

Forever Fashion

Colossians 3.12-17

There are few things more pathetic than a person attempting to be someone he or she is not. I know that from personal experience. I wasted my entire adolescence trying to be someone else.

The problem for me was my hair. Why did I get cursed with red and curly hair when most everyone else's hair was brown and straight? Oh how I hated my hair.

So I kept it covered as much as I could. At night, I wore a beanie to bed to smash out the curls. During the day – as much as I was allowed – I wore a sailor's hat upside down like Gilligan on Gilligan's Island. I think I was the only kid in America whose fashion idol was Gilligan. Pathetic.

My grandmother used to warn me – “You've got to be yourself. Why do you keep covering up your beautiful, curly hair? Don't you know all the girls would be jealous of you? Stop wearing those silly hats, or you will go bald.” Yeah, right, granny. What did she know?

It wasn't until I was 20 years old that someone finally persuaded me to stop the beanie and Gilligan's Island routine – and that someone was Sue. As soon as I let myself be who I really was, I started getting compliments. “How lucky are you! I have to pay big bucks for a permanent to get curls like yours!” I guess I wasn't the only one trying to look different to the way God made me.

Now this sermon is not a commentary on hair or fashion. If you like to colour or curl your hair, you keep right on doing that. The point I'm trying to make is about trying to be someone we aren't.

If it was pathetic for me to suppress the natural beauty of my red, curly hair, how much more pathetic is it for a Christian to suppress the inner beauty of a redeemed, sanctified life.

I borrow the sermon in a sentence from the song, “Make Me a Blessing”: **Out of your life, let Jesus shine.**

Please notice from verses 12 – 17, three natural – supernatural – distinctives to the believer's appearance. These must never be suppressed.

1. The Rationale for What We Wear (v 12a)

Colossians 3:12 (NKJV)

¹²Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on . . .

Paul is using the analogy of changing clothes to explain how Christians ought to live. Because a Christian is chosen by God, is beloved, and is made holy – because this is who a Christian is – he or she must appear different to everyone else.

The imperative is ‘put on’. You can think of this in the same light as a uniform. Because you are a student at Mamre Anglican School, put on a tie. Because you are a student at James Erskine

Public School, put on maroon and white. Because you are an employee of KFC, put on the shirt with the Colonel's face emblazoned on it.

Because you are a Christian, put on . . . an outward appearance consistent with the inward reality of a redeemed, sanctified life. In a moment we'll talk more specifically about what that looks like.

But first, let's contrast the old with the new. Paul does this when he starts verse 12 with the word 'therefore'.

Do you remember from the first half of Colossians 3 what our old sinful rags looked like? Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness (Colossians 3.5) – not a pretty sight. Do you remember what our old sinful rags sounded like? Anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk (Colossians 3.8). Not a pretty sound.

Before a person is converted by God, this is his or her default nature – sinful, polluted and profane. But when God converts a person, that person is changed – the old has gone, the new has come.

Colossians 3:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have **put off the old man** with his deeds, ¹⁰and have **put on the new man** who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

Another gospel song puts it this way . . . 'what a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, since Jesus came into my heart.'

Have you been changed? Have you been converted? Then let the new nature shine through.

There's nothing more pathetic than a Christian who conceals this new nature with the old sinful rags in order to blend in with the world. Out of your life, let Jesus shine.

So the rationale for what we wear is that God has converted us from sinfulness and set us apart as saints. We must, therefore, live consistent with who we are. How do we do this? By daily, intentionally, keeping off our old sinful rags, and letting the radiant new appearance of Christ's righteousness shine through.

The difference is in our deeds. This is distinctive number two:

2. The Rudiments of What We Wear (vv 12b-14)

Just as the clothing we've chosen to wear today is actually an ensemble – multiple articles of clothing jewellery blended together – so the Christian who let's Jesus shine through displays an ensemble of character qualities and action qualities. Paul lists five and three, respectively.

a. Five Character Qualities

Colossians 3:12 (NKJV)

¹²Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on **tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;**

Let's learn more about these five.

- **Tender mercies** – a heart of compassion, a manifestation of pity

Romans 12:1 (NKJV)

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the **mercies of God**, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

If you are a believer, you have experienced the tender mercies of God – He has not dealt with you according to your sin, but has punished His beloved Son in your place.

Who are we, then, to withhold mercy from someone who has wronged us?

Jesus told a parable about a man who owed an impossibly large debt. The king had tender mercy towards him and forgave the lot. What did the man do? He went out and found a man who owed him a small debt and abused him.

A true Christian takes the loss – and it's not hard to do because we've received so much more from God. Do you have tender mercies?

- **Kindness** – moral goodness, gentleness

Romans 11:22 (NKJV)

²²Therefore consider the **goodness** and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, **goodness**, if you continue in *His* **goodness**. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

Galatians 5:22 (NKJV)

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, **goodness**, faithfulness,

There was a movement some years ago called 'random acts of kindness'. The idea was to intentionally do something good for someone each day for no particular reason.

For the Christian, doing something good for other people should be something we do every day simply because of who we are. We have received good from God; we give good to others. What good have you done this week?

