

Rules for Dressing as a Follower of Jesus

Colossians 3:9b - 17

Do you remember playing dress up as a child? Possibly you put on a costume for a school play. Maybe you were a sheep in the Christmas pageant. Did you have a box of old clothes, shoes, shawls, and hats for your children to play pretend, to encourage role play? What about Halloween and super hero costumes?

When children dress up, it gives permission to be different for a short time, to pretend they have more power or grace or holiness than they actually possess. Dress-up play is more than just physically wearing a costume. When “in character,” kids role play. They imitate speech, mannerisms, and may even create their own special traits, stories, and personalities. Dress up encourages kids to “think outside of the box,” practice different emotions, and use their language skills to communicate. I think we have all played pretend at some time.

How are actors affected by the characters and costumes they must wear? Does it affect their real personalities? An actor of Downton Abby described how putting on those amazing period costumes affected her. Her posture changed. The way she spoke became more refined. Wearing the costume automatically put her into the character she was portraying. Putting on the dress made her into someone new.

In the Bible, the Apostle Paul uses the term “clothe yourselves” as a way to express the new you as a follower of Jesus. In Galatians 3:27 he says, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have **clothed yourselves** with Christ.” In Romans we are told, “**Clothe yourselves** with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” (13:14) And the scripture today, begins with, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves.**”

“Clothe yourselves” is a great metaphor to remind us of our Christian uniform. When we see a police uniform we get cautious. When we see a paramedic uniform, we become curious.

When we see the mail lady, we wonder what’s in our mailbox. Every day we may change our uniform several times, depending on what we are going to do – drive tractor, cook, exercise, shop, watch TV, go to church and so on.

And we are told to put some things on – clothe ourselves in a certain way as followers of Jesus. Paul writes about taking off the old self (Col. 2:10) and clothe ourselves in the new life in Christ. We are to strip off everything from our lives that is not of the Creator, so that we can put on the new self, the self that is constantly being restored to bear the image of God. Paul tells us, there is no identity that matters, no uniform or clothes that matter, slave or free, Jew or Greek, barbarian, Scythian, except the uniform, the clothes, that put-on Christ Jesus.

We studied the things that must be left behind. We looked at putting off hollow and deceptive philosophy, false humility, human traditions, elemental spiritual forces, worship of angels, rules about food & special days, harsh treatment of our bodies, sexual immorality, lust, evil desires, greed, idolatry, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, lying and so on.

But now Paul describes what we are to put on; how we are uniformed and clothed; when we have died to Christ; stripped of sinfulness and self-centeredness; & have given ourselves over completely as followers of Jesus Christ. Now as chosen by God, set apart, made holy and dearly loved, we have a uniform, a specific set of clothes to wear. Now we must put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Col. 3:10) So what does the Bible and the public, expect followers of Jesus to look like? We must not try to wear the old and new clothes at the same time.

Well, are given a list of ten virtues of moral excellence and righteousness that are the result of becoming Born-Again. We are commanded to practice these daily so that we become "possessed of the mind of Christ in thought, feelings, speech, and action to resemble Him and, as it were, reproduce the life He lived."

Please notice, everyone of the traits listed has to do with personal relationships between people. Whether it is one to one or between groups of people. Think of the traits we value that are not listed here – like efficiency, being a hard worker, intelligence, cleverness and so on. Instead, we are given values about identifying with others, and getting along with each other.

First is, "Clothe yourselves with **compassion**." Literally the word is "bowels of sympathy." The ancients believed the emotions originated in the bowels. We do not think that way, although we get close to it when we say, "I've got a gut feeling." Or we see a person or a situation that makes us, "sick to the stomach."

Compassion is what we would call a "heart of pity." It is the sense of sympathy, of empathy with someone. This world majors in judgement when our first instinct should be compassion. Compassion translates two Greek words. The first refers to the viscera. In New Testament times, people thought our inner parts were the seat of emotions. So here the word means deep feelings. The second word is synonymous with mercy, or sympathy, that is acted out.

