

## Clothes Do Make a Difference

Colossians 3:4-13

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**Some Background to Remember:** The air of controversy hangs heavy over all the first half of the epistle, and its style, reflective of this, is abrupt and broken. In the last half of the book, marked by simplicity of style and language, there is a more tranquil tone. The structure of the passage now to be considered is quite simple. It begins with a brief but all-encompassing statement of the root principle of the Christian life (v. 14). The apostle proceeds to delineate some practical guidelines for living that life (3:5-4:6). We will consider the first of these today.

#### Take Your Bibles, Please...

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Colossians 3:1-13 ESV).

I overheard two little boys talking in the hallway of the elementary school one day. One of the boys announced proudly, we have a new baby at our house." The other said, "Is it a boy or a girl?" The answer shot back, "I don't know; they haven't put its clothes on yet."

**Clothes do make a difference!** I want you to use your imagination and take a trip with me. Let's imagine that we're in another city and we're coming home to Nashville and together we board the plane. As we get on board, I see a man standing in the doorway. I've never seen him before in my life but I turn to you and say, "I know that man; I know who he is - I know what he does. I can tell by the cap he wears, the dark suit he has on, and the emblem he has on his lapel. He even has his name on. I know that he's not the co-pilot. I know that he is the captain because of the stripes on his arm. I say, "Hello Captain, hope we have a good flight." As we sit down you say, "You never met him?" "No, but I know a lot about him. I know his training; I know what he can do. I know what he's going to do for us in a few minutes, because of the clothes he wears."

Well, we're seated, the plane takes off and presently I stop a young lady coming down the aisle and say, "Would you bring me a Coca Cola?" She says, "Yes sir." You say, "Did you know her?" "No." "Have you ever seen her?" "No." "Well how could you ask her for a Coca Cola?" "Oh, I knew who she was and what she did because of what she wore - the little cap and the uniform she had on. She's the flight attendant on this plane and it's her job to serve the passengers a drink or lunch or wait on them. I knew all that because of the clothes she wore." "You see that man over there," I asked. "I never saw him before in my life, but I can tell you what his religion is." "You can?" "Yes, because he's sitting there reading a book. I can't see what it is - it's a little black book, but I know

what it is. I know his religion because he's got a little cap on the back of his head. He's an Orthodox Jew and he's reading the Bible. I can tell by what he's wearing on, the top of his head."

What am I saying? I'm simply saying that the clothes we wear speak and tell a lot about us - revealing the kind of person we are and maybe our vocation, even our religion. Clothes do make a difference - what we wear - it's always been so throughout the ages and around the world. It was true in Jesus' day and Paul's day. So Paul puts forth this idea about what we are to put on and what we are to wear. In this larger passage of verses 14-16 of Colossians the third chapter, he uses this magnificent figure of speech about the clothes we should wear.

### **First, as Christians We Should Take Some Clothes Off (vv. 5-9).**

He starts out the chapter with the basic premise. He says, *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* He does not say "if" in terms of a question. This is a declaratory statement. This is an affirmation. Our Christian life is staked upon that glorious, historical event of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

The greatest event in human history, next to creation itself, was when Christ broke the bonds of death and set man free from sin, as he was resurrected out of the grave. Paul never questions that, he never doubts it. He stakes all his theology upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, even as we must do. He says, on this premise, we also claim that we have been resurrected. While we were dead in sin, without life, Christ is come. The resurrected power of Christ working in us and we have been raised up from the dead. Now he said, if this has happened - then this follows. This is a corollary, this is true.

