

Christ Is All: Christian Wardrobe

by J. Glyn Owen

Christians should put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, gentleness, patience, and love to reflect their relationship with God and to show love and care for others.

Duration: 46:21

Scripture: Matthew 9:36, Matthew 23:37-38, Colossians 3:12-14

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes a chain of events that starts with a young boy discovering his chewed-up guitar and ends with a series of people lashing out in anger. The speaker emphasizes the need for someone who can absorb unjust treatment without retaliating. He then connects this concept to the compassion of Jesus, who had compassion on the multitudes because they were harassed and helpless. The speaker explains that before we can live a kind and compassionate life, we need a miracle of being incorporated into Jesus Christ. This miracle allows us to identify as strangers in this world and belong to a heavenly kingdom.

Transcript

Well now, we continue this morning with our studies in the letter that the Apostle Paul was given to write and to deliver to the Colossians. And we've come to that point in chapter 3, which begins with verse 12, and we are going to read this morning verses 12, 13, and 14. I would like to read them now from the New International Version.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other, and forgive whatever grievance you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And over all these virtues, put on love, which is agape. Over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Now, if you notice very carefully, you will find that there are two main threads woven into the pattern, into the texture of that passage.

First of all, Paul appeals to the basic Christian consciousness of every Christian in Colossae. And not only in ancient Colossae, he appeals equally so to the Christian consciousness here in our service this morning, which is threefold. As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

These are three features to the Christian consciousness that are universal or ought to be. The second thing that we have in this particular paragraph is this. It's a delineation of the kind of character which Christians should cultivate.

And I want to look at these in the reverse order. First of all, we're going to look at the portrait, the character, the Christian man, as the apostle would have him or her develop. And it is quite a challenging picture, the complement really of what we were looking at last week under the ministry of Mr. MacLeod.

So we turn first of all then to consider the character which Christians should cultivate. Now, let's come directly to this. Mr. MacLeod has really paved the way for us so that there's no need for any introduction.

I'm sure you'll remember some of his metaphors, some of his pictures last week to which we shall have to return today. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves. There's the key.

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, etc. Clothe yourselves. Or as the King James puts it, put on therefore.

The summons is to come into the roving room and into the ward room. And there are certain garments awaiting us that the apostle would summon us, all of us, to put on. If we are men and women in Christ, there are certain things that we should be wearing and that should exhibit not our beauty which we have none, but rather the beauty of our God and the beauty of our Saviour and the beauty of our sanctifier to the world around.

Yes, Christ is all in all to his people. And Paul not only continues to expound that theme in these verses, but he does so basically in the same lingo, using the same kind of metaphor as he had in the passage that began with verse 5. In verse 5, of course, he was concerned that we should put something off, put many things off as a matter of fact. And the image there was that of undressing.

There are certain characteristic features of the old man in us, of the old life, of the old pre-Christian nature, that Paul calls upon us to put on one side. Get rid of them. This is something that you and I do every day.

We put on our garments and we put them off again. I hope we do anyway. And you'll be doing that today.

You've put on your clothes to come to church. You'll put them off sometime sooner or later this day. Now, that's the image that we have here.

In verses 5 to 12 to 11, Paul says, everything that characterized the non-Christian in you, put them off. Get rid of them. Once for all and forever.

But now today, where we are, the passage that we are looking at, he comes to the complementary side of that. We are not to be left naked. We are to put on certain things.

We are to be dressed. We are to be robed. It was the theme of Isaiah in chapter 52, with which we came into the presence of God in this sanctuary today.

He tells us to be clothed aright in our beauteous apparel. He has provided robes for righteousness. He has provided beauty for ashes.

And he bids us come to our wardrobe as believing men and women and put on, clothe ourselves with these specifics that he mentions, which are not only to our advantage but to his glory. Now, there is one thing that we must stress before we go any further. This is a call, or this is a command, what we would call a categorical imperative, which is addressed essentially to Christian men and women.

You see, you must become a Christian before you can be a Christian. You must be a Christian before you can behave as a Christian. Many people make a blunder here.

They think that the only thing they have to do when they hear about Christianity is just to start living a kind of life. No, it's not that. That's not where you start.

First of all, something big must happen. And it's something that you can't do all on your own. God must do it.

There is a response from your side and mine, but God must do it. And the consequences described in the first three verses of this great chapter in terms of our having died with Christ, risen with Christ, ascended with Christ, and when Christ returns in his glory, we shall return with him and share in his glory. In other words, the miracle that must take place before we can obey these commands is the miracle of our being incorporated into Jesus Christ, of our being taken out of the world, so that we can say that basically I am a stranger here.

