

# Colossians 3:12-14

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[ 0 : 00 ] I mentioned in introducing the reading just a few moments ago how in the morning we were exploring the theme of clothing in the light of two texts in particular in the book of Isaiah.

And we noticed how in Isaiah 59 you have this picture painted of God as he sees the plight of mankind, clothing himself with a view to his saving mission on behalf of a lost world.

And then in the following chapter, two chapters on in what was really our principal text, you have this interesting development where you have the one who so recently has clothed himself now clothing his son, clothing the anointed one, clothing the Messiah for his particular task in the saving initiative of God on our behalf.

And then finally what we saw was how Jesus having completed his work on our behalf wonderfully clothes us with his own righteousness.

righteousness, God's people clothed by faith in the righteousness of Jesus. And what was very evident, I hope, in what we were seeing is that that robe of righteousness that is ours, that we are clothed with, is all of God's doing.

[ 1 : 31 ] This is a righteousness not our own. We are, in a very real sense, passive. We receive what another has done on our behalf. And there's a sense in which we're even dressed by God in this robe of righteousness.

Now this evening I want to continue with the same theme, but I want to focus on clothing that we are called to put on. So clothing where there is a very real sense in which we have something to do, where the onus is on us to clothe ourselves.

And that's the focus of the passage or of the verses that we've just read. And the idea being that those who have already been clothed with the righteousness of Christ are called to conduct themselves in a manner that gives evidence to that reality.

And the picture used by Paul is that of clothing or of clothing ourselves. Well, we've read the verses then in Colossians chapter 3 and verse 12. And as we maybe just make our way through the verses, also just by way of introduction, you'll be able to see how there's, I guess, three elements in these verses.

We're just going to focus on one of them, but there are three elements. At the beginning of verse 12, you have a description of who we are, God's chosen people, holy, dearly loved.

[ 2 : 54 ] That is who we are. And then Paul goes on, in the light of who we are, what we are to wear, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

And then in verse 14, he adds another item of clothing over all these virtues put on love. So who we are, what we are to wear, how we are to clothe ourselves, and then it follows on from that.

There's also another element of how we are to behave, what we are to do. Bear with each other, forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another, forgive as the Lord forgave you. So we could maybe see those three elements, but this evening we're going to focus in on the second one, this idea or this charge to clothe ourselves in the manner described.

Now there is, I think even as we've gone through those verses just very swiftly, there is an order, there is a logical order in Paul's argument. You know, what we wear is determined by who we are.

[ 3 : 59 ] There is clothing that is appropriate, and indeed especially provided for those who have been chosen by God. And as we look at this aspect of these three verses, I think there's three things that we want to think about.

First of all, this reality that we have to clothe ourselves. So that's really in distinction to what we were thinking about this morning of God clothing us. Here the onus is on us.

We have to clothe ourselves. So we want to notice that and just draw out the implications of that. But then we want to look at the clothes themselves. What are these items of clothing that are

provided for us, certainly, but that we need to put on, that we need to clothe ourselves with? And then finally, we want to just notice what we might call the outcome or the result. What will we look like if we take seriously and if we obey the charge that we find here that Paul directs to us? Clothe yourselves with. So we want to imagine that we're going to be obedient to this, and we want to think, well, what will that look like? You know, when we do clothe ourselves in this way, what will we look like?

[ 5 : 09 ] So that's the way we want to think about this charge this evening. So first of all, the simple fact that we want to note is that we have to clothe ourselves.

Who we are, chosen, holy, dearly loved, who we are is all of God. It's all of grace. God chose you. God set you apart. God decided to love you of his own initiative and prerogative. But having been chosen and set apart and loved by God, there is now, says Paul, something we need to do. We have to clothe ourselves in such a way as befits our status as children of God. God provides the clothing, but we have to put it on.

We could maybe think of, as a way of illustrating this, we could maybe think of how it is with our own children. Children have very little say in the matter of coming into this world.

[ 6 : 15 ] That's something they can't decide to do. It just happens. Well, it doesn't just happen, but they have very little input into it happening. And as they grow up, you know, from infancy, well, their parents provide for them.

And we try and do so adequately. We provide the food that they eat, and we provide the clothes that they wear. And when they're very, very small, not only do we provide the clothing, but we actually dress them.

We put the clothes on. It's something that they're not capable of doing at that stage of their development. But, of course, the time comes when that has to stop.

As parents, we continue to provide the clothing, well, for a period, not forever. But then the child needs to put it on themselves. And it would be a very strange thing if a child was growing older and older, you know, getting to school, and still expecting his parents to clothe him.

The child needs to clothe himself. Now, that can be difficult, certainly at the beginning. You know, if it's a shirt with little buttons and they're not used to doing that, that can be difficult. Tying shoelaces, that's a big challenge to overcome for any child growing up.

