

Colossians 3:12-17. Growing in Christ involves renewing the mind with truth while replacing vices with virtues. Like putting on clean clothes, Scripture exhorts God's people to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience with love holding all together as a belt. A church filled with believers characterized by these garments will be a good one, indeed.

Few monarchs ever willingly step down. Either an enemy topples their power or death takes their life. No one who inherits a throne throws it away, except in the case of the British monarch, King Edward VIII. He ascended the throne in 1936 only to abdicate later the same year to pursue one of his mistresses to marriage. Not once in all the centuries from Alfred the Great to the present, more than eleven-hundred years, had such a thing happened (and on the eve of WWII, no less).

Edward's father, King George V, had been a popular monarch who groomed his eldest son to reign. Yet, Edward was a socialite at heart, known to many in his younger years as the Playboy Prince. Some of his letters reveal a man who hated responsibility. He liked being in the limelight, even leading others, but he despised the fact that duty might get in the way. It did when he ascended the throne.

Queen Elizabeth II reflected upon her uncle Edward saying "you couldn't reason with him, nobody could. The whole government tried, everybody tried." And though it seems everyone did, it didn't matter. Edward VIII reigned less than a year before he threw the crown away. He simply refused to be who he rightfully was, a king.

Paul didn't want the Colossians to make this kind of mistake. In Christ, they had rightfully become "members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19). They were now "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ", even "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (Rom 8:17, 1 Pet 2:9). They had been adopted into the most royal of all lines as "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved" by Him (v. 3:12). They, like all believers, enjoyed a royal position in the family of the King of Kings. Would they live like it?

Paul had told the Colossians to renew their minds and to "put to death" all that's consistent with their old lifestyle (v. 3:5). He now says to "put on" all that's consistent with Christ. *Look and live like you belong to God!* Unlike Edward VIII, be who you truly are.

A SET OF CLEAN CLOTHES

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14

Change doesn't happen by ending old ways or patterns. Anger and rage, covetousness, lustful eyes, a lying tongue—focus on ending these, and you may end up exchanging one sin for another. Conquer an addiction, as many do, and pride or self-exaltation may fill the void. Like preparing for the day, you need to do more than take off your pajamas. You also need to wash and put on clean clothes. So, renew your mind with God's Word and "put on" the clothes you were meant to wear as a son or daughter of the King.

Colossians 3:12-13—"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."

COMPASSION

The word literally refers to the "bowels" or abdominal organs, to experience something in the pit of your stomach. Compassion is to look upon suffering and not turn away but feel the pain of another. It is Jesus who looked upon the crowds and felt a deep gut-level pain within. He had compassion for them who were "like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6:34).

KINDNESS

Kindness means doing good. The psalmist said all the creatures of the oceans look to God "to give their food in due season." Praising God for His kindness he said, "when You open Your hand, they are filled with good things" (Psa 104:27-28). It's the same idea, even the same word, that Paul used. Kindness isn't a state, but an action that blesses and keeps blessing others with good things.

HUMILITY

A humble person isn't one who thinks less of himself. Rather, he doesn't think of himself but looks outward "to the interests of others" (Phi 2:4). The actual word is nowhere to be found in ancient sources outside the Bible. Humility simply wasn't a virtue. Instead of asserting ourselves, boasting, and defending our rights, look to Christ who "though He was in the form of God... humbled Himself... to the point of death" (Phi 2:6-8). That's humility.

A New Wardrobe

MEEKNESS

Meekness isn't weakness, but a willingness to suffer injury instead of inflicting it. Consider Moses who faced tremendous criticism while the Israelites wandered in the hot desert. They mistreated him and rebelled, but rather than respond in kind, he prayed God would forgive the people (Num 14:13-19). Meekness rises above personal injury to respond with blessing. What could be stronger than this?

PATIENCE

It's a slowness to boil over. Perhaps you try to speak, and it's met with interruptions and misrepresentations before you try again only to receive a flash of anger and insults. Patience, *macrothumia*, speaks of a fuse so long it never explodes, self-restraint, a coolness in battle that can't be broken. It best describes God's mercy towards sinners, a "perfect patience" (1 Tim 1:16).

When does a church need these articles of clothing? Constantly. If you pause to look around next Sunday morning, you'll notice many hurting people who need compassion. Opportunities to do good are all around you. And every church has conflicts that could be defused with humility, meekness, and patience.

Colossians 3:14—“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

But what is compassion without love? What is kindness or any other virtue without love? I'm not sure, because none of these can exist without love. Love "binds everything together in perfect harmony." As a belt holds up the pants, so love holds together these virtues. It keeps them from falling off, so to speak.

Believers wearing these clothes will forbear or keep enduring with one another and learn to forgive offenses (v. 3:13). This is how the church was meant to be. Paul envisioned a church in Colossae so connected and integrated that believers would truly see one another as brothers and sisters forever bound together in Christ. He wanted them to understand this and live it out. May we have the same heart among our brothers and sisters today.

A NEW COAT TO WEAR

COLOSSIANS 3:15-17

Growth is a process, not an event. It happens little by little as God's Spirit changes His people to become more like Him. And yet, change doesn't automatically happen. Why not? Because God's people have a responsibility in their growth (Phi 2:12-13). They have to work at it.

Paul encouraged the Colossians to renew their minds while replacing vices with virtues. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience are some of the Christian's new clothes, and love is the belt that pulls them together. What follows are three general commands to conclude this section (Col 3:1-17). Like a coat, may we put these on as well...

LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE YOUR HEARTS

A church not at peace reflects a people not at peace. Sometimes we want what we can't have and fight or quarrel with other believers (Jas 4:1). Sometimes we become consumed with this world and filled with its anxieties (Matt 6:24-34). We can lack, as Christians, all the virtues that Paul set before the Colossians. And the result? We forfeit peace.

God wants His people not have a little peace in their chaotic lives, but to be ruled by His peace. This means that at the crossroads of a decision ask which choice, if any, will help you better rest in Christ. That inner peace Christ provides, a tranquil spirit, is priceless. Make decisions that will maintain it.

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY

It was said of the Puritan preacher, John Bunyan, that "this man is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere—his blood is Bibling, the very essence of the Bible flows from him." That's the idea in this second command. Be a sponge soaked deep in the living waters of the Word. Absorb the truths of Scripture. Saturate your mind with them. Let these things dominate your thinking.

What will happen when God's people aren't content to snack upon His Word but want multicourse meals? They begin to talk about it, teaching one another what they've learned and admonishing when necessary. As the Word becomes dearer, it moves more than a believer's mind but also his heart. He sings (v. 3:16).

LET THE NAME OF CHRIST BE SEEN IN ALL YOU DO

Paul exhorted the Ephesians to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph 4:1). Don't be a spiritual version of King Edward VIII, but live a life that's consistent with who you are in Christ. It's the same charge Paul gave to the church in Colossae, and it's the goal of all he's said in Colossians 3:1-17.

True spirituality begins and ends with Christ. As you renew your mind while replacing old patterns with new ones, may you become a little more like Christ each day. May you and I learn to live out in practice our glorious position in Christ.