He says in verses 5, 6, and 7 - mortify certain things, bury them. He says in verse 9, put off these things, and in verse 5, bury them. Take off some of the things you've been wearing. In the old light we'd say - go burn those contaminated clothes. Paul just says, go bury them - get rid of them and bury those old clothes that you're to take off. He lists for us some of the things we wore before we were converted. No longer should we wear them - get rid of them - take them off. It's rather hard to express from the English translation, but let me read them. He says, "Put off and bury fornication. That's sexual immorality - looseness - sex outside the sacred relationship of marriage - fornication. Put it off and bury it. It doesn't belong on a Christian. Then he says, immorality, uncleanness, impurity, all of these - sins of sex, lust, evil desire of the flesh - do not belong on a Christian. Right beside it he says put off covetousness. Look at it. In the same category as sexual sins he puts greediness, grasping for money, materialism - where our life is absorbed in the things we have, the things we get and we want to get more and more. You don't have to be rich to be consumed with materialism. He says this destroys you. The avarice and greediness as a religion dries up the soul itself.

Sexual vices rock both soul and body. They're both akin - they destroy us spiritually. Avarice, greed materialism and sexual perversity, immorality - put them off - bury them. Then he goes on in the same category and says to put off anger wrath malice - its bitterness, resentment, want, revenge, and explosiveness. Put these things off. These aren't the kind of clothes you ought to wear. You used to wear them before you were resurrected in Christ - a new creature - but now put it off. Then blasphemy - that's slander. That's seeking to injure others by destroying their good name - that's gossip. Paul lists long tongued gossip, hurtful, storytelling,

blasphemy of someone else, telling half-truths and leaving the wrong impression. Then he sums it all up by saying - lie not to one another. Quit your lying. Do you mean outright overt lies? No, he's talking about the kind of lies we tell by the way we live. The deceit of wearing a mask - I'm one thing and I pretend to be something else. It's the kind of lying we do in the "games people play". We play these games. We really are doing one thing, but we try to make people think something else. It's the double tongue kind of lying, where I say one thing to you and I say the opposite to someone else. That's lying! He says - these are the clothes that you are to put off, the clothes of the old man, the dead man that's buried in sin. Get these old clothes off and bury them too.

### **Second, as a Christian We Should Put Some Clothes On (vv. 10-14).**

Paul says, put on the new man after the image of Him, Jesus Christ. Put on the image of Christ - the appearance. That word image is in the Greek icon and it's not a familiar word to us. It's hard for us to get a hold of the full impact of this word but let's see if we can understand it. **To have the image of Christ - what is an image?** We talk about "in the beginning God created man in his own image," then Christ is the image of God and we in the image of Christ - used again and again. **The best definition of an image or icon is a representation of the person himself.**

You might use the idea of a seal. In that day, they had a ring that was a seal, an emblem. I would have my own seal if I were an official, a businessman or an emperor. I would press my seal into the wax of a document. That document might call for the execution of someone and they would examine the seal and see if it were a proper representation of me, my authority and my position. They would do what the document said. Now isn't that essentially what a signature is on a check? It goes to the bank and they examine that signature. They say - is that signature a true representation of you, your desire, and your will to have this money taken out of your account. If it is a true representation and image - they'll give the money as the check calls for. So we could say - we are to bear the image of Christ, the icon of Christ, the seal of Christ, the signature of Christ, so that people looking at us would say, "Ah, I see Christ, a true representation of Christ in you and me."

Well, that gives us meaning to that verse in Acts where it says, "They were first called Christians at Antioch." That word, "Christian," is a diminutive. It means "little Christ." They started calling the followers of Jesus - Christians as they saw them at Antioch. I wonder if people at work, at school, or around us, look at you and me and say, "That person is a little Christ? That person is just like Jesus. That's what the word image means. Paul is saying, having put off all these things - then put on clothes that will make us look like Jesus.