[ 7 : 29 ] And great satisfaction when they manage to tie their shoelaces for the first time. But that's the natural order of things. We provide the clothing. The child puts on the clothing.

And really, this is what we're being told here. God does so much for us. But then there comes a point when he says, well, there are things that you have to do for yourself as a Christian.

I'm with you to help you, to encourage you. But there are things that you have to do for yourself. As a believer, as a disciple of Jesus, you have to make every effort to live a life that reflects who you are.

And that involves decision. It involves effort. It involves discipline. It involves perseverance. It doesn't just happen. We don't sit back passively and expect God to be the one who does everything to enable us to grow.

No, we have to put of our own effort. That capacity to put of our own effort is God-given, but we have to do it.

[ 8 : 31 ] And among those duties that require conscious decision and effort is this matter that Paul addresses here. We have to clothe ourselves.

Clothe yourselves. He's speaking to the believers. He's saying, this is what you have to do. So that's the first thing I want to say, simply to make that point and hopefully not overstress it, but simply to make that simple point that we have to clothe ourselves.

And then we move on to the clothing, which in some ways is the heart of the matter. What are these items of clothing that we are to put on? Well, Paul here talks of six garments that we have to wear. And let's just notice each in turn. And we'll just do it in the order in which they appear there in the text. Clothe yourselves. First of all, it says with compassion.

Clothe yourselves with compassion. What's compassion? Well, compassion is a deep sensitivity to the needs and sufferings of others. Our English word, the way it's constructed, which really derives from Latin, does reflect, I think, well that the original sense of the word, the word compassion.

[ 9 : 46 ] If you break it up into two parts, simply means with passion or with suffering. And when we think about what the implications of that are, compassion is not just feeling sorry for somebody.

You know, you might see somebody in a difficult circumstance and you feel sorry for them. You feel some pity for them. But compassion is more than that. Compassion is suffering with the one who is in that plight.

It is sharing the suffering. If we think of the words that Paul uses to really speak of the same thing, but in other words, he speaks of how we are to mourn with those who mourn.

So not just feel sorry for them, not feel pity for them, not even think, well, what could I do to help them? Though there may be that, but to actually mourn with them, to suffer with them.

And when we think of it in those terms, more importantly when we experience it in those terms, we can see how compassion mobilizes. If you share in the suffering of the sufferer, then you become a sufferer.

[10:50] And the impulse to relieve the suffering becomes more real, becomes more personal, becomes more intense. And in a congregation of God's people, it really ought not to be a case where you're, you know, we're divided into perhaps those who are suffering and then those who relieve suffering.

And, you know, two distinct groups. Now you can maybe change groups depending on your circumstance. And so at some point you're one of the ones who is suffering. And then at another point in your life, you're actually the one who's relieving suffering.

But I don't think we should think of it in those terms. But rather, the idea of compassion is that there's a real sense in which we are all sufferers together. And as we are clothed with compassion, we share and struggle as fellow sufferers.

And Paul says, this is one of the items of clothing that you are to put on. And I don't know if we should think there's any particular significance in the order, perhaps not. But it certainly is the first one that he mentions.

Clothe yourselves with compassion. So is that a garment that you are wearing today? You need to put it on and you can look at yourself and say, well, is that a garment that I wear?

[12:03] Is this a garment that I am clothed with? But then let's move on. What's the second garment that Paul mentions there? Clothe yourselves with compassion and then with kindness.

I think kindness, we're familiar with the word and not just with the word but with the reality. But I think kindness speaks of action. Kindness finds expression in what we do.

You don't feel kindness. You do kindness. And so again, I pose myself the question and I pose you the question, is this a garment that you have put on today?

Or maybe if we just pause for a moment and think about the week that has passed. So the last six or seven days. And just reflect on what we have done, how we have occupied ourselves in this week that has ended.

During this week, has there been any evidence of us having put on this garment of kindness as we seek to do kindness in favor of others?

[13:09] So we are to clothe ourselves with compassion, with kindness. And then the third item of clothing identified is humility. Humility is a very distinctive Christian virtue.

Thinking of ourselves before, or rather thinking of others before ourselves. And there you go, just how much it's in our DNA to think of ourselves first. That even in saying it, the natural kind of automatic default is to say thinking of ourselves first.

But no, humility as a distinctive Christian virtue is to think of others before ourselves. Seeking the good of others before our own. Willingness to do the most menial tasks, or at least tasks that are deemed to be menial, with no expectation of reward or recognition.

In the context of when Paul was writing to the pagans that surrounded the church, and among which the church lived, and indeed all those who were members of the church had come from that context.

