

OUR NEW “DRESS CODE” FOR CHURCH (COLOSSIANS 3:12-13)

I want to start out this morning with a **question**: Have you ever belonged to an organization... or worked for a company...or attended an event—that required a **dress code**? My guess is that most of us have. If you belonged to Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts, you had a **uniform**. If you served in the military, you had **several** uniforms—and were expected to wear the appropriate uniform when told to do so. Most **schools**—even if they don’t have “uniforms”—have some kind of a dress code. But what about **churches**? Do **churches** have a dress code? We do—but probably not the kind you think!

Take your Bibles and turn again to Colossians 3. As stated a number of times over the last couple of weeks, the first two chapters of this book emphasize **instruction and teaching**; the last two chapters focus on **applying and doing** in light of what we have been taught. And chapter 3:1-4 **begins** with—and kind of **wraps up**—the **instructional/teaching part**.

Notice again vs 3. God counts the life of born-again, blood-bought believer as being “hid with Christ.” That means our sin—and I believe our sin-nature—are counted as having **died with** Christ. Not only that, we are given a **new nature**—and are counted as being **risen with Christ** according to verse 1!

Now vs 4. Here we see that there is a day coming when Christ shall appear—and we “shall also appear with Him in glory.” We will go to be **with Him**—but we will also become **like Him**.

--Philippians 3:21a “Who [referring to Jesus] shall **change** our vile body, that it may be **fashioned like unto His glorious body...**”

So **how should we live** in light of what we **have now** in Christ—and what we **will have** in the future? It **doesn’t matter**, right? You can **live any way you want** because Jesus died for **all your sins** and God has promised to **finish** the good work He began in you and **make you** like Christ!

Is that the message of the Bible? **Absolutely not!** Since ye are risen with Christ (vs 1)—and your life is hid with Christ (vs 3)—Paul says, ‘**Change your uniform!**’ **Put off** the **immoral behavior** that characterizes the unsaved (vss 5-6)—and **put off** the sins of the heart (and mouth) listed in verses 8-9!

Why? Because you have **put off the old man**—your **old way of life** controlled by your sin nature; and have **put on the new man**—a new way of life that is influenced by your **new nature** and the Holy Spirit.

And your new **nature**—and **new way** of life—puts you in a **new community**: the body of Christ where all are equal—**except** Christ! Christ is **not equal** to us—He is **above all!** And since He is the **head** of the church, we need to **follow** Him...and **represent** Him...and **submit** to Him. And we are to “wear His uniform,” so to speak! What does that uniform **look like?**

Notice what it says in verses 12-14. Do these things characterize you? They’re supposed to—if you are a child of God—because this is “the dress code” for the church!

First, let’s consider... **1. The command to “put-on”** The Greek word that the verb “put-on” comes from is used 27 times in the Greek NT and 17 of those times it refers to the literal putting on of a piece of clothing or armor. Here in vs 12, it is in the **imperative**—meaning it is a **command**.

A. The recipients

Who is the command given to? **Who** is supposed to put on the characteristics listed in verses 12 through 14? **All believers**—not just a select few! We know from chapter 1, verse 2, that Paul is writing to “the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse”—not just to the **leaders** of the church! So this command to put on these character traits was **to all of** God’s children—and by extension is a command **to all of us!**

B. The reason

What is the reason we should put on these characteristics? Because we are “the elect of God, holy and beloved...” Of the **seven** words I just read, **one** of them is often times considered **controversial**. Which one? The “E”-word, right—**elect**. What does **elect** mean? It means “picked out, chosen, selected.”

“Picked out” for **what?** Chosen/selected—to **be saved** and to **become a child** of God! We understand—and agree with the truth that God **adopts us** into His family—we don’t adopt ourselves! In other words, God makes the **first move**—not us! How do we **know** that?

--Psalm 53:2-3 “**God looked down** from heaven upon the children of men, to see **if there were any** that did understand, **that did seek God. Every one of them** is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; **there is none that doeth good**, no, not one.” **People** don’t search for God—**God** searches for them!

