

**Colossians 3:12-17** *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.<sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.<sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.<sup>16</sup> Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Dress for Success

1. Dressed on the outside
2. Dressed on the inside

The way a person dresses says a lot about him. If he wears jeans and cowboy boots, he is a cowboy, or at least, he thinks he is. If he wears a white coat and carries a stethoscope, he is a doctor. We are holy people in God's eyes, so we ought to dress like it. Today, the Apostle Paul shows us how to dress for success.

Look at how Paul begins this section. *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.* He says that we are elect. We were dead in sin, but God was not satisfied to leave us that way. So, in eternity he planned our salvation. We were chosen by God to be saved before the world was even created.

He also calls us holy. Considering what we were, that is an amazing thing to say about us. As God looks at your last year, he sees only perfection. Maybe we don't see ourselves that way, but God does. Covered by the perfect robe of Christ's righteousness, we are holy. God looks at you and sees only holiness. Maybe we need to see ourselves and each other that way also.

He also says we are dearly loved. As you look back on last year, you may be able to offer a lot of evidence to the contrary. Your spouse died. You had an accident, lost your job or failed a class. There may be a lot of things in your life that say you are not dearly loved. But God says otherwise. We are dearly loved by him.

My daughter-in-law has, to my knowledge, never paid full price for anything. You can't go out to eat with her unless she has a coupon or a discount. She will always find a way to get something cheaper.

When it says that we are dearly loved it means that Jesus did not treat us that way. He didn't just keep some of the commandments for us. He didn't just have one hand nailed to the cross. He didn't just suffer a little bit of hell in our place. He paid the full price of his suffering and death to buy us back and make us his own. We are his dearly loved children, bought with the price of his death and resurrection.

When we begin to take seriously that we are chosen, holy and dearly loved, we begin to value ourselves and we aren't so focused on trying to make ourselves special. When we see ourselves as we really are, that is, as God sees us, then we can be more focused to serve others. When we are not spending all of our time and energy for ourselves, we have more energy and time for building up the body of Christ. This, of course, is not something that's going to happen easily. The grooves run deep and it is hard to get out of them. It begins by remembering we are elect, holy and dearly loved. Believe it. Let it sink in.

Then, dress for success. *Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.<sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* He lists six items for us to dress ourselves in: First, compassion. Don't be like heartless Scrooge. Have compassion. Second, kindness. This is not only saying nice things but doing nice things. Third, humility. Humility means you recognize your own weakness.

The next item is gentleness. Have you ever held something expensive that was also breakable? You are gentle with it. That is how God wants us to treat the people around us. Fifth, patience. Patience in unpleasant circumstances, like when the waitress messes up your order. Sixth is forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not always easy. The evil we suffer is real. The injustice we experience is real. Sometimes we feel cheated out of a happy childhood or marriage. Sometimes it feels like we've been robbed of our money or our time. The wounds are deep. The memories are vivid. The tears many. Anger comes easily. Forgiveness does not. (Adapted from James Mattek in Forward in Christ, November 2005)

But then Paul leads us back to the cross. *Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* There we see the minor hurts that have happened to us are nothing to what we have done to the Lord. There, at the cross, we see his forgiveness for us. We see that we are at peace because of his blood.

We finish dressing the outside with a belt. *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.* Love is the greatest virtue and the foundation of all the others. Only by living undeserved love for others are we truly dressed for success.

But we don't always do that, do we? We will do things that hurt others. Those hurts build up a wall, brick by brick. You need to tear down that wall before it gets too big and becomes something you can't ever get over. You tear down that wall with repentance and forgiveness. Admit when you have hurt someone and repent of it. Then forgive each other with the forgiveness that Christ has won for you.

Dressed on the outside with Christian virtues, we can be a blessing to those around us. But we also need to dress on the inside. *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.* The word, "rule" really means to act as an umpire. We can all imagine what confusion would arise at an athletic contest if there were no umpire or referee to control the game. So too the child of God may find many divergent claims being made on him by his family, his work, his church. So Paul says, "Let peace be the umpire."

There are many umpires a person can have in his heart. Love of money can control your thoughts and actions and everything is judged on whether it gets you more money. Pleasure can be the umpire and every decision is decided on whether it makes you feel good. But these umpires make the wrong call time after time. Let the peace of Christ be the umpire in our hearts and it will always make the calls that defends our families against spiritual threats.

What helps with that, of course, is a regular diet of God's Word. Paul wrote, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.* The key word in this verse is the word, *richly*. How rich is richly? How rich is rich? If you ask an Ethiopian who does not know when he will eat again, he would say we are rich. If you asked a middle class American what rich is, he would say rich is being a millionaire. For most people, rich is having more than they have right now. When Paul uses the word, *richly*, he is telling us to have the same attitude toward the Word of Christ. Being richly filled with Christ's Word means having more than we already have. No matter how much we may know of the Bible, no matter how much that teaching fills our lives, it can be and it should be more.

We need to approach Bible study a little differently. We can look to the Bible for specific answers to some questions, but it's not meant to be a practical answer book to life's problems. It would be better to approach Bible study in a more fundamental way, simply getting to know it to know it. The more complete understanding we have of the Bible, the better we can apply its principles to our daily lives. That is letting the Word dwell in us richly.

Did you have visitors for the holidays? Did your guest move furniture around, paint the walls, do the laundry? No, because a guest is just visiting. He doesn't really dwell there. But you do and you have the right to do those things. If Christ's Word dwells in our hearts, it makes changes. It moves priorities around and dresses us differently. Dress your inside with God's Word so much that it gives you God-pleasing priorities in all that you do.

Dress your inside with peace and God's Word. Dress your outside with Christian virtues, such as, love and forgiveness. Then, we are truly dressed for success.