

In 1964 Merv Griffin debuted the TV show “Jeopardy.” There have been several versions over the decades but I am going to make a guess here that at some point in the last 50 years most of you have seen an episode or two of Jeopardy. If it has been a while, the basic game goes like this: there is a board that lists several different categories. You choose a category and pick one of five hidden answers on the board. Then the contestant has to ask the right question to match the answer on the board.

Let’s try it. Our category is **US Presidents**. Let’s say you pick the cheap and therefore fairly easy answer which is “*The founder of our country who did not really chop down a cherry tree.*” And the question is....”**Who is George Washington?**”

Now let’s change categories to **Theological Terminology**. We’re Christians, we’re feeling pretty confident here so we go for one of the more high priced answers and it is: *The Son of Man*. Someone who was paying attention today’s gospel might buzz in with, “Who is Jesus?” But that is an incorrect answer; the category is **theological terminology** – not persons in the NT.

Well, don’t feel bad. The fact is that there are a couple of phrases in the readings today that we all have heard before, we know they mean something important but we are not exactly sure what that is. The first one we will look at is **SON of MAN** from the gospel and the other is “**put on Christ**” or “**clothe yourself in Christ**” from St Paul.

If you just look at the words, it would seem logical that the son of man would be another man, or just **A** man. But since this is “son of man” spoken with sort of capital letters, the English equivalent might be more like,

“**The Man**,” in the way someone might admire or recognize a friend’s achievement and say “You’re the man.” In the context of scripture, it goes even further and means something like, “**You are the ideal man; you are the pattern for what every other human should be.**” When Jesus uses the term Son of Man it basically described the relationship he has with God. It is the close relationship of father to son that God had intended for all of humanity, it was the unique relationship that Jesus claimed and it was the pattern of life that Jesus wanted to offer to everyone. So our Jeopardy question might go something like: *what term did Jesus use for his relationship to the Father and his offer to us?* That is an important but a bit complex question – it should probably should have been saved for double jeopardy.

The other answer we find on the board comes from Paul who uses the phrase “to clothe ourselves with Christ.” The easy question might be something like, “*how do you win 1st prize at costume party at the Vatican?*” but again that doesn’t really fit the category of **Theological terminology**. Think of it like this, at awards shows the TV commentators will often say something like, “She is wearing Verasche; or he is wearing Armani.” It means they have chosen a style, a look that is very easily identified and they hope that that style – whether it is simple or outlandish or elegant or creative – that that style says something about who they are. That is almost exactly the way Paul is using this phrase. He is talking to new Christians who stepped out of the waters of baptism and needed a new look, a new identity. When people look at us they should see Christ at work.

We should always be identified as a follower of Jesus and that should be the style that best describes us.

There is one other important but more subtle point that comes with Paul's phrase "clothed in Christ." When sensible parents make or buy clothes for kids, it's not unusual that you get a shirt with sleeves that are too long or pants that need a cuff so they don't drag on the floor. Why did your parents do that to you? Were they really that fashion blind? Didn't they care how you looked on your first day of school? Well, of course they cared, and they certainly were not blind or foolish shoppers. As only a parent outfitting a child during a growth spurt can know, it was good stewardship of the family's clothing budget to buy your clothes a size too big, to allow you to wear those items long enough, as you continued to grow, to justify the cost. They were buying you clothing items with "room to grow," that is, clothing you had to "grow into." Some wisdom and truth comes to us when we are young and naïve, but it comes with "room to grow," that is, we have to "grow into it" over time.

Paul gives an outstanding summary of his preaching ministry in a single sentence, "***In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you all one in Christ Jesus.***" Make no mistake about it; these words were radical in the first century. In these three pairs of words, Paul staked out a path for the Church to travel, but it would take centuries for the Church to make the entire journey. Paul spent most of his entire life helping the Church work through just that first pair of words,

the question of how Christians from Jewish background and those from Gentile backgrounds could be united equally in the Church of Jesus Christ.

There are those who fault Paul for not coming down harder on the issue of equality for women, or for saying very little to overthrow the institution of slavery but there is only so much a person can accomplish in a single lifetime, and only so much a culture is prepared to endure at one time. If Paul had also tried to establish the Christian Church in first century Roman culture as a place of radical gender equality, and a people mobilized to overthrow slavery, the Church would have been viewed as a radical subversive cult, and might not have survived a single generation. It was radical enough just to set up the Church where Jew and Greek could share equal footing, and even that stance cost Paul his life.

A great theologian once said, “Nothing really significant can be accomplished in a single lifetime, and that is why we are saved by hope.” It would be eighteen more centuries after Paul before the world was finally ready to overthrow the institution of slavery. And it would be another century after that before women would have the right to vote in this country. Paul’s vision for the Church was far-reaching but it can be “slow learning” for us to grow into such a magnificent insight. And you could argue that we have yet to realize fully, or to grow deeply into, the entirety of Paul’s sweeping statement in Galatians.

Can you imagine a place, and a people, where the normal societal divisions **did not** divide us. Yet Paul dares to imagine, and gave his life to create, a place where Jew and Greek, the dominant racial and religious divisions of his day, meant nothing.

Imagine a place where economic divisions melted away, where there was no elite or downtrodden class! Yet Paul dares to imagine a place where slave or free, representing the top and bottom of the socio-economic ladder of his day, meant nothing.

Imagine a place where even the most basic of human distinctions, male and female, did not create hierarchy or oppression! Yet Paul dares to imagine just such a community. Did the apostle imagine a time when there would be no racial differences, or economic differences, or gender differences? Not at all. God seems to delight in diversity. Paul simply taught that those differences should not make a difference. No barriers, no layers of power, no privileged class—that was Paul's inspired vision. And what would you call such a utopian place, such a utopian community? A Church. You would call it a Church.

Fortunately God is remarkably wise and remarkably patient. He offers us big truths that cannot be quickly appreciated, truths that inspire us to grow into their insight over a lifetime—or even over a period of many lifetimes. Having put on Christ, the designer label for Paul's church reads **Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female** and if it doesn't fit now, that's OK because our loving God understands that there is still "room to grow."