To the pagan world, humility equated to weakness. And far from being a virtue, it was a weakness to be avoided, to be humble.

[14:28] But not so for the child of God. And when we think about putting on this garment, perhaps the greatest obstacle to putting on this garment is our unwillingness to remove another.

I think in this case, there's a need, before we can even put on humility, there's a need to remove another garment, and that's the garment of pride. Again, if we just think of it, maybe by way of illustration, perhaps you've been out running, or you've been to the gym.

Why anybody would want to do that is beyond me, but there are people who do those kind of things. But just imagine it, if it's not something you do yourself. You've been out running, it's raining, there's muddy puddles, and half an hour later, you come back, and you're sweaty.

The clothes that you've been wearing, the t-shirt, the shorts, they're covered in mud, or the splashes of the puddles that you've been running through. Now imagine if in those circumstances you said, well, I really need to put on a clean t-shirt.

Well, that's true, you do. But imagine how ridiculous it would be. Inconceivable that you would grab a clean t-shirt from your chest of drawers, and just put it on, on top of that sweaty, dirty, muddy t-shirt that you're wearing.

[15:47] It's just inconceivable. You wouldn't even imagine doing such a foolish thing. Obviously, you need to take off that dirty garment first, have a shower, I guess, and then put on the clean garment.

I think when it comes to humility, there is this dual task. First of all, of taking off that garment of pride, that natural tendency to think of ourselves first, in order that we might clothe ourselves with humility.

So clothe yourself with compassion, with kindness, with humility. And then Paul goes on, mentions another item of clothing, gentleness. Gentleness. I guess gentleness has to do with how we treat people, the manner in which we speak, the manner in which we act.

I think in life we discover, as I'm sure you've all discovered, that so often we hurt and offend others, not by what we say or do, but the manner in which we say it or do it.

Of course, we also hurt people by what we say and what we do. But sometimes, even when what we say is not particularly offensive, even if what we do is intended with good intentions or with the desire to be of help to others, sometimes just the way we do it or the way we speak, the absence of gentleness can lead to hurt and misunderstanding and rejection.

[17:15] And so there's this urge, this call that we should clothe ourselves with gentleness. And I think when we think about this, and Paul urging us to put on this item of clothing, and he's speaking to all the Christians in Colossae and to all of us through the ages, it's very clear that Paul doesn't consider any of these things.

We're thinking at the moment of gentleness, but Paul doesn't consider any of these things simply as a character trait. We sometimes look at these things, and maybe gentleness would be one particular where we might think, well, that's just the way some people are, and it's not me.

Some people are gentle. Some people, that's just the way they are. That's their character. That's their personality. They don't need to really think about it much. They're just gentle in their manner, and that's good.

But that's not me. I'm not like that. And so somehow we are, we imagine that we're scot-free. We don't need to be gentle because that's not the way we are. But Paul doesn't in any way suggest that's an option for us.

He is saying that these are items of clothing that we all need to consciously put on. It may not come naturally to us, hence the need for us to consciously and carefully clothe ourselves in this manner.

[18:30] So clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and there's two more. The penultimate one is patience. How do you react in particular circumstances or to particular people, maybe difficult people, who you deal with, to people who, even as Christians, are badly dressed?

If we think of this way in which we are to dress ourselves, many of us are badly dressed. We're not dressed with all of these things. And when that's the case, then we're difficult to deal with.

And we will require or demand patience of others as patience is demanded of us. Is that a garment that you are clothed with?

When you come across those who show little compassion, little kindness, little humility, little gentleness, the response is patience.

Maybe an old-fashioned word helps here, the long-suffering. Sometimes we do need to suffer long with others, as no doubt others have to suffer long with us.

[19:44] And then finally, there's one other item of clothing that Paul gives a particular prominence to. It's not first in his list, but there's a sense in which he closes the list with that which is most important, that which, in a sense, encompasses all the others.

And we need to jump from verse 12 to verse 14 to find this final item of clothing, where there we read in verse 14, and over all these virtues. So all those that I've already mentioned, and compassion, and kindness, and humility, and gentleness, and patience, over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

The picture is of love as our crowning glory, as we become beautifully clothed people, the bond of perfection, the picture is perhaps of an outer garment holding all the others together.

The other virtues that Paul speaks of, if they're pursued without love, if that's even possible, become distorted and unbalanced, and quite false and contrived.

But love binds them all together. Love binds together a group of believers. It binds together a church. Without love, we fall apart, and everything goes awry.

[ 21 : 07 ] And so, over all of these virtues, Paul urges us, put on love. Clothe yourself with love. So we have to clothe ourselves with all of these things.

And maybe just a couple of things to say before we look at the final thing, the outcome of this, what we will look like. First of all, just to be clear, that we are to wear all of our garments.

