



# Dressing Up The New Man [1]

## [3:9-14]

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*“Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*

*“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (3:9-14).*

A friend of mine in another state is a policeman. When he puts on his uniform, he always strikes me as a different person. An air of authority seems to exude from him. He even looks stronger and tougher!

The cliché has a ring of truth about it: Clothes *do* make the man. You can tell a lot about a person by the way he or she dresses. Mailman, football player, mechanic, soldier, nurse—each wears a uniform which reflects his respective role in society. In a spiritual sense, you are to dress yourself to match your new identity in Christ.

In Colossians 3:5-9 Christians are commanded to put off the garments of the former way of life with their moral and spiritual corruption. But “taking off” is not enough. Christians are instructed to dress up the new man.

In the early church it is said that the custom developed that when an individual came in faith wanting to be baptized, he would remove his old clothes and be baptized in a small amount of clothing. When he came out of the water, the church took his old garments and threw them away. The Christians then presented him with a new white robe to put on to symbolize his break with his former way of life. The church was impressing upon this new convert that he could no longer be the same old person.

### **THE REALITY OF THE NEW MAN (3:9, 10)**

Paul reaffirmed the reality of the new man: “Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self” (3:9, 10a). Before Paul exhorted Christians to dress up the new man, he reaffirmed the tremendous transformation each had experienced. We are to change our lifestyles because God has changed our lives.

We made a conscious choice to bury the old man that reigned within us with all its rebellious practices. No one forced us to do this; it was our decision. When we buried the old man, God raised us out of our liquid tomb to a new life.

Paul did not say the old self is to be converted. He cannot be; he is dead (d. Ephesians 2:5). The old self is replaced by the new self. We read, “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This explains why people cannot be changed spiritually by education, psychology, or philosophy. Whatever good these disciplines may accomplish, they are still working with the old man. Educate an illiterate pickpocket, and you get a smart pickpocket.

Education is not the answer to society's woes. Psychology, better philosophy, or a better environment is not the answer. The answer is the new birth, a radical change within a person which gives him a new beginning. God's plan never included dusting off our old man to make him look better. God's strategy is to make new people, new from the inside out. Grasping this truth is the key to our motivation to live differently. A new life demands a new lifestyle!

### **THE ONGOING RENEWAL OF THE NEW MAN (3:10)**

Verse 10 also speaks of an ongoing renewal of the new man: "And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." When you became a Christian, God put new life in you. But you have a problem. This new life has to be lived out in a body that is used to housing the old man. Every morning when you get up, your flesh will go to the closet, look for the old clothes of the old man, and say, "I just must wear these today!" On the hangers will be greed, anger, malice, slander, lying—the whole old wardrobe. You will have to resist the flesh. Little by little, day after day, you will trash a few more of the old garments in favor of new ones.

While God gave you new life, He did not give you spiritual maturity. Think of that baby you brought home one day. He was born with all his limbs, but that little body was only a beginning. With the passing of time the baby has to learn to bring all his parts under control. The same is true in the spiritual life. You were born again. But your heavenly Father expects you to grow spiritually, bringing that life under control.

Romans 8:29 says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." God's incomprehensible plan is for us to become like Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23) is the work of the Spirit reproducing in us Jesus' characteristics that we might be carbon copies of Him. How does God accomplish this? Paul said we are "being renewed to a

true knowledge." That is present tense; it refers to an ongoing experience in our lives. We received the new self, once for all, at our new birth in baptism. Now that life is renewed as we train our bodies daily to live out that new life.

Paul did not say we are renewed *by* knowledge. Rather, he affirmed that we are renewed *in* knowledge. The Greek text literally says "unto" knowledge. The end goal of this renewal process is knowledge. When we are completely renewed, our bodies will completely understand how it is to respond in order to properly live out this life God has granted the Christian.

How does that renewal in knowledge take place? The answer is not complex. Learn a truth; live a truth. Put into practice what you already understand, and you will receive a deeper insight into truths you do not quite understand. Do that throughout your life, and in time the Spirit will bring you into more maturity of full knowledge. Out of that full knowledge will come consistent righteous behavior.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). We are renewed in our minds when we accept the truths taught in Jesus. As we learn the knowledge God wants to impart to us, we must apply it. We put into action the truths we know. Then the new man is strengthened and moves toward maturity. The end result is that we become Christlike.

### **THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE NEW MAN (3:11)**

Verse 11 introduces us to the relationships of the new man: "A renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all."

Tertullian, in the third century A.D., spoke of Christianity as the "third race." The whole range of prejudices and barriers that presently divide mankind give way before a new humanity in Christ. All relationships are made new. No longer does the new man look at anyone from an earthly point of view. Racial divisions ("Greek and Jew"), religious prejudices ("circumcised and uncircumcised"), cultural barriers ("barbarian, Scythian"), and social standing ("slave and freeman") are abolished as the test of fellowship in this "third race" of humanity.

Why is it so important that Christians grasp this principle? Because it will profoundly affect the way we relate to each other in the church. The way we treat others will be influenced by our new clothing: "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (3:12). Why should I be compassionate toward you? Why should I be patient with you? Because you deserve it? No! Because whether or not you are like me racially, culturally, or socially, Christ dwells in you just as He dwells in me, and that makes you important. That affects the quality of my relationship with you.

Tragically, some local congregations reflect a certain class of society, racial heritage, or educational range and exclude most who are different from them. Twentieth-century barriers, just as real as those in Paul's day, are allowed to exclude some from a local fellowship of Christians.

In the church, every individual is to be accepted on the basis of being a new creation in Jesus. We cannot afford to do otherwise. We must try to break down the Christian barriers that would exclude fellowship to any.

