

CLOTHED IN CHRIST

Colossians 3:12-17

Last week we examined some of Paul's best known words, "*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*" Just prior to this passionate call to believers for unity and equality, Paul writes, "*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have **clothed yourselves in Christ.***"

Clothed in Christ! Clothed in Christ! I like saying it! I like hearing it! And I like feeling it! Clothed in Christ!

Listen as I now read how Paul defines being clothed in Christ. (Read Text)

Of all Paul's writings this may be some of the easiest to read and to understand; yet, some of the most difficult to apply. Why do I say this? Because in this text Paul is stating how important it is to allow the Christ that dwells within to become a visible and active reality in our human relationships—especially our relationship with other believers, with other people of faith, with other people in the family.

There is a little poem that goes: *To live above with saints I love, oh that will be glory for me. But to live here below with some of the saints that I know, well that's another story!* On a more serious note Ralph Martin in his commentary on Colossians writes, "*How we get along with other people is quite often the decisive test of the quality of our Christian living, and a truer index of our character than our pious feelings or private devotions.*"

It is not my intent today to beat us up because we may not always be what we should be in relationship to one another. My intent today is for us to understand the ability that we have to be clothed in Christ so that we can improve our human relationships. And to know that being clothed in Christ is far superior and more satisfying than wearing rags. Paul, in Colossians 3:8-10, identifies some of the rags that believers wear—anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive language. Continuing the analogy of clothing Paul writes that as believers we can strip off these old rags and be clothed in Christ. Paul further writes that our new clothing is in the image of the creator—of God! So when Paul describes the clothing of **compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience**, he is indicating that these are qualities of God. When we are clothed with these qualities we are reflecting God.

Further, Paul writes that those who are clothed in Christ, those who are putting on the image of God are God's chosen ones—holy and beloved! Smother yourself in that thought for a moment and see how it affects your self-esteem. We are God's chosen ones—holy and beloved!

Chosen, holy and beloved are terms used in the Old Testament, that is pre-

Jesus, to refer to the nation of Israel. Paul uses these terms, chosen, holy and beloved, to identify all believers; remembering, *“There is no longer Jew or Greek...for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”* We are chosen of God! We are beloved of God! We are in the image of God and clothed in Christ. The rags of our discontent, of our low self esteem, of our petty differences, and of our judgments and criticism can be stripped off. Our new wardrobe consists of **compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.**

To be clothed in Christ is to be clothed in the image of God. God is compassion! God is kindness! God is humility and meekness—just think of the cross! God is patience! God is love!

Right after Paul lists patience as a part of the believer’s new clothing he writes, *“Bear with one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other...”* Forgive each other! Paul says to be patient and to forgive. Now the concept of forgiving others in Christian teaching is not new; but I want us to understand what is behind the concept; why it is we are to forgive. Paul writes, *“...forgive each other; just as the lord has forgiven you, so must you forgive.”* Friends, God is forgiveness! To be in the image of God means being forgiving. Paul is clear that as believers we are to catch the divine spirit. We take off the rags of grudge-holding and resentment and we put on our new divine clothing of forgiveness. Next week we are going to delve into this topic when we look at another well known saying of Paul’s, *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*

Paul instructs believers to put on the clothing of love. He writes that it is love that makes the new wardrobe coordinated. It is love that binds all of the believers Godly image qualities together. Without love can there be compassion? Without love can there be kindness? Without love can there be true humility and meekness? Without love can there be patience? Without love can there be forgiveness?

Three times in today’s text Paul calls on believers to be thankful to God for their new clothing—for being clothed in Christ. Who among us would prefer to wear rags in place of nice clean well fitting clothing? In Christ we have the opportunity and the ability to wear the fine clothing of **compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness and love.** Clothing that can truly reflect the image of God within. O, what a reason to be thankful!

Now here is where the rubber meets the road. I have never had any of my clothing to jump out of my closet and onto my body. I can stand in front of my closet all day and wait for my clothes to take the initiative to put themselves on me. And friends, it just is not going to happen! I have the privilege of having nice clothes—they are there—all I have to do is take the initiative to put them on. As God’s chosen and beloved we have access to some fine clothing—we can be

clothed in the qualities of Christ and in the image of God. But just as Paul writes we must clothe ourselves. We can wear the rags that will continue to make us discontented and that cause us not to reflect the image of God within or we can be clothed in Christ—but we must decide. I must decide. You must decide.

I believe that wearing the fine clothing of Christ can help bring healing emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually. But I also believe that by reflecting the image of God through our **compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness and love** we are able to help bring healing to others as well; perhaps even being the answer to their prayers.

Many centuries ago, there was a young man from a rural setting that went to live in a large city and became involved with the wrong crowd. He lived a wild and degenerate life; becoming involved in many hurtful things which almost destroyed him. Then one day he met a man who happened to be a preacher. This young man was intrigued by the preacher. He listened to the things that the preacher taught and believed about God and Jesus the Christ; until he himself began to believe. That young man was St Augustine. And the preacher was Ambrose, the pastor of the cathedral in Milan. Augustine wrote of Ambrose, "*I began to love him, not at first as a teacher of the truth, which I had despaired of ever finding in the church, but rather I began to love him as a fellow creature who was kind to me.*"

What an open door kindness can be! What an open door compassion can be! What an open door patience can be! What an open door meekness and humility can be! What an open door forgiveness can be! What an open door love can be!

We can strip ourselves of the rags that only close the door—anger, wrath, malice and slander. We can be clothed in Christ. We can reflect the image of God within. Why? Because we are chosen and beloved of God! But we must take the initiative! It is up to us!

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