

ROMANCING THE SAINTS AT COLOSSAE

Studies in the Book of Colossians

*“If Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the ‘church of Christ,’
then Colossians must surely be labeled ‘the Christ of the church’”
unknown*

Text
Colossians 3:12-17

Topic
The spiritual character and conduct of a man saved by grace
are described as items of clothing we can put-on

Title
“The Man in the Grace Faithful Suit”

Introduction

Mark Twain once said, “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.”

Our last study left us somewhat spiritually naked. It described our thoughts and traits before we were saved as stained, filthy clothing that we needed to put-off. The apostle Paul said to “put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth...” Then he said, “you have put off the old man with his deeds.”

He mentioned that there is a new clothing line for us to put on. We are going to begin looking at this new line in verses twelve through seventeen. It is the clothing of the new man, the look of a Christian.

I read this as if, in verses twelve, thirteen, and fourteen, you were picking out the appropriate garments to go on a walk. Then, in verses fifteen,

sixteen, and seventeen, people can't help but notice your confident, steady gait.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Your Garments Should Tell Everyone You Are Walking With Jesus, and #2 Your Gait Should Tell Everyone Jesus Is Walking With You.

#1 Your Garments Should Tell Everyone You Are Walking With Jesus

(v12-14)

People have different 'body types,' or shapes, that affect how they look in certain clothes. For example: I'm told that the three most typical body types for women are hourglass, ruler, and pear. My body type is spare-tire.

You want to choose clothing that fits and flatters your body type.

Your 'body type' as a Christian is the subject of the opening words of verse twelve.

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved...

These are things you are as a result of receiving Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You are "the elect of God." The doctrine of election is that God chose you to be saved in eternity past. You believed on Jesus when the Holy Spirit convicted you and the Father drew you to Himself.

Does that eliminate the element of free will? *Not at all!* The Bible simultaneously teaches that every man is to seek and find the Lord. Men and women are held personally accountable for their choice to receive or reject the offer of salvation by grace through faith.

If you ask me, "Is God sovereign?," I will say, "Yes!" If you ask me, "Does a man have free will?," I will say, "Yes!" If you ask me how God can be sovereign and man have free will I will say, "I don't know, but that is the clear teaching of God's Word."

Paul wasn't teaching the Colossians anything new about election. He was reminding them they were God's elect. They were to consider their election as they determined what to put on. God had chosen them. Their lives ought to reflect the grace of God.

They were also "holy." It's the same word translated earlier in the letter as "saints." It describes every Christian as permanently set apart to God as His unique possession. On a practical level it means we are growing and maturing a little more each day.

A Christian is also "beloved." It means that God has fixed His love upon you. It means God the Father loves you as much as He loves His own Son, Jesus Christ.

When my eyes open each day and I contemplate walking with the Lord I ought to remember that I am elect, holy, and beloved. The rest of my choices are going to be based on how much I receive and believe those descriptors. They represent my body type. If I dress accordingly I will look my very best.

God isn't giving you a strict dress code. He is providing a wardrobe that is consistent with who you really are as a child of God. He's given you a spiritual closet full of the richest garments imaginable.

From a fashion point of view, you dress to make a certain statement to others. As a Christian you want what you 'wear' to say, "I'm saved and serving, what about you?"

As for the garments themselves you begin to read about them at the end of verse twelve.

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

Getting dressed for a walk with Jesus starts with putting on "tender mercies." This is the feeling of concern for the needs of others. It is the attitude of putting others first. It is a desire to help others find Jesus along your way to Heaven.

The next item, “kindness,” is putting those tender mercies into action. At some point your compassion must reveal itself in actual help to those in need. While it may include physical and material help, the greatest need in a person’s life is a personal relationship with Jesus.

While you are looking upon others with tender mercies and helping them with kindness, you are to be thinking of yourself with “humility.” The expression, “but for grace there go I,” perfectly captures the concept of true, biblical humility. God has showered His grace upon your life. You are undeserving of His mercies. You thus see others as God sees them - in need of His grace and mercies. You are no better than they except for God’s grace.