My home is far away upon a golden strand. My roots are not here anymore. My father lives above and I belong elsewhere.

My commonwealth, my kingdom is not here. Now, I want to stress this because there may be someone here this morning who doesn't know that by experience. And I want to ask you, therefore, if you want to follow the steps outlined by the Apostle Paul, right now in our service, before we go any further, with all the sincerity of which you're capable, ask the Lord God Almighty to transform you and to work in you that miracle whereby he takes you out of Adam and incorporates you like a stem into the Adamic stock which is Christ, so that you may know something of the mystical union and in consequence of a rebirth, because his life invades your soul.

These injunctions then are only addressed to men who have become Christian, who know a mystical union with the Lord Jesus Christ, have died with him, risen with him, ascended with him in one sense. One day when he returns, they will share equally in his glory. Their glory is bound up with his.

His is bound up with them by sheer unqualified grace. But now, as sure as you are a person in Christ, these words apply to you and to me. And I want to stress that.

Let not any believing man or believing woman in Knox this morning say, now that applies to so and so, he needs it, she needs it, but I don't. Don't, don't, don't try that. You'll only mar your fellowship with God and with his people and you yourself will become a stulted little believer to say the least.

This applies to you, it applies to me. And I simply cannot wriggle out of it. As sure as I'm a Christian, as sure as I'm in Christ, this speaks directly to my soul and to yours today.

The New English Bible rendering of verse 12 focuses our thought upon those who are exclusively qualified to produce the kind of character that Paul envisages. It puts it this way. Put on the garments that suit God's chosen people, his own, his beloved.

Now let's come to these garments. This is a beautiful picture, you know. I've been quite enthralled as I've looked at this during the week and have been browsing and wondering whether I'm making an error or whether I'm not.

And as I've been confirmed in my own convictions about it, I want to share with you this morning what I think. The garments which all who are in Christ should be regularly wearing. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievance you may have against another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And then over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

A beautiful picture. Careful scrutiny will show, I believe, that Paul may well be thinking here in terms of outer garments, undergarments, and a belt. Or, strictly in Paul's order, undergarments, outer garments, and a belt.

And I want to take them in that order. The Christian's spiritual underwear. Clothe yourselves, says the NIV, with compassion.

That's a garment of the soul, of the heart. Kindness, so is that. Humility, so is that.

Or in the language of the King James, put on bowls of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind. Now let's look at these in turn. It's a little prosaic, but may the Lord by the Spirit make them real to us and apply the truth to us and enable us to be putting on from the wardrobe of grace this morning what is provided for us in Christ.

First of all, clothe yourselves with compassion. Or as the King James puts it, bowls of compassion. Now the King James translation you may smile at, but let me tell you that it's a literal translation of the Greek.

And it's the most accurate version at that point. And the reason being, of course, that the ancients thought of the bowls as the seat of the tender feelings in every man. We still have a little relic of that today as when we speak of a gut feeling.

We mean we feel it in the depths. It's down here. And the Apostle Paul says that every Christian man should know something about feeling.

Now that in and of itself is a very challenging thing. Because you see, we are living in a day and age where the mind counts for so much. And I don't want to take away from that.

Your mind matters, says John Stott. And I never want to quarrel with John Stott for one thing. But the Bible says it.

You are to love the Lord your God with all your mind as well as all your heart and all your soul and all your strength. Your mind does matter. But man is not all mind.

And some of us are very unemotional. And what is far worse, we're proud of it. We think it ought to be that way.

We think we ought to be detached and cold and objective in all our attitudes. Not so, says the Bible. You should have a gut feeling.

You should have something that touches you in the depths of your stomach. When you look at a world that is dying and at men in need. You should have, pardon me for saying it, a bellyache.

When you think of the starving multitudes of the world. Let me add, those who are spiritually without God and without Christ and without hope. And yet you see there are multitudes of us that know nothing at all of anything in this realm.

Now if you ask me to express more accurately what it means. I can only at this point, I can only have time to read two scriptures to you. And they all take us back to the life of our Lord.

The first is in Matthew 9.36. When he saw the multitude, he had compassion on them. Because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Now you know there is something absolutely astounding about that.

You see our Lord saw the crowds and he might very well have got excited. Ah, here is a great crowd to preach to. Here is a great crowd to teach.

They are promising to become my disciples. Well this is called for gladness. But you know what really touched him down in the depths here? Their need.

Their condition. They were like a crowd of frightened sheep. Without one solitary shepherd to guide them in the way of life.

They were lost sheep. The other scripture I must simply quote from Matthew 23 verses 37 and 38. It is the same Savior that we hear looking at Jerusalem from a vantage point a little higher than the city.

