

## The Well Dressed Christian

### Colossians 3:12-17

**Introduction:** 1) Clothes say a lot about a person. Mark Twain said, “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.” “Dress for success” is still common advice that is wisely considered. The fact is most, if not all of us, give a tremendous amount of attention to what we wear and what is in style.

2) However, there is a major problem. Styles change and they change quickly. They also vary from culture to culture. What is viewed as acceptable and even attractive in one is seen as offensive and in poor taste in another.

3) But, I have some good news for devoted Christ followers. What was in style in the 1<sup>st</sup> century is still in style in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact it is in style anyplace and anytime. Four essential pieces of Christian apparel, 4 godly garments for the child of God are always appropriate and always in season. They are love, peace, thanksgiving and the Word of Christ.

4) Paul began Colossians 3 by noting that we have been set free in Christ to “seek those things which are above” (v.1) and to “set our mind on things above” (v.3). This is possible because we have been “raised with Christ” in the past (v.1), we are “hidden with Christ” in the present (v.3), and we will “appear with Him in glory” in the future (v.4). Therefore we are to put to death (vs. 5-7) and put off (v.8-9) the life of our old self, and we are to put on (v.10) those things that characterize our new self. We are new creations, with a new ethic (love), a new heart (peace), a new attitude (thanksgiving) and a new passion (Christ).

**Transition:** Four imperatives related to each of these virtues weave this text into a beautiful tapestry. Here is “the wardrobe of the saints” (Hughes, 101).

**I. Put on love.                      3:12-14**

- “Therefore” links these verses to vs. 1-11, especially vs. 8 and 10. Paul begins by providing a further motivation for our pursuing the life of a well-dressed Christian. He gives us a challenge.

**1) See the reasons for our clothing.              3:12**

- a) We have been selected by God – “the elect of God” (*NIV*, “God’s chosen people.”). Salvation begins with God, it is at His initiative. It is His work of grace.
- b) We have been set apart by God – “holy.”
  - negative → from sin, Satan, selfishness, and the systems of this evil age.
  - positive → unto the Savior for His service, His will and way in our life.
- c) We have become special to God – “beloved” (*W.A.R.*) III. The German theologian Karl Barth said the greatest spiritual truth he discovered: “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.”

**2) See the resources for our clothing.              3:12**

- “Put on” is an imperative. The main object of the imperative is the word “love” located way down in v. 14. Thus v. 12 provides a 5-fold description of what this love will look like. These godly garments are quite similar to and in essence a summary of the Fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. They also are qualities [that] characterize the life of Jesus’ life.
  - tender mercies (*NIV*, compassion), lit. “bowels of mercy.”

The seat of compassion and sympathy. Jesus was so moved with compassion for people that He wept for them (Luke 19:41). He fed them. He healed them. Christians should be the greatest helpers of the poor, blind, sick, and needy. Compassion is love in action rooted in a tender heart.

- Question: Do we weep for others?
  - kindness – This is the virtue of a man whose neighbor’s good is as dear to him as his own. The Good Samaritan in Luke 10 came upon a beaten man who was his enemy and bound the wounds, took him to an inn, spent a significant amount of money, and cared for him, and all at personal cost to himself.
  - humility – The attitude that esteems others better than oneself (Phil. 2: 3-4). It is the opposite of pride and human comparisons. Rather, it compares itself always and only to Christ. No place for hubris here!
  - meekness (*NIV*, “gentleness”) – strength brought under control, with a willingness to suffer injury rather than inflict it.
  - longsuffering (*NIV*, “patience”) – a word always related to how we respond to people not circumstances. It is an “extended governor” on the will before giving way to passion or action. To be longsuffering, God brings people into your life that make you suffer long! Be prepared!

### **3) See the results from our clothing.      3:13-14**

- These 5 internal or under-garments if you like, now give way to 2 particular outward garments that provide a “living advertisement” (Garland, 210) of the love made possible by our new life in Christ: bearing and forgiving (both present tense part.).
  - “bearing with one another” (Gal. 6:2) means to endure hardship or difficulty for

another, not out of some type of post-modern philosophy of tolerance, but out of a heart concern for the well-being of their soul. “Tough-love” gets at the idea. - “forgiving one another” may be the hardest garment of love to put on, but it may be the most important. Without it you will put on bitterness, and bitterness is the cancer of the soul.

Forgiveness is an action based on choice and not on emotion. Not every relationship that has caused us hurt will be restored, but every hurtful relationship needs forgiveness. The person who fails to forgive not only carries an unnecessary reminder of his hurt, but also falls short of God’s command.

It hurts to hurt! We need to ask ourselves if we are letting the pain of yesterday’s hurt stand in the way of letting God heal us today. He is the loving physician who is ready to heal. Are you willing to be His patient?

You ask, how do I get there? The last phrase of v. 13 is the key! (cf Eph. 4:32).

Remember: you will never forgive anyone as much as God in Christ has already forgiven you. How much did He forgive you? Everything!

- So when I have been dressed in Christ with this spiritual suit, love appears in a glorious visible display “over” or “above” it, and this is the bond of perfection, it is that which ties up and unites all these virtue together.

## **II. Put on peace.                    3:15**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> imperative is found in v. 15. We are to continually (pre. imp.) let peace rule. The background is the Hebrew *shalom* which carries with it the ideas of wellness, spiritual wholeness, personal and community well-being, justice and equity. It is a spiritual society where everyone’s needs are met and all are cared for.