“Meekness” is not weakness. It is power under control. David Brooks always quotes Adrian Rogers who said of meekness, “If you think meekness is weakness, try being meek for a week!”

If you’re going to try to serve others, you’re going to be treated like a servant. You’re going to get messy. It can ‘ruin your outfit’ if you’re not careful. Treated like a servant, you tend to either passively withdraw or aggressively attack. Meekness rejects those fleshly responses and keeps you on task.

Thus the next thing Paul listed, “longsuffering.” It is putting up with people who try your patience.

Colossians 3:13 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.

“Bearing with one another” is the practical side of longsuffering. You don’t just suffer long, shaking your head and talking under your breath. No, you actually bear with them and encourage them.

Paul was a realist. He understood the difficulties people presented. He knew that there would be offenses between Christians. The word “complaint” means *something worthy of blame*. It is a real offense.

What should you do when a real offense occurs? “Forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another...” If you are offended or wronged (and you will be if you go about dressed like this), then the solution is biblical forgiveness. It is not retaliation; it is not slander; it is not separation. It is to keep the matter as private as possible and go to the other person with the desire to be reconciled for the Lord’s sake.

You can exercise biblical forgiveness to the extent you remember that “Christ forgave you.” You and I have been forgiven much by God. We can forgive the little that is done against us.

There is one final item that holds everything together and in place.

Colossians 3:14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

Literally Paul said “put on the love.” It is love that is uniquely possible because it is implanted in you by God. It is God’s love flowing through you to others. The best definition of it is unconditional. The best example of it is anything Jesus ever did or said while on the earth.

In Paul’s day the men wore what was called a girdle. We would call it a belt. Think of this as a utility belt - like the bat belt! Because God’s love is all around me like a belt, I can reach into it for any of the characteristics listed whenever I need them. And there are tons of other characteristics that are to be found as I explore God’s love.

Love is “the bond of perfection,” meaning that the more I practice it the more ‘perfect’ I become at it. I am being perfected day-by-day. I am becoming more like Jesus day-by-day.

Out in the world we can recognize certain people because they are wearing a uniform. Even if a person isn’t wearing a uniform, we can tell something about them by their clothing choices.

Our uniform, our clothing, is spiritual; it is matters of the heart. But it affects my attitudes and actions in such a way that others can tell something about me by my clothing choices.

And that's the idea. People should be able to see and hear by my choices that I am walking with the Lord.

#2 Your Gait Should Tell Everyone
Jesus Is Walking With You
(v15-17)

We like to watch the Westminster Kennel Club dog show. Some of the breeds are judged by their specific gait. German Shepherds, for example, have a very distinctive gait as they walk with their handler for the judges.

Think of your attitudes and actions as a gait being judged. What would someone say? Would they say your gait was erratic? Fearful? Secretive? Hypocritical?

I don't need to go on listing all our possible failures! We are too well aware of them. Instead let's see the quality of our gait when we remember that Jesus is walking with us.

Three things should regulate our gait. The first is "peace."

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body...

Paul was describing the quality of having the peace of God. It means you can rest assured of the goodness of God. It is the settled opinion of your heart that all things really do work together for the good for the child of God.

The word "rule" can be translated *umpire*. What does an umpire do? He makes the call. You are out walking in the world and you find yourself in some difficulty. Your circumstances are adverse. You can react with agitation or fear or stress or worry or any of a number of human traits. Or you can appeal to the umpire to make the right call that you can rest assured God has everything under control and all things are working together for your good and His glory.

Verse fifteen reminds us we were “called in one body.” My personal “peace” or lack of it affects everyone else. If I am stressed, worried, annoyed, fearful, etc., etc., then the whole body of Christ I am part of feels the effects. Letting “peace... rule” in my heart is healthy for others.