And as he looks down upon the city you hear the Savior cry. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem. You who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.

How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.

Look, your house is left. That would have been enough to frighten a Jew in his right mind. But it is left to you yourselves.

Do what you like with it. And it is left desolate because I am leaving it. Clothe yourselves with compassion.

Men and women in Christ, you and I are in front of the wardrobe this morning which is Jesus Christ. And all grace is given us in him. Everything that pertains to life and godliness.

And God holds me and he holds you responsible for putting on this grace of compassion. Because if we are in Christ, you see, we have the capacity to do it. If you are not in Christ, if you are still dead in trespasses and sins, you can't do it.

You may try to emulate the Christian ethic, but you can't really do it. For this reason, there are always two sides to every action. One is godward, one is manward.

You may be able to do the manward a little, within limits, but the godward you simply cannot. To every action, to everything mentioned here, there are these two sides. And you must be in Christ to be able to perform these things, to put on these graces, so that they may have their godward and their manward

expressions in us.

Let me hurry. The next in the list is kindness. Now this again, you see, is an undergarment.

You've got to feel it deeply. It's got to be next to you. The person who has this virtue in his heart will always be thinking of others.

That's the characteristic. It comes out in Philippians chapter 2, where Paul says, Think not every man of his own things, but also of the things of others. The things of others.

Driving on the road in your automobile. The things of others. Gathering the goods to stock up for the week.

The things of others. In the office, in the school. The things of others also.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that this was especially a characteristic of Isaac. And he says that during the prophetic era, Isaac was looked upon as the main exemplar of this particular characteristic. And he says he came to earn this title for this reason.

Because he was always known, wherever he went you remember in Genesis, he always dug fresh wells for himself and his family. Isaac is always digging wells. But no sooner has Isaac dug and opened up his wells, and somebody comes around and they scramble and scramble with dear old Isaac.

They too want the wells. And Isaac never fought back. He thought to himself, well, if they're going to fight me for the wells, they too must need water.

And if they need water, I'm not going to fight for them and keep them away from the water they need. They're as important as I am. Oh, bless him.

Do we ever think like that? Kindness, Christoted. Then the next is loneliness or humility. Now here you see we're still in the depths underneath.

The things which are not visible to the human eye and yet you can see them in action. The third undergarment is the believer's spiritual attire. And the believer's spiritual attire is basically an attitude towards oneself.

It is the refusal to cling to one's own rights or prerogatives when the needs of others requires that I do something terribly humble, to get my hands terribly dirty, to do something that perhaps will result that other folk may not think much of me at all. As when our blessed Lord Jesus on that day took off his garment and got a towel and a basin of water and began to wash the disciples' feet, that's humility. He who was co-equal with God, washing the disciples' dirty feet.

The menial task of a slave for the sovereign Lord of the ages is humility. It's an attitude towards oneself that doesn't allow one's notions or conception of oneself to obliterate one's awareness of the rightful need of others. Paul speaks of that very, very clearly.

You remember again in Philippians 2. That's why I read from Philippians 2 this morning. Being, he says, in the nature of God. That's the NIV.

And it's a very good rendering. Being in the very nature of God. He did not consider equality with God something that he should grasp, cling on to.

And there was a world in sin and there was a world dying and lost. Let me put it to you, my friends, in all its hideous reality. When there was a world going to hell.

I hope that shocks you. Without God and without a Savior. With nothing but sin on their souls and hopelessness and despair in their hearts.

He didn't grasp on to the prerogatives of his deity. But he cast off his garments. He became nothing, as the NIV puts it.

He made himself of no reputation. Took upon him the form of a servant. And was found in the fashion of a man.

Not only that, he became obedient as a man. Obedient to death. And if you think of it as mere death, then you have not gone far enough.

Even the death of the cross. That's humility. Clothe yourselves.

Clothe yourselves, says Paul, to every Colossian Christian in Christ. Died with him, risen with him, reigning with him, coming with him. Clothe yourselves now out of the wardrobe of grace.

You clothe yourselves with that kind of beauty. That kind of excellence. That quality of soul.

Let's move hurriedly to the Christian's spiritual outerwear. And yet, one needs to be careful when we say this, because there's such a similarity in texture between the characteristic features that we are going to consider now and those that we've already considered. But these come out into the open very evidently.

There are four in number. Meekness or gentleness are the first two. It doesn't matter how you translate it.

One translation gives meekness and the other gentleness. This word has reference to what is the very opposite of rudeness or harshness. See, the proud man is sometimes very rude, very harsh, careless of others' feelings and needs.

