



What Do Your Clothes Convey?

[3:12-17]

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“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. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (3:12-17).

Clothes tell us much about a person. It has been said that clothing is an external badge of individuality. People pay handsome amounts of money to determine the best colors to wear, how to dress for success, etc. Even movie makers understand this phenomenon and portray a certain type of character by a certain kind of dress.

I enjoy watching people. How interesting it is to sit at a mall or airport and just watch people. What an education! All kinds of clothing styles and hair styles can be seen. Teenagers who opt for the extreme use shocking styles of clothes and hair to make a statement, but it may not be the statement they would really like to make. Some are actually saying that they are suffering from poor self-esteem. If they felt good about

themselves, they would not find it necessary to be on the fringes of good taste and acceptable standards. Clothes and hair styles designed to shock, to flaunt the acceptable standards of society, are used by many to say, “Hey, here I am. Look at me!”

Paul realized that it is the same with Christians and Christianity. Christians need to possess character. Paul used the idea of clothing to represent how we should be known. As you can tell much about a person by the way he dresses, you can tell much about a person’s Christianity by the character he shows, by how he lives.

In Colossians 3:12-17, Paul mentioned how Christians are to be clothed, what we are to allow, and a simple formula for all other parts of our life.

THE CHARACTER-CLOTHES OF A CHRISTIAN (3:12-14)

Seven seems to be the number of completion in the Scripture. Here Paul suggested seven traits needed in our lives.

Notice the terms of affection Paul used to identify those to whom he wrote. They were the “chosen of God.” As such, they were to maintain a higher standard of living than others who were not God’s chosen. They were chosen by their obedience to the gospel. God has elected those who are obedient to His will.

They were “holy” or separated. “‘Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says

the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you'" (2 Corinthians 6:17). We are to be holy, for God is holy. Holiness demands a separation from the world and its allurements and a commitment to God's purposes.

They were "beloved." Nothing could be a greater motivation for higher living. In fact, all three designations suggest a motive for doing what Paul would direct.

As God's elect, as those separated for God's purposes, and as those dearly loved, we are different. Paul listed seven characteristics of the Christian's clothing.

First, we are to have "a heart of compassion." Other translations have "tenderness of heart" (Moffatt), "merciful in action" (Phillips), and "compassion" (NIV). Jesus saw the people and had compassion on them "because they were like sheep without a shepherd," and He taught them (Mark 6:34). The word is the same! In Luke's record of the story of the Good Samaritan, he used the same word to describe the action of the Samaritan toward the man beaten and robbed. Surely, this kind of compassion should characterize Christians.

Second, we are to have "kindness." The Greek word means "good" or "useful." It was used by Jesus when He said, "My yoke is easy." Kindness is the attitude of preferring my neighbor's good before my own. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (Philippians 2:3).

Third, we are to possess "humility." Humility is an interesting characteristic. "He has told you, a man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Micah places humility alongside the strength of character that enables a person to do goodness and love mercy. It is a proper understanding of self. We often go to one of two extremes. On the one hand we overestimate our own importance and become puffed up. On the other hand is the extreme of depreciating ourselves. We think we can do nothing and, therefore, limit our own effectiveness. Humility is neither of these. It is the proper view of one's self.

Fourth is "gentleness" or meekness. The gentle person is one who is slow to take offense or to give scorn, the person who is self-controlled. Meekness, it has been said, is power under control.

Fifth, we are to show "patience." This is meekness manifested under the greatest provocation. Jesus said, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Sixth, we are to be "bearing with one another, and forgiving each other." It takes two to quarrel, and a Christian should never be one of the two. Verse 13 continues: ". . . whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." Notice the command is universal: "Against anyone." Surely, no one who is striving to be a Christian would be involved in a quarrel or refuse to forgive.

The word translated "forgive" comes from the same root word as "grace." Thus, to forgive is to give graciously. Forgiveness is a gift, not an accomplishment. Forgiveness is not something earned and then awarded as a merit badge. True forgiveness is a gift given to those who may be undeserving. The forgiven must always be forgiving.

When we put on the new man, all the rules change. Grudges have to go! Revenge is out of the question! We leave all judgment to God. We must be forbearing and forgiving.

**"When we
put on the new man,
all the rules change."**

The seventh characteristic is *the* glue or cement that binds the others together—love. It is the "perfect bond of unity" or completeness. None of the gifts given would operate at all without love. That which motivates compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness, and forbearance is love. Without love nothing else works.

Christian, how are you clothed?

THE RESULTS OF REGENERATION (3:15, 16)

The natural results of these characteristics are shown in three areas. The results are shown in *peace*.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

Why do we not have the peace of God? Why is peace not shown in our attitudes and lives? The answer is simple: We do not have the characteristics of the new man! With the new man comes peace! Spirituality is shown by those characteristics.

The results are shown in *thankfulness*. Have you ever noticed that the natural outcome of spiritual blessings is gratitude? The Bible stresses the need for gratitude. A major fault of those who do not serve God is that they are not thankful: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21). Surely, we would not want to be identified with a group who willingly knows not God.

A third area is *singing*. "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you." The NIV says to "allow the word to dwell in you richly *as* you teach and admonish one another." (Emphasis mine.) Notice how we are to accomplish the indwelling of the word—by singing. A parallel passage says, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). All are to sing. A failure to sing violates these passages. Paul did not say we are to sing well. But the commandment is to sing. All can sing! Unless you have a disability that prohibits you from speaking, you are under this command. It is a heartfelt response to God.

THE CONSTANT CONSIDERATION (3:17)

Whatever your task, dedicate it to the Lord: "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (3:17). Charles Sheldon wrote a little book entitled *In His Steps*, which is based on the idea that the

main character would do everything with the consideration "What would Jesus do?" It is an interesting book because that consideration leads to a complete change of life. But that is what Paul was saying every Christian should do! We are servants doing our Master's will. We are slaves to Jesus! We are to do His work! We are acting as His agents! Remember Paul had already said that Christ lives in Christians (1:27).

This overriding consideration contains the thought that all things are to be done with thanksgiving to God the Father. Twice in three verses this command is found. Does it characterize your life?

CONCLUSION

We are to put on the character of the new man, we are to show forth the results of this character, and we are to live by the overriding consideration of gratitude and dedication. How are you clothed? Do others recognize you as a Christian by your actions?

QUOTATIONS

"I make a rule of Christian duty never to go to a place where there is not room for my Master as well as myself."

John Newton

"When you're thinking fun-for-me, success-for-me, satisfaction-for-me, no-time-for-God—you are thinking worldly."

Ethel Barrett,
Will the Real Phony Please Stand Up?

"The mystery of godliness is God humbling Himself to become man. The mystery of iniquity is man exalting himself to become God."

A. J. Gordon

"The branch of the vine does not produce the fruit; it only bears it. It is as life flows from the Vine, Christ, that we, as branches, die to old habits, old natural instincts, old preferences, and bear fruit unto holiness."

Herbert Lockyer,
Twin Truths of Scripture 1