- **Humility** – modesty, lowliness of mind;

Philippians 2:3 (NKJV)

³Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in **lowliness of mind** let each esteem others better than himself.

1 Peter 5:5 (NKJV)

⁵Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be **clothed with humility**, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

The opposite of humility, according to these verses, is putting yourself forward – pushing to the front – wanting to be first.

In direct contrast, the Christian must put others first. Here's a test for this one: are you able to be happy for someone else when they are chosen or honoured and you are not? If you are clothed with humility, you'll have no difficulty congratulating that person; and the thought 'hey, that's not fair; it should have been me' will not enter your mind.

- **Meekness** – gentleness, mildness

Galatians 6:1 (NKJV)

¹Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of **gentleness**, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

2 Timothy 2:25 (NKJV)

²⁵in **humility** correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,

As we see from these verses, meekness is displayed in the midst of conflict. A person clothed in Christ's righteousness remains gentle even when wronged; even when attacked.

How gentle are you under pressure?

- **Longsuffering** – slowness in avenging wrongs, perseverance, patience

1 Timothy 1:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. ¹⁶However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all **longsuffering**, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Aren't you glad God is longsuffering? Paul says he is exhibit A. Though he was a blasphemer and a murderer, God did not strike Him dead, but let him continue until one day he was converted. Similarly, we should not be quick to write people off.

Do these five character qualities shine through in your life? If you have been converted, they should.

Paul now identifies another aspect to our ensemble: action qualities.

b. Three Action Qualities

Colossians 3:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³**bearing** with one another, and **forgiving** one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. ¹⁴But above all these things put on **love**, which is the bond of perfection.

Bearing, forgiving, loving – this is what 'out of your life, let Jesus shine' acts like.

- **Bearing** – to sustain, hold up, endure

Mark 9:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹He answered him and said, “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.”

Within the church, we do not always agree. That’s not surprising – none of us has been perfected yet. The combination of our differing perspectives under the control of Jesus Christ is a strength.

In any other organisation, disagreement means division; but in the church, we bear with one another – remaining committed, giving grace.

- **Forgiving** – grant forgiveness, pardon

Forgiveness is expensive. It means to pardon, to give graciously and to restore a person.¹

How often should we forgive? Peter asked that question. Jesus gave an answer that basically meant, ‘don’t bother counting.’

So when we have a complaint against another believer, as Paul says in verse 13, our course of action as changed people directly opposite to our fleshly impulse – don’t get even; forgive.

And we do this because Christ has forgiven us.

At this point I want to warn you against a growing movement in Christianity called conditional forgiveness. There are a few books on Koorong’s shelves that are espousing this, and I think it is wrong.

The idea is that I don’t have to forgive someone unless they repent.

Problems with conditional forgiveness

1. It makes me a judge
2. It claims powers that belong only to God

Romans 12:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*” says the Lord. ²⁰Therefore “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*”

¹Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the test of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) (G5483). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

3. It discredits Jesus

Matthew 6:12-15 (NKJV)

¹² And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. ¹⁴ "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

4. It defies grace

It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. Verse 13 does not contain any exemption clauses – we are to forgive as Christ forgave us – freely.

- **Loving** – agape; unconditional

This binds all together because it is the summary of all virtues.

Are these the actions that come out of your life? Let Jesus shine.

I think you will agree with me that these five character qualities and three action qualities are a tall order – impossible, really. We are not perfect in any of these areas.

So what is the secret? Jesus. We must let Him be these perfections in and through us. This is point three.

3. The Root of What We Wear (vv 15-17)

If you are a believer, the Spirit of Christ is in you. Let Him shine. Paul names two ways. Notice the word 'let' attached to each.

a. Peace of Christ

Colossians 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And let the **peace of God** rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

This has particular application in the church. The peace of God is in our hearts – and we must let it rule us.

And so we care not so much for what is best for me, but what is best for us. Sometimes that means my preferences are set aside, and that's okay.

b. Word of Christ

Colossians 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Let the **word of Christ** dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace [thankfulness, ESV] in your hearts to the Lord.

The Word of Christ is the gospel . . . and, by extension, the whole of the Bible. Just as hiding God's Word in our heart keeps us from sinning, so, too, having God's Word dwell in us makes us an encouragement and support to other believers.

One way this happens in the church is through our singing. Our mutual participation in singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs not only glorifies God, but also teaches and admonishes one another. It strengthens us in the faith.

Now you may have noticed that there was one word in both verses 15 and 16 that I underlined. The reason for that is seen in verse 17, where you find this word a third time.

Colossians 3:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Here's the point: we have received all we need for life and godliness through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the root. So let's give up our striving and fighting and stressing and worrying . . . and let's let Jesus' peace and Jesus' word come out.

When we can be thankful, we are there.

Here's a practical challenge: The next time you start feeling oppressed – even in church – purposely pray thanksgiving prayers. In other words, count your blessings . . . and, as the song says, it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

Out of your life, let Jesus shine.

There's nothing more pathetic than a person trying to conceal who he or she really is. If you have been converted, you are a child of the King, you are a saint, you are a new creation.

So put on the new, and be joyfully, and thankfully, different.