He marches on in triumph because he's got everything and let everybody else go their own way. So meekness may first have reference to our attitude to God, as it does, and is manifest in our acceptance of God's ordering of his providence, for example, the things he denies us or the things he imparts. Our meekness is manifested in the way we accept pains, privations, and so forth from the hand of God.

It also expresses itself toward man. I can best describe this with an illustration. You'd be surprised what comes to our house by post from time to time.

One of the things that came this last week, almost at the end of the week previous, had in it this description of a certain circumstance very far from Toronto. So it doesn't apply to anyone here. Don't waste time thinking.

Directly, I mean, or originally. Four-year-old Angelo wakes up and discovers that his new beagle puppy has chewed up his plastic guitar. Tragedy.

The little fellow has a fit of grief. Mom's nerves get all tight. Yesterday's headache starts coming back, and she snaps at husband Tony as he leaves for the office.

Still feeling the unhappy send-off, he greets his secretary with some cold and utterly unreasonable instruction. She immediately picks up the mood, and at coffee break she tells off a fellow secretary in a way that puts the whole community on ice for the rest of the day. Fifteen minutes before the office closes, the second put-down secretary vents her anger at her boss and tells him she's had it.

You know what that means. About an hour and a half later, he walks into his house after fighting heavy freeway traffic. You can guess how he arrives.

Seeing his wife, he blurts out an angry word because little Nelson had left his bike in the driveway once again. Mom turns around and he yells at their five-year-old son. Nelson's eyes fill up with tears.

He rushes to his room, slams the door, and kicks his Scottish terrier. Where does it all end? The writer says, every action is understandable. Each person had a reason for being upset.

Now, but what that little world of people needed that day was someone who could absorb unjust treatment without lashing out. Have you got it? Someone who can absorb unjust treatment without lashing out meekness. That's it.

It's the capacity to take it all because one is in touch with a living Lord who took it all and more. And by His grace, one can so do it. Clothe yourselves with meekness, says Paul, then longsuffering or patience.

Here is another quality that describes someone's reaction to the unpleasant and difficult circumstances created by one's fellow man. Instead of going off the handle in a violent temper, the longsufferer does exactly what the English word suggests. He suffers long.

He has patience. He takes it. He takes it in.

He may inwardly feel the pain more than the person that goes off in a fit of temper, but he takes it in for his Lord's sake. He has learned to bear with fools and folly. In other words, he's in touch, in life touch may I say, with Jesus Christ who is his life.

The next two I'll bring them together, forbearing and forgiving. The first two outer garments we have just described are made of the same basic texture as these other two, but these latter are but two different styles of the same. You have a coat and a waistcoat and the trousers made of the same texture.

And that's the picture that Paul has here. Longsuffering or patience is an attitude that puts up, forbears with anything in the will of God. Unsympathetic friends, uncomfortable circumstances, unpromising conditions, and the list is endless.

But the point is, here is a person in touch with the overcoming grace which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And when faced with evil against one's person or against one's property, meekness and patience, forgive 70 times 7. Oh my, Paul puts something before us here to look at. He doesn't simply say forgive because Christ forgave.

He says forgive as Christ forgave. It makes a world of difference. As he forgave.

Now all these graces are like garments that are meant to constitute the Christian's character. Put them on, says Paul. Clothe them.

You are in him. You are in life union with him. He is not just a name you sing about.

Now my friends, let's examine ourselves. Is he just a name you sing about? Or you talk about? Or you read about in the Bible or in other books? Is he merely a name? And you have no life touch with him? So that you can't envisage any such transformation in your life. You know of no source that can really change you to become like that.

A Christian should know. A certain pastor was very fond of referring to one incident in his experience as a pastor and in many of his sermons away from home. This was one that he referred to if the context came anywhere near giving him the license.

There was a man in his congregation who had a very short temper. I won't tell you where it came from. People from that part of the world often have short tempers.

They tell me. But anyway, he had a very short temper. And the moment there was any semblance of somebody taking exception to it, he would say, Oh, he says, I got this from my father.

He had a very short fuse too. The pastor had heard this 20, 30 times over. I got this from my father.

He had a short fuse too. Therefore, I'm expected to be like my father, aren't I? Isn't that what we expect? One day the pastor couldn't take it anymore. He said, Tell me, Tom.

Did I ever hear you tell the church meeting that you were born again? Of course, he said. I bore my testimony at such and such a time. You remember, he says.

And so and so was speaking on the occasion. Have you forgotten about it? No, no, says the pastor. I remember.

Does that mean that you became a child of God? Of course, pastor. As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Oh, he knew the scriptures all right.

And he could have given others. So you've been born again, and you're a child of God. God is your father.