### **THE ROBINING OF THE NEW MAN (3:12-14)**

Paul graphically described what it means to dress up the new man: ". . . put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (3:12, 13).

Up to now the message has been to strip off the ragged clothing of the former lifestyle. Now the time has arrived to dress properly in attire befitting the new man. What Paul described is the outer manifestation of the inner transformation made visible through our new birth in the family of God.

#### **The Grandeur**

Before Paul described the garments of the new life, he first reminded Christians of the grandeur that is ours. First, we are a people "chosen of God." This is a tremendous truth! Christianity is no last-minute emergency plan by God when Israel rejected their Messiah. We have always been in the plans of God. Ephesians 1:4 says, "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, . . ."

We are not in God's family because *we* decided we would be His offspring. Rather, we have the glorious privilege of belonging to Him because *He* chose us. He wanted us in His family, and that is the only reason we enjoy the grandeur of being called children of God.

The Bible says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). When God chose us, He did so with the idea that we would behave in a way consistent with our new nature in Jesus. If you do not live such a life, you are in violation of God's eternal plan set in motion before the world began! As chosen people, we are called to live a particular lifestyle.

Second, we are described as "holy." The Greek word means "separate, set apart." When God chose us, He drew us out of the mainstream of society. A uniqueness now characterizes our lives. If that uniqueness is not there, we are thwarting the eternal purpose of God. To go on living like the society around us is to live in violation of the entire intention of God from before the world began. That is a sobering thought.

Third, we are a "beloved" people. God is madly in love with *us*. Everything He has done through Jesus was done for us because He *loves* us. We do not have a dry contract with God; a passionate love relationship exists that ought to drive us to want to please Him.

#### **The Garments**

On the basis of this grandeur that is ours, we are to dress accordingly. What kind of wardrobe is consistent with our status as new men and women in Jesus? Paul identifies eight garments of the risen life.

"Compassion" is the first virtue with which the Christian is to robe himself. Some older translations have "bowels of mercies" which literally reflects the original language. The Hebrew mind thought concretely, not abstractly; thus, even emotions were expressed in physical terms. In effect, Paul declared that the new man must have an empathy with others.

We must have empathy, not sympathy in this case. There is a world of difference between the two terms. In sympathy we feel sorry *for* someone else; in empathy we experience sorrow along *with* the other person. Our relationship in this

new life leads us to a costly involvement with other Christians. It is not enough to read about another Christian's misfortune in the church bulletin and think, "That's too bad." We are to walk into their suffering, praying with them, actually bearing their burden as our own.

The next garment is "kindness." More than an attitude, kindness is an action that arises from a sense of compassion. A note of encouragement, a telephone call inviting someone to lunch, an offer of help—are illustrations of kindness. Some acts of kindness may not be appreciated at the time. In Israel a group of tourists saw a shepherd throw a rock and hit one of his sheep on the head. "That was not kind," said one sightseer. "But it was," replied the guide. "That sheep was about to wander onto the road where it would have been hit by that bus that just passed us." Kindness does not mean the absence of pain or conflict in a relationship. Confrontation can be an act of kindness. This garment of the risen life is the spirit which seeks to help others in overcoming that which is wrong in their lives.

Also in our wardrobe is "humility." This is the opposite of the self-sufficient arrogance of the old man. In the risen life the new man willingly foregoes some right he could claim for himself in order that another might be helped. Paul said, "Give preference to one another in honor" (Romans 12:10).

A false humility is nothing more than self-denial for the purpose of manipulating others to get your own way. Such will poison a relationship. Genuine humility that gives preference to meeting the needs of others promotes healthy relationships.

The garment of "gentleness" (or meekness) is perhaps the most misunderstood of all the Christian virtues. When the world thinks of a meek person, they envision someone in desperate need of assertiveness training. Quite the opposite is true. A meek person is very assertive. But what he insists on is unusual. He insists, "If one of us in this relationship has to suffer for the relationship to continue, let it be me." If you put on the garment of gentleness, it means you are willing to endure suffering rather than inflict it.

We are to be robed with "patience." The Greek word literally means "great heat." The idea is that it now takes a whole lot to get your blood boiling. We can endure wrong without flying into a rage or lashing out in vitriolic rebuttal. When we wear this

garment, we do not let our situation control our actions; we determine our own godly responses.

The closet of the new man contains another garment: "forbearance." The term means to put up with another. Whether it is insults, lies, complaints, gossip, or indifference that another is doling out, we take it. We bear it in our hearts all the time we are working to bring healing to the relationship.

In the wardrobe of the new man is a "forgiving spirit." Humans cannot live in community without hurting each other on occasion. It is not enough to forbear with one another; we are to go a step further and forgive. We should do as a body, among ourselves, what our Savior has done for us individually.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. People will say, "I can forgive, but I can't forget." Exactly! Forgiving is something I *can* do. Forgetting is something over which I have little control. If you are not convinced, stand in the corner for five minutes and try to forget where you work. God never commanded us to forget what another has done to us; He did say to forgive him. We cannot easily forget. Forgiveness chooses to sustain and nurture the relationship even with the memory of the hurt.

We are to robe ourselves with one other garment. An outer garment of "love" is to be put on over and around the others: "And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (3:14).

Without love, all we have is a group of legalistic, moral attitudes. Love transforms them and brings maturity to our relationships in the church. We are compassionate because we truly care about others. We are kind and gentle because we are concerned about the welfare of the members of our spiritual family. We forbear and forgive over and over because we love those who hurt us.

Love holds it together. It is the cement in our relationships. When love prevails in a congregation, a beauty and harmony reign that gives the church power in its witness to the community of unbelievers.

## CONCLUSION

How are you dressed? Are you dressed up resurrection style in the garments of the new man? Or are you still dressing every morning in the tattered rags of the old man?