--And Jesus plainly says in **John 6:44**, “**No man** can come to me, **except the Father** which hath sent me **draw him**: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

So the controversy is not **who** seeks **who**—God unquestionably seeks us! And the controversy is not **if we would draw near to God** without Him drawing us because **we wouldn’t!** The controversy comes in answering **why God chose** us?

--Does God choose us based on **foreknowledge?** In other words, does God choose us because **He knew** we would repent and trust Jesus for forgiveness and salvation?

OR

--Does God choose us **just because** He chose us—because He predetermined to do so?

And the answer is...**I don’t know**—and I’m okay with that! And I’m being totally serious!

Just this week I heard a Facebook reel about **R.C. Sproul**—a staunch believer in God choosing people, but not based on foreknowledge—and **Billy Graham**, who emphasized man’s choice and free will. I obviously can’t verify this, but the story goes that R.C. Sproul was asked, “Do you believe you will see Billy Graham when you get to heaven?” R.C. Sproul **hesitates** and says, “**No**”—and leaves it at that—for about 5 seconds!

And then Dr. Sproul said this, “No, I will not see Billy Graham in heaven because when we get there, he will be so near the throne—and I will be so far away—that I don’t think I’ll have any chance of seeing him!”

The point: Since **godly, brilliant men** have been on both sides of the issue—and have “agreed to disagree”—**who am** I to think that I can figure it out? Not only that—and some of you have heard me say this before—“Since I don’t have to **do God’s** part, why do I have to **understand** it?”

My part is to “preach the gospel to every creature”—not try to figure out **who** God is going to save—and **why!**

Back to verse 12. Paul elaborates on **who** the elect are by furthering describing them as “holy and beloved.” Who are God’s “holy and beloved” ones? **His children**—all of them!

--What does Paul mean by “holy?” Is he saying that all of God’s children are **pure** and **upright** and **sin-free?** No—although we should **strive** to be! The word “holy” here is the same word translated “saints” in Colossians 1:2. In this context, it means **set apart by God**—and **for God**. It should hardly be surprising that **God’s children** are “set apart” from those who **are not** God’s children!

But—praise God—we are also “beloved”—meaning **loved by God**. The word for love here is “ag-ap-ah’-o”—the **highest form** of love in the Greek. The Topical Lexicon puts it like this: “Far beyond sentiment, “ag-ap-ah’-o” describes a volitional, covenant-loyal love that seeks the true good of another regardless of merit or cost.” Stated another way, it is “more than merely affection—it is a wholehearted, unconditional, devoted love of the heart.”

And God’s unchanging...undying...and unsurpassed love for us is what should motivate us to “wear” the characteristics that Paul lists for us in these verses!

2. The characteristics of our “clothing”

In the remainder of verse 12, we have a list of **five** virtues that God through Paul says we are to put on. Before I define—and give you an example—of each one, I want to point out a couple of things.

--**First**, each of these characteristics are seen in either God the Father, God the Son, or both!

--**Second**, they are all ingredients necessary for having healthy relationships! **Case in point:** what kind of relationship will you have with someone who is uncompassionate, unkind, proud, and intolerant?

Not much of one, right?

A. Bowels of mercies = heart of compassion

Paul is obviously not talking about a *literal bowel*—like the *small* bowel and *large* bowel, right? The Greek word it is translated from carries the idea of “**gut-level compassion.**” It is an inner emotion that moves people **to action**. Jesus uses the **verb-form** of the same word to describe the compassion that the father had **on his prodigal son** (Lk 15:20)—and that the **Good Samaritan had** on the man he found on the road half-dead (Lk 10:33). **Ever wonder** how you’d react if you came down the road and found someone in need? We’d like to think we would have been **just like the Good Samaritan** and shown compassion. And yet, just last Sunday we had a little red car in our parking lot that pulled too far ahead and was obviously stuck. I wonder if some of us noticed that, but got in our cars and drove off? ‘Alright preacher, get back to preachin’ and stop meddlin’!