It is important to know back then it was a very cruel world. It is not an over statement to say that Christianity brought mercy into the world. It was a new social dynamic. It is not too much to say that almost everything that has been started & done for the aged, the sick, the weak in body and mind, the animal, the child, and women, has been done with the inspiration of Christianity. This list really highlights this.

Next second, we are to put on the uniform of **kindness**. This describes graciousness, respect for other's feelings, responsive listening, goodness, empathy, courtesy & generosity. In short, kindness describes God's gentle caring ways. It is meeting the needs of people on whom we have compassion. It is benevolence, goodness in action. The Greek term refers to the grace that seeks to touch the whole person, taking the edge off their harsh reality. This was the word Jesus used when he taught, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble

in heart; & you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy & My load is light." M11:29–30

The kind person is as concerned about their neighbor's good as they are about their own. Kindness is exemplified by the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), who bound the wounds of an enemy, took him to an inn, and spent a good amount of money so that the man could be cared for properly. It is an example we should follow. Sympathy is sorry for pain. Empathy feels your pain. Kindness helps stop the pain.

We are instructed, third, to put on **humility**. It is not highly regarded in this world. But Jesus praised it in children and expects it from his followers. Humility dominates the verbal portrait of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11. John Stott calls humility "the rarest and fairest of all Christian virtues." It is the primary Christian virtue because it is the exact opposite of the worst of sins, a core root of sin, which is pride.

As Paul says it in Philippians 2, verse 3, we are to "regard others as better than ourselves." "We are not to consider ourselves in any way as superior to others." It is having the proper estimate of yourself in the will of God (Rom 12:3). That's why the Gospel message is so powerful, radical and freeing. "Here with Christ, there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, male or female, Scythian, slave or free, Christ is all, & is in all."

The person with humbleness of mind thinks of others first and not of themselves. Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less and others more. The world has never admired genuine humility. We know the world's value as it says, "nice guys finish last." But the Bible teaches, "the first shall be last." (Luke 13:30) It warns us, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, & whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12) So we must be clothed with humbleness like Jesus.

Humility is an important part of our uniform because it allows us to be compassionate and kind. It allows us to accept people as they are. And humility comes from experiencing the

greatness of God. We realize that we become who we need to be only by His grace. Christ and Christianity elevated humility to a virtue. It is the antidote for the self-love that poisons relationships in all types of ways.

Fourth, let's clothe ourselves with **gentleness**. Long ago, Aristotle defined this as the happy center between too much anger and too little anger. The person with gentleness has great self-control because they are God-controlled. They are angry at the right time over the right things, and never angry at the wrong time over many situations. This person has at the same time, the strength & sweetness of gentleness.

Gentleness is often translated as "meekness." Meekness is "strength under control." It is real strength, but it does not have to display itself or show off how strong it is. This is what Jesus beautifully displayed. An excellent definition of meekness is: "a willingness to waive one's rights for a good cause." Do not demand that you be satisfied, but, for the sake of a good cause be willing to suffer loss. Meekness is the exact opposite of rudeness and abrasiveness.

Gentleness or Meekness is a gift of God. It is not a natural human trait. The word describes a condition of the mind & heart and refers to the inward work of grace & gift by the Holy Spirit within us. It is the characteristic of how we are to live in what we do and how we respond to others, including those who do evil. I Peter 3:15 urges us, "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with respect and gentleness."

Part of the uniform we put on as followers of Jesus is **patience**. Human patience reflects the divine patience which puts up with all our sinning and never gives up on us. It translates as self-restraint, exhibiting these other traits in the face of being provoked. Longsuffering is a great description of healthy relationships. The patient person has the spirit which does not let humankind's foolishness and unteachability drive it then cynicism or despair. They don't

allow insults and ill treatment drive one to anger and bitterness. Patience is the opposite of resentment and revenge.