This isn't a menu where you can choose and say, well, okay, I can do a bit of kindness. That's, that's, I can do that. But humility, well, that's not for me. Or whatever your particular favorite is, or perhaps your particular poison that you want to avoid.

It's not a menu. Paul is saying that we are to put on all of these items of clothing. If one of them is left to one side, if we fail to put on one of these items of clothing, then we are not properly dressed, is what Paul is stressing.

And I suppose the other thing to say, and in some ways it's just a practical point, that just as we have to get dressed with our physical clothing every day, you know, a day doesn't go by where we don't have to get dressed, there's also a very real sense in which we have to consciously clothe ourselves with these garments, these spiritual garments every day.

[ 22 : 34 ] It's something that we need to think about and consciously do day after day. And that requires effort. It requires perseverance.

We can ask God to help us, to remind us, to prod us, to encourage us, and He will do so. He is the one who is most interested in us, being so clothed.

But let me just finish with the third thing that I wanted to draw from this. And that is simply to ask the question, what is the outcome? Let's imagine that we clothe ourselves with all of these garments that Paul highlights there.

You put on all these clothes. What will you look like? Or maybe I could put it another way. Who will you look like? And I guess by putting it in that way, who will you look like?

I think we know, and you know the answer. You will look like Jesus. If you clothe yourself with these garments, then you will look like Jesus. As we consider the garments, each one in turn, we've practically been describing Jesus.

[ 23 : 45 ] as we just think about each of them now, much more briefly, but with that focus on how they are descriptive of Jesus. Compassion. His very name, Emmanuel, is at the heart of compassion.

God with us, suffering with us, identifying with us, bearing our burdens. Compassion is at the heart of the person of Jesus.

Kindness. When we see Jesus, as He's described for us in the Gospels, as He walked the dusty paths in Galilee and was confronted with human need and pain of every description, we never find Him too busy or too tired, ever ready to do good to others, to engage in acts of kindness on behalf of others.

Humility. We think of what Paul says about Jesus in his letter to the Philippians in chapter 2 and from verse 6. Speaking about Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And so when we think of humility, in the measure that we put on humility, then we are reflecting something of the person of Jesus.

[ 25 : 16 ] Gentleness. What is it that the prophet Isaiah said concerning the Messiah? A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out.

A gentle Savior, dealing with fragile men and women with great gentleness. Patience. Just in your own experience, consider how patient the Lord is with you.

We who are, all of us, I think grown-ups, in some measure in the faith, and yet so often we don't know how to get dressed. You know, we're thinking of a child and how strange it would be for maybe a child who's getting older, going to school, and still not being able to put on their own clothes.

We would think, well, there's something far wrong there. Well, how often is it true of us that we are slow to learn to put on these items of clothing, and yet Jesus is patient with us?

Perhaps for some of you here this evening, it's the case that you have yet to put your trust in Jesus as your own Lord and Savior. How patient is He being with you?

[ 26 : 30 ] Now is the time to trust in Him and to become like Him. Love. Well, love surely is what most marks the Savior.

Greater love has no one than this, than that He lay down His life for His friends. As we put on these garments provided for us, so we become more and more like Jesus.

And maybe that prospect, when we think about it, what reaction does that provoke in us? Is it of excitement? I want to be like Jesus. Or is it one of hesitancy?

That can never be. Not for me. I could never be like Jesus. That is setting the bar too high, as it were. But I would encourage you, never say never.

You have been chosen and set apart for that very purpose, to be like Jesus. We think of what Paul says as he writes to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 18.

[ 27 : 34 ] Speaking of the believers, he says this, And we, who with unveiled faces, all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord.

To be like Jesus, to resemble the fairest of 10,000, to be beautiful. That is your calling. And so I would encourage you not to engage or act with the futility and the foolishness of trying, consciously or unconsciously, to frustrate God's purposes for you simply because you will not get properly dressed.

But rather, see, this is something that is a beautiful prospect. And do that which Paul urges you to do. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, and over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You that You are the God who generously provides for us. We thank You for who we are, that we are a chosen people, that we are a holy people, set apart by You and for You, that we are dearly loved.

And we thank You for the charge that is addressed to us this evening that is an inspiring one, a beautiful one, to clothe ourselves with compassion and with kindness, with humility, with gentleness, with patience, and with love.

[ 29 : 21 ] Help us. We are slow. We are stubborn. We are reluctant to do these things. We are reluctant to remove those items of clothing that ought not to be upon us.

Help us in these things, to clothe ourselves in a manner that gives evidence of who we are, that demonstrates to a watching world that we are indeed Your people, clothed with the righteousness of Jesus.

And we pray these things in His name. Amen.