B. Kindness

Kindness carries the idea of being **good** to others—and **meeting real needs**. Two notable uses in the NT both refer to God’s kindness in our **salvation**.

--**Ephesians 2:7** “That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding **riches of His grace in His kindness toward us** through Christ Jesus.”

--**Titus 3:3-4** “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that **the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,**”

--Not a very flattery picture of us, is it? But in spite of what **we were like**, God’s kindness and love toward man appeared—in the person of the Savior!

What about us? Are we known for **being kind**? In the devotional booklet *Streams in the Desert*, the story is told of an eccentric old man who carried a little can of oil with him everywhere he went. Why? Because if he passed through a door—or gate—that squeaked or was hard to open, he oiled the hinge or latch. “And thus he passed through life lubricating all hard places and making it easier for those who came after him.”

The application? “There are many lives that creak and grate harshly as they live day by day. Nothing goes right for them. They need lubricating with the oil of gladness, gentleness, or thoughtfulness. Have you your own can of oil with you?” (Volume 1; December 8th)

C. Humbleness of mind—humility

Does pride cause problems in relationships? **Proverbs 13:10** says, “**Only by pride cometh contention:** but with the well advised is wisdom.” Pretty strong statement, isn’t it—especially the first part of the verse! One translation put it like this: “**By pride cometh only, nothing but, contention.**” Is there ever an argument or disagreement where **pride is not** a factor? I think you’d be hard-pressed to find an exception!

Instead of pride, we are to put on **humbleness of mind**. Biblehub defines it like this: “the **deliberate refusal** to advance oneself, coupled with a **readiness** to esteem God and others above self. It is **active**, not passive: a **chosen mindset** that governs words, decisions, and relationships.”

How can we develop a mindset that refuses to **advance self**—and that is eager to esteem God and others **above** self? **First**, recognize that the **dragon of pride** will battle you till the day you die! Some sins you can—and will—gain victory over, but pride will always be your nemesis! **Second**, ask God to **help you!** He wants you to be humble—and will help you to be. **Third, memorize Scripture** that God can use to remind you that you are getting off track.

Here are some that have personally helped “cut me down to size.”

Jer 45:5a “And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not...”

I Cor 4:7 “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

II Cor 15:10a “But by the grace of God I am what I am...”

Phil 2:5 “Let this mind [attitude] be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...”

I Pet 5:5b “...and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

D. Meekness = gentleness—and strength under control

Most commentaries point out that it is difficult to find one single **English word** that accurately captures the idea of the what the **Greek word** means. Steven Cole points out that it was used in classical Greek of **trained animals**—like horses—that although strong and powerful, yields itself to the will of its rider.

Jesus described Himself as meek and lowly in heart (Mt 11:29)—and yet no one would have accused Jesus of being weak! He drove out the **money changers** with a whip—and yet parents eagerly brought their **children to Jesus** to hold them and bless them!

What about us? Is there a **gentleness about us** that attracts people—or a **roughness** that drives people away? Galatians 6:1 “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the **spirit of meekness**; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

E. Longsuffering = patience, the quality of being “long-tempered”

“Long-suffering” is used of **God waiting** while Noah built the ark (I Peter 3:20)—and of God **withholding judgment** upon those that deserve judgment (Romans 9:22). Paul even refers to God’s **longsuffering toward him** as a blasphemer and persecutor of the church before he was saved (I Tim 1:13-16). It is also a **fruit of the Spirit**—meaning God is the one who produces it in us.

The verse that helped me the most, though, to kind of wrap my mind around this concept is **II Timothy 4:2** “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, **exhort with all long suffering** and doctrine.” Paul, it seems, is telling Timothy—be faithfully preaching the word—but **be patient** when it comes to expecting growth and response in those you are preaching to and teaching!

But what about for **non-preachers**? How does this apply **to you**? I found this **quote quite helpful**: “Patience enables unity by **absorbing offenses** and allowing space for growth, reflecting the Lord’s own dealings with His people.” (Biblehub, Greek Lexicon, 3115, “Communal Harmony”)

In other words, remember how slow you sometimes are to learn the lessons God is teaching you—and have that same kind of patience toward others!