Paul wrote, "But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life." (1 Tim 1:16) And we get a sense of how important patience is when we are told, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. (2 Peter 3:15)

The sixth type of clothes we are to dress up in is, "**bear with one another.**" This means, patiently endure, and live with each other. The word is used regarding a person who needs to hold back their judgment of others, listen, have patience and bear with another in their mistakes or weaknesses. God is forbearing towards you and I, in that He holds back His judgment. We can see how all these different traits are a great outfit that looks good when they all are worn together. They need each other, support each other, and are the different parts of a uniform.

The logical next trait we are to wear is **forgiveness**. Verse 13 reminds us, "Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you." Our experience of God forgiving us gives us plenty of reason to forgive others. Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant makes the same point. (Mt 18:23-35) Sometimes we find it hard to forgive others. C. S. Lewis said, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive."

But we must. It's theological and logical to summarize these traits by saying, "wear Christ." What Paul is saying, you are a new man and new woman; therefore, live that way! Dress yourself up in the characteristics of Jesus. We have all played the game of, checking out children's physical characteristics – oh – that's the Friesen nose. And we name our relatives personality traits – yes, that's the Ewert kind of humor. Even if we are adopted, we inherit a blend of these traits from birth and our adaptive

parents. As we mature as followers of Jesus, we take off some traits and clothe ourselves in our new wardrobe that is the uniform of Jesus. Every Christian must start dressing like Christ and looking like Jesus.

So, it should not surprise us that the eighth article of clothing we must put on is – **love**. “Above all of these – put on love. Love is the perfect tie to bind these habits together.” It means affectionate regard, benevolence, and goodwill to each other. It is God's chosen, willful direction towards us. Love is the most important virtue, and it acts like a belt or coat that ties all the other spiritual fruit together.

Next, verse 15 tells us, “Let your hearts fall under the rule of the Almighty’s **peace**, the peace you were called to as one body.” Barclay translates this as, “Let the peace of God be the decider of all things within your hearts, for it is to that peace you were called, so that you might be united in one body.”

These traits are not just about our individual lives. It’s clear these words are also aimed at groups of all kinds. Literally Paul is telling us, “Let the peace of God be the umpire in your hearts.” So, this uniform is not just for us as individuals, it’s for us as a church. Collectively we need to put on the peace of Jesus.

Notice the word “rule” here means judge. So, the way to right feelings & actions is to appoint Jesus as the arbiter, to rule, be the decider, between the conflicting emotions of our hearts and between us as people. This is how we can live this set of clothes instead of the behaviors and feelings we are to take off. There is a huge contrast between these two uniforms.

Before Paul’s letter there wasn’t much of the peace of Christ going around in the Colossae congregation. They were dealing with heresies, that were diminishing the person of Jesus. So, they needed this peace that only Jesus can bring. We are called to live in peace with each other. Individuals who have peace with Christ and in their own hearts have a better chance of living in unity and harmony with each other.

Then **tenth**, we need to clothe ourselves in thankfulness. We should not be surprised that being thankful is on the list since Paul models it in Colossians. To maintain a peaceful heart, we must be thankful. An attitude of gratitude contributes to an enjoyment of spiritual tranquility, while grumbling makes for an agitated spirit.

Gratitude comes naturally to believers as a response to all God has done for us. On the other hand, ingratitude marks unbelievers. Romans 1:21 tells us, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” So, a spirit of humble gratitude toward God will inevitably affect our relations with others. Peace and thankfulness are closely linked.

Paul concludes this look at the qualities that should mark our lifestyle, by these directives. We need to teach each other these traits. We are to worship. We are to stay thankful. “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach & admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, & songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 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.” (Col. 3:16-17)

John W. Coakley wrote, “The texts of the Bible are not to be treated as objects to be understood, containers of ideas to be questioned or debated, rather, they are to be taken into oneself through the whole shape of daily life.”

Paul has told the Colossians what Christ can do for them. He knew that if they saw the potential of their new self, and not just their problems, they could dare to live a life that pleases God. The proposal for the new life is nothing less than Jesus living His life in and through you and me. Believers should so clothe themselves with the uniform of Jesus Christ so that when people look at us, they see Christ. The goal of the Christian life is Christlikeness. This is why following the rules of dressing as a follower of Jesus is so important.