**Transition:** Paul addresses 2 facets of the peace of God, better, the “peace of Christ” that we are to put on.

1) **Be controlled by peace.**

- The peace of Christ is to what? Rule. Where? In your hearts. The word “rule” comes from the world of athletics and means to act as umpire, to arbitrate as the decision-maker. Paul says let *shalom*, the peace of Christ be the final word in your hearts (plural). Let it decide what is right and let it make the call time and time again in your church.

2) **Accept the call to peace.**

- The peace of Christ is something to which we have been “called in one body.” We are now family, one community, one body. To fight and quarrel with each other is insane. It can be suicidal.
- How inconsistent is it for those of us who have experienced the peace of God to war among ourselves, draw battle lines in the sand, choose sides and take shots at one another. What a shame it is for the church. What a tragic witness it is for the world.

**Illustration:** Adrian Rogers says, when we are in the foxhole side by side we have no problem fighting against a common enemy that threatens our community.

However, when the war against the real enemy subsides and we are back in the barracks face to face, if we are not careful, and we are in the habit of fighting, we will begin to fight one another.

**III. Put on thanksgiving. 3:15, 17**

Here in a short, concise, spontaneous interjection Paul launches his 3<sup>rd</sup> imperative: “Be thankful” (pre. imp.). He follows up and expands the command in v. 17.

**1. Be thankful comprehensively.      3:15**

- There are no limitations or qualifications to this bold imperative. We are told to be thankful, a volitional act not an emotional decision. And why? Because we are naturally ungrateful. We get angry, fuss and fume when:
  - We don’t get what we want.
  - We don’t get it when we want it.
  - We don’t get how much we want.
  - We don’t get it the way we want it.
- Paul says in 1 Thess. 5:18, “In everything give thanks.” Clothe yourself with a comprehensive attitude of gratitude.

**2. Be thankful through Christ.      3:17**

- We are to give thanks to the Father thru Christ. Why? Because as 1 Thess. 5:18B says, the “in everything is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
- This is another one of the most difficult pieces of clothing to put on. It is also one of the most important, for it can be done only with the eyes of faith and a settled confidence in a sovereign and gracious God. When we understand God’s hand is in all things, through Christ, then we can thank Him for all things.
- Unable to trace His hand, we can still trust His heart!

**IV. Put on the Word of Christ.      3:16-17**

- Our final essential garment is the “word of Christ.” This is the only time this phrase occurs in the Bible. It also parallels, and this is important theologically, Eph. 5:18 and the command to be filled with the Spirit. In other words “let the word of Christ dwell (pre. imp.) in you richly” is equivalent to “be filled with the Spirit.”
- The word “dwell” means to take up residence or to make oneself at home. The word of Christ is to be at home in you 1) richly (abundantly) and 2) in all wisdom. Word and wisdom are inseparably connected.

**Transition:** What is the result of Christ and His word making themselves at home inside of you? There is a 3-fold blessing.

**1. It will encourage instruction.      3:16**

- There can be no teaching without the word and there can be no word without teaching. Here is wisdom learned and applied.
- We come to understand more fully each day the implications of the gospel and the truth that I am accepted and so I obey Christ, not that I obey Christ and then I am accepted. One is salvation, the other is slavery.

**2. It will encourage celebration.      3:16**

Teaching is instructing, admonishing is correcting. How we do this, at least in part, is fascinating to me. It is “by psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (emp. mine), singing with grace (emp. mine) in your hearts to the Lord.” Here the church has experienced both great success and great failure. Leander Keck exposes our failures when he writes,

“We have blown up balloons, danced in the aisles, marched behind banners; we have turned to jazz and sung ditties whose theological content makes a nursery rhyme sound like Thomas Aquinas. But it is not enough to make things livelier, or to set to music our aspirations and agendas. We can do better than that, and we must, for then the truth of God as made actual in Christ and attested in the gospel evokes the truthful praise of God. Christian worship enacts an alternative to the secularism which otherwise deludes us with its promises.” (Garland, 236).

- Marva Dawn rightly notes, “Shallow music forms shallow people. Real praise occurs when we open our hearts and cry, “speak Your Word so strongly we can’t hear anything else. (Garland, 234-40).
- Maurice Jones reminds us, “Every great revival in the Church has been accompanied by a corresponding outbreak and development of Christian hymnology.” (Garland, 240). Lord, revive us in Word and song!

### 3. **It will encourage consecration.**      **3:17**

Whatever – all encompassing.

you – personal and inclusive.

do – action oriented.

word or deed – comprehensive.

do all – comprehensive again, just in case we missed it.

the name of the Lord Jesus – His glory (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31) It truly is all about

Jesus!



**Conclusion:** 1) Let the word of Christ dwell, take up residence, make itself at home in you. What does this not mean? It does not mean to treat him like a guest, even a welcomed one. No, it means to treat him like family, with total freedom and access to every room and every corner of the house, even the closets!

2) C. S. Lewis says that we are ordered to “dress up as Christ” and though it may seem like pretense, it is in fact what we are ordered to do. He writes, “But there is also a good kind (of pretending), where the pretense leads up to the real thing. When you are not feeling particularly friendly but know you ought to be, the best thing you can do, very often, is to put on a friendly manner and behave as if you were a nicer person than you actually are. And in a few minutes as we have all noticed, you will be feeling friendlier than you were. Very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already.”

3) So here is heaven’s wardrobe beautifully woven from the hands of a divine tailor. Each of these garments was perfectly worn by Christ. He longs to see you wear them as well.