Next, our gait should be regulated by thankfulness:

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Paul completed his thoughts on thankfulness in verse seventeen:

Colossians 3:17 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.

“Whatever you do in word or deed” is **everything** you think or say or do. It is all to be done “in the name of the Lord.” Last week I illustrated this by looking at celebrities on the red carpet. They always get asked, “Who are you wearing?” Every outfit has a designer. And the designers give them the clothing to wear because they know millions will be watching.

The idea here is that people should never have to ask you, “Who are you wearing?” They should see that your wardrobe was all designed and provided by Jesus. The way they see that is by you being “thankful” and by you “giving thanks to God the Father through [Jesus].”

You’re not thankful *for* all things, but you can be thankful *in* all things.

One more element of your gait is in verse sixteen.

Colossians 3:16 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 in your hearts to the Lord.

The “word of Christ” is a great way to refer to the Bible. After all, Jesus said that He came in the volume of the Book. He said that Scripture was all about Him - **and it is**.

The Bible should “dwell in you.” The word “dwell” means *to be at home in*. We might use the phrase, “make yourself at home.”

If you tell someone to make themselves at home, you’d better mean it! You’re telling them to act as if they lived in your house with all the privileges you have to access every room and closet and drawer.

God’s Word should be at home in us. It should be welcome in every ‘room’ of our heart and mind, opening every door and drawer.

The word “richly” describes God’s Word as a treasure to be highly prized and appreciated.

“In all wisdom” reminds us that God’s Word is sufficient. It is God’s wisdom as opposed to the world’s supposed wisdom. Paul was still picturing our walk and what it shows others. They should see Jesus walking with us and providing the wisdom to answer our life’s difficulties and dilemmas. Then they will want it for themselves.

There are any number of services now accessible via computer or cell phone by which you can ask a question and receive an answer. Jesus is the ultimate source of wisdom. We can consult with Him, via the indwelling Spirit of God and the Word of God, step-by-step.

Next we teach and admonish “one another.” “Teaching” is the general presentation of truth. “Admonishing” is the specific application of truth by warning or correcting others who are deviating from it. We need both teaching and admonishing.

I find what Paul said next curious. He put all this in the context of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” My initial reaction is to see the Christian life as if it were a musical that combines music, song, the spoken word, and dance!

Maybe on some level your Christian life **is** to be understood as a musical. After all, in Ephesians Paul described us as God’s “workmanship,” using the word for *poem*. We see in the Old Testament God portrayed as a Potter molding and shaping us into a certain type of vessel to His purpose

and design. So why not see ourselves as His musical production? God has provided the soundtrack, the lyrics, the dialog, and the choreography.

Some scholars think that, at the Reward Seat of Jesus, your life will be reviewed and be played back for you to view. I don't fully comprehend how that will occur. In Heaven it can probably occur in a millisecond. I can only think in terms of a video presentation.

So let's think in those terms. You're there with Jesus being rewarded. The video starts. **You realize your life has been made into a musical!**

Now musicals can be happy or sad or both at once. Your life as a musical will be both - maybe more of one than the other.

We've all seen *The Sound of Music*. What would it be like if Julie Andrews didn't sing? Or dance? Or if she used dialog from her role as the Queen in *Shrek*?

What if, in *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy was diagnosed with clinical depression because of her separation from family and had weekly therapy instead of going 'off to see the wizard, the wonderful wizard of Oz'?

You're the star of your life that is going to be the basis of a musical. God designed it just for you. What if you aren't singing? Or dancing? What if you make-up your own dialog?

It's not that you literally go through life singing or dancing. I guess you could... *But that would be weird!*

It's that, at the end looking back, your life can be edited as a musical to the extent you understood Jesus was there walking with you. It can be a musical to the extent that His peace ruled, to the extent you were thankful in all things, and to the extent that His Word was at home in your heart.

Put-on the garments. Get used to the gait. You're walking together with Jesus and people are watching.

