claims us as God's own, not because of our faith, nor our deeds, but simply because God loves us. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*" (John 3:16)

For those who believe, life of faith is more than just a set of rules and regulations that one follows for a short year. What we do matters, the theory of cognitive dissonance is not too far off. Our actions can influence

our mindset and even our beliefs, to a certain degree. Some of the commandments seek to do precisely that, “*thou shall not commit adultery; thou shall not murder; thou shall not steal; thou shall not covet.*” (Romans 13:9).

As Paul would readily testify and proclaim, our faith is ultimately grounded in the radical, inclusive and overwhelming love of God through Christ. For us, it is indeed in Jesus the Christ, whose teachings, life, death and resurrection speak to us a better word—a love that we owe to one another, a love that breaks barriers, that builds bridges, a love that fulfills the Law.

Living in such love, of being loved and of loving others and loving God is not necessarily easier. It means that we approach each encounter with others with a sense of reverence, for there are no script to follow blindly, no easy answer to come by. However, we trust that God is in our midst, in this always changing ever shifting world, as we learn to listen to what the Spirit is saying to us, in our hearts.

For me, the love of my wife Daisy, and my love for her changed my life, changed ours. Over time, I could no longer bear to live that double life, no matter how I justified it. I could no longer lived as a wild commodity futures trader by weekday, and loving husband and a good Christian by the weekend. I could not reconcile it. I knew something would have to give, and when the time to choose came upon me, I listened to the Spirit of God speaking in my heart, and chose love.

I finally put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and never look back.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**