What kind of a temper did you get from your heavenly father? Now, my friends, that's a real question. That's a real question. Have you and I been really born of God? Do we know what it is to have dealings with the real God of the Bible and the real Savior of the Bible and the mighty Holy Spirit of the Bible so that we are in process of being transformed into his image? Clothe yourselves with these inner garments, these outer garments.

And then, to put it all, there's such a completeness about Paul's teaching. And then he says you need a belt. Typical oriental thought.

You have the undergarments and you have the outer garments, but you need to belt the whole thing together for completeness and compactness so that you can run. And if you have a long flowing robe, you pick it up and you put it under the belt so that you can run. He says you need a belt.

And the belt, of course, is agape. In some measure, you must have agape before you can have any of the others. But agape is both the beginning and the crown of everything in the Christian life.

It will give a new significance to all these characteristic features and it will bind them together and it will make them a cohesive force. And you can run. And you can walk.

And you can move wherever God is sending you. Christian brother or sister, I hope you're not cross with me this morning, but I have to be true to my passage and my text and my mandate. How well clothed are we? How often do we come to the wardrobe and put anything on that we've never had before? The wardrobe is full.

For all things that pertain to life and godliness were given to us when we came to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. And faith can come and make it his own as the scriptures command. There's a hymn which some of my friends sing in certain circles where I have turned with great joy.

Two stanzas go like this. I want that adorning divine. Thou only, my God, canst bestow.

I want in those beautiful garments to shine which mark out thy household below. I want, oh, I want to attain some likeness, my Savior, to thee that longed for resemblance once more to regain thy comeliness put upon me. Now, I'm not going to say very much about the other.

Now, in order to get them there, I want you to notice the way Paul comes to it. Remember what you are by God's grace. You are God's chosen people.

Oh, yes, every Christian is a chosen person to belong to God's chosen people. Until the Christian church was born, these lofty terms were only given to Jews. But in the New Testament era, Paul, like his brother Peter, brother Apostle Peter, uses these high terms and applies them to the church comprising believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

You have been chosen. God has chosen you. He sought you.

He came after you. He pleaded with you. He invited you.

He said, I want you. And He constrained you to come and He grew you. And then you followed on.

And foolishly, perhaps for a long time, you thought that your following on was everything that happened. Whereas, as a matter of fact, you would never have started off had He not called you and drawn you. But He chose you.

And He made you holy in Christ. Now, the reference here, of course, is to a positional holiness in Christ. You see, the moment you and I receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, all the perfections of the Lord Jesus Christ are made over to us.

He of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. The whole thing. So that if you are in Christ this morning, technically speaking, positionally speaking, perfection is already yours.

In your Lord. There's no question about you bearing His image at last. It's been given you.

All the glory of the future is in the cupboard, in the wardrobe, for you. For Christ is yours. And you're dearly loved.

God's choice of you was not a king summoning from the throne, go and get number so and so and bring him to my councils and I'll say something and I'll do something. He loved you. He followed you.

He wanted you with all His heart. He loved you despite your rebellion, despite your condition, despite your waywardness, despite everything you had done and everything you were. And our God loves His people.

So that the Bible speaks of the redeemed of the Lord as the apple of His eye. He has loved us with an everlasting love. Now says Paul, you Colossians, I want to appeal to the real Christian consciousness.

Remember who you are. God's chosen people. Sanctified by Him.

To be more and more sanctified in your daily lives practically because of that. Beloved, dearly beloved. Because of that, out of the awareness of that, get cracking.

I appeal to you in the Romans, Romans 12, 1. It's the same concept. By the mercies of God, by what He's done for you and what He is to you. A new relationship and the benefits He's heaped upon you.

Come, come, obey. Brothers and sisters in Christ, that's where we've got to end this morning. Commune with your own selves, those you redeemed of the Lord.

And remember who you are. God's chosen. Men and women who God has set apart to be His own and to glorify with His own glory.

And He loves you dearly. And as such, read these verses and start making far more trips to the wardrobe which is Christ Jesus, your Lord. And by grace, put on this and this and this.

For Christ is all and you'll find everything you need. And that God needs of you in Him. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, our God and Father, we bow humbly before You because, for one thing, when we meditate upon a passage like this, we are always reminded of our undeserving condition. And we have many things that come to our memories, come to our minds, which we need and ought to confess before You. And we have decisions to make and dedications to offer.

And we ask that in these closing, concluding moments of our morning's worship here in Knox, You will give us the grace to take seriously what You say and as the day unfolds, to come back again to this passage and learn from it what You were so eager to teach us. And of the Lamb.

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