3. Carrying out the characteristics—in conflicts in the church!

Most commentators point out that Paul kind of “shifts gears” and that **forbearance and forgiveness** are **not** two **additional virtues**. Instead, they **help explain** how the five listed virtues can be **carried out**. **Why** do they suggest that? Because in verse 12, Paul says to put on (**the verb**) and then lists **five nouns**. But when we get to verse 13, we see that **forbearing** isn’t a **noun**—it’s a **verb**! And so is **forgiving**!

So these are **new actions** that are to be taking place—**not new items of clothing** to put on! And the reason I’m using the phrase “conflicts in the church” is because Paul was talking about the church in verse 11—and he refers to “a quarrel against any” here in the middle of verse 13! And even though it says “if any **man** have a quarrel, we know it can pertain to ladies, too!

A. Forbearing one another

What does it mean to “forbear” one another? It means to bear with, to tolerate, to put up with! Of the 15 times the Greek word is used in the NT, the KJV translates it “**suffer**” 7 times. Here’s one example that you might be familiar with.

Jesus comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration, and a man tells Jesus that he had brought his demon-possessed son to His disciples, but they could not cast the demon out. **Mark 9:19** “He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I **suffer** you? bring him unto me.” You can almost hear Jesus, **sighing**, can’t you? “How long shall I endure...and put up with...and tolerate your lack of faith?”

How **tolerant** are you of people and their idiosyncrasies? We are all different, aren’t we? And sadly, we are of the mindset that if people would only be **more like us**, it would be so **much easier to get along with them**! Here’s my advice if you are tempted to think that way—**get over yourself**!

Why? Because the glasses that you are looking through are **negatively tinted** when you look at others—but are **rosy** when you look in the mirror! Remember—the way you **judge others** is the way you will **be judged**! Not **everything** that “rubs you the wrong way” **has to** rub you the wrong way!

Let it go! Be a duck—meaning let it run off your back! Don't specialize in being **offended**—specialize in being **forbearing!**

B. Forgiving one another

Are you a **forgiving** person? God wants us to be, doesn't He? We have the phrase "forgiving one another" **fairly early** in the verse—and then we have it **at the end**: "even as **Christ forgave you**, so also **do ye**."

Twice then—in the same verse—God says that the way to show you are "following the dress code" is to be a **forgiving** person. We obviously don't have time to do this topic justice so unless the Lord directs otherwise, we will be coming back to this verse next week and delve into this topic a little more.

For now, though, I want to remind us of the **reason** we should be a forgiving person—because **Christ forgave you!** Not only did **Christ** forgive us, so did the **Father!** **Ephesians 4:32** "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.**"

I'm not saying it is easy to forgive, but it **should be**—and here's **why**. If a **perfect Being**—that you have sinned against **countless times** and in **countless ways**—can forgive you, why can't you forgive a **fellow sinner?**

'But Pastor, you don't know what **they've done to me!**' To which I reply, 'But so-and-so, you don't know how much **you've sinned** against God Almighty! Stated another way, no one has **sinned against you** more than **you have sinned against God!**'

You have been forgiven **much!** Be a **forgiver!**

So what would God have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, have you been forgiven **by God?** You striving to put on these five characteristics—and trying to be a forbearing and forgiving person—will not earn you forgiveness of sins! Works don't work, right?

Forgiveness of sins is possible only because the debt we owe for sins—death—was paid for by **someone else**. And that Someone, of course, is God Himself—in the person of Jesus—who died on the cross as our Substitute! But He is not your Substitute unless you personally receive Him as a gift.

Have you done that?

2. Second, are you following the dress code that God gave us in these verses?

--God obviously wants you to be—and will help you "put them on."

--But you have a part—and God won't do your part for you!

--Can I make a suggestion?

--Take your sermon outline—and your Bible—and look again at these five characteristics.

--Be honest about **which one** you need to work on the most, then find verses that will help you with that particular characteristics.

--If you need help, I'd be glad to give you some pointers as to how to go about looking for verses.