You want to be in style don't you? I'm not very good at that. I'm like a lot of you men, I get a suit and if I like it, I'll wear it every day. My wife will try to get me to wear something else, but I like my old suit. She'll say, "Well it's getting out of style, the lapels are too wide." I say, "Well I hadn't noticed that." Several years ago, my wife convinced me to go and buy a suit on my own, - a very dangerous thing to do! So I took her along - always play it safe men. I tried everything on and each time I'd go out and say, "How does this look? Do you like this?" I left it entirely up to her. She said, "I like that," and I said, "I think I like it too," so we bought it. I went back to the fitting room to have it fitted. I picked it up a week later and brought it home. She saw it for the first time on Sunday morning when I put it on. I walked out, "How do you like my new suit?" She looked at it

and cried, "What in the world - why did you do that?" I said, "What?" She said, "Those cuffs, why did you have them put cuffs on?" "I like cuffs," I replied, "But they're not in style", she replied. I said, "They are too. The suit I got four years ago had cuffs on." "I know," she exclaimed. "That was in style then, but it's not in style now." So I went and had the cuffs removed. Obviously, I wanted to be "in style."

Styles are changeable. Its stylish one day to wear this kind of clothes and it's stylish another day to change and wear another. It's not so in the clothes we were talking about as a Christian. Styles don't change. There are those who say there's something that can be right yesterday and wrong today - and wrong yesterday and right today - change is like style.

A friend who is a dean at one of our Baptist seminaries told me a story one day. He'd gone to a large meeting of deans and representatives from other denominations and divinity schools of state universities and some independent universities. They were a very mixed group but still called themselves divinity schools and supposedly are teaching religion. There was a man who was a dean in a divinity school who had with him a young woman to whom he was not married. This young woman was pregnant by him and they were living together. They were openly saying, "This is all right." Situational ethics had so consumed his concept of right and wrong that he was saying, "That's all right."

Some of the things Paul says here - put off sexual immorality - that'll never be in style. Marriage, fidelity and faithfulness will always be in style. It doesn't change. In those days Jesus called for purity of life, purity of speech, purity of mind and decency and order. Those things will always be in style then and today. Marriage, fidelity and faithfulness will always be in style. It doesn't change. These things that he called worldliness of the old man - Paul lists them here. They will never be in style and nobody can make it right. Just remember that! Marked with the image of Christ, the signature of Christ - let people look at us and see Jesus Christ in us. You wear these clothes and you'll always be in style.

The apostle writes, *Put on then (v. 13)*. The word *enduno* is the Greek word translated "put on." It means "to be enveloped in," "wrapped up in," or "clothed in these." We are to put on these things listed. If we really want to understand what it's saying, it's that we should have a heart of compassion. Put on the heart of compassion; put on kindness. Kindness is an important concept. It means not cutting down, not digging, not putting down. My how that would stop a lot of the conflict at home if we just put on Christ. To be kind one to another - to those that are closest to us. Kindness, humbleness of mind which is the opposite of egotism. We must take off the arrogance and superiority; and, instead, put on meekness and longsuffering. Christians could suffer a lot, put up with a lot.

Then Paul puts two together as he says, *forbearing one another and forgiving one another as Christ forgave you*. I like to think of these as the gloves we put on: forbearance and forgiveness - because this is the way we handle people as we deal with them. Forbearing - that's patience. Have a lot of patience. Then forgive and forgive and forgive even as Christ has forgiven you. Paul says, "Having put all these clothes on - look at them - a heart of compassion, kindness, humbleness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, and forgiving

I know some folks after reading and understanding this passage begin to check off the list and say, "I don't do this - I got this out of my life – I buried that - and I do this..." Paul did not write these words to give us a list to check.

Our puritan forefathers had a lot of merit in their teaching and gave us many good things - but they were so intent on keeping the law that they missed the love. Legalistic drive never lasts. It's too easy for us to illustrate the changing nature of the law versus the changeless nature of love. For example, in Alabama, according to Section 5539, of the 1928 code, it is unlawful for "any person to engage in domino playing on Sunday."

**I'm glad we don't live there! The law binds, but love sets us free.** This love will produce the "image of Christ" in you. What kind of clothes are you wearing?

Let us pray...