

THE SPIRITUAL ATTIRE OF A CHRISTIAN

Colossians 3:12-14

Intro: The more I study Paul's letter to the church at Colosse, the more I marvel at how much truth he presented to the believers in Colosse what it means to be a child of God, what it means to be a true Christian. He told them in chapter 2, verse 1, "what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." The word "conflict," as I explained to you when I covered that part of the epistle, is the Greek word from which we get our word *agony*. It is a word that can be used of the conflict that athletes exert especially when competing with each other. They are called upon to exert all of the ability and strength that they have in order to win.

But Paul had in mind a much greater and a much more important struggle that the child of God faces. That is the struggle that we all face against sin. And so Paul, in expressing his concern for the believers at Colosse and Hierapolis, where he had never been when he wrote this letter, Paul expressed the great burden that he had for the believers in both of these places. And he used this word to express his "intense solicitude," his "anxiety" (Thayer, p. 10). for them. Solicitude, in case you are not familiar with that word means his *extreme concern* for them. It was intense! The Apostle Paul knew that the Christian life is spiritual warfare between the old man and the new man which he said in chapter 3, verse 9, they had "put off," and the new man, which he said in verse 10, that they had "put on."

Now they may not have understood this. And it ought to raise the question in our minds, "If they had put off the old man with his deeds, and had put on the new man," why then in verse 8 of chapter 3 had Paul told them to "put off" the sins which he mentioned from verse 5 on, and then told them to "put on" the five characteristics that he mentioned in our text for today – in verses 12, 13, and 14?

Well, this is one of the important things that we all need to realize about the Christian life. Paul obviously had in mind every true Christian when he said, "ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man." If it applied to all of them, then it must have happened to them when they first trusted in Christ. They were not aware of it then, and neither were we. There were many things that happened to us when we were saved that we have learned about from reading the Word since

we first were saved. By the grace of God the power that our old nature held over us was put off by God, and we put on a new nature. It seems that the believers at Colosse had not understood this about their salvation. And Paul was deeply concerned about them because they needed to understand this basic truth if they were to make any progress in their new life in Christ.

This was doctrine. It was not something that they had experienced so that they would know it that way. This was truth that Paul wanted them to understand, a truth that applied to all who were really saved. This ought to show us how important it is to know doctrine. Doctrine is the foundation of practical growth in the Christian life. The more we learn about the truth of salvation, the better prepared we are to make progress in a life that is pleasing to God, which is a life of holiness. Before we are saved, there was nothing we could do to please God. Paul wrote in Romans 8:8, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." But then he added in verse 9:

9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

This is another point of doctrine that we all need to understand, and we don't know it unless some other Christian tells us, or we read this verse for ourselves in the Bible. You see, this is doctrine, and it is true doctrine. We weren't conscious when the Spirit of God came to dwell in us, but He did! And yet you will find true Christians today who do not know this doctrine of Scripture.

It is very important that all of us understand teaching like we have in 2 Corinthians 5:17;

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

When Paul spoke of being "in Christ," he was not speaking of a person who is just a church member. Nor was he talking about a person who tries to live a good life, taking care of his family, obeying the law, paying his bills. Becoming a Christian is a work of God when we repent of our sins and believe that Jesus Christ died to save us from our sins. That is when God makes all of those wonderful changes in our lives. And we learn what those changes are as we read and study the Bible. That is why it is important for all of us to be reading the Bible for ourselves, and to find a church where we can be taught the great truths of Scripture. And as we learn the truth of Scripture, then we act upon the truth that we learn.

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If you go back to Colossians 1, verse 7, you will see that Epaphras had been one of their teachers. And if you turn to chapter 4, verse 12 you will find that Epaphras prayed for them, and what the burden of his prayer for them was. (Read Col. 4:12.) How thankful all of us can be who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, for those who have helped us to understand the great teaching of Scripture.

Now I hope you can see how all that Paul taught just in Colossians 3, is related to each other. He said, as we have seen, that they all when they were saved had “put off the old man with his deeds,” and had “put on the new man” (Col. 3:9b-10a). In verse 11 he mentioned that it did not make any difference whether a person is a Gentile or a Jew, has been following another relation, or not, is from the lowest class of people, or whether a person is free or a slave, this truth applies to all who know Jesus Christ as Savior. To people who know the Lord, Christ is all (because we don’t need anyone or anything else to make us acceptable to God), and Christ is “in all.” If you are truly a Christian, did you know that from the moment you were saved, the Lord Jesus Christ has been living in you? I was saved for many years before I learned that amazing truth.

Now I have said of this to point out to you in the first verse of my text for the morning, the word “therefore.” That is, based upon the truths in verses 9, 10, and 11, or I could say, based upon the first eleven verses of chapter 3, “put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved” – and then Paul mentioned seven characteristics that you and I need to put on ourselves, not to put off and on like we do our clothes, but to put them off and keep them off and to put the others on and to keep on, the seven godly characteristics. To put them off is to refuse to do them, and to put the others on is to know that by the grace of God we can become holy people, people that love and please God.

And now let us notice what they are:

First in verse 12:

- 1) “Bowels of mercies,
- 2) “Kindness,
- 3) “Humbleness of mind,
- 4) “Meekness,
- 5) “Longsuffering,

Then in verse 13:

- 6) “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,
- And finally in verse 14:

7) “Charity,” which is an old English word for love.

Now this is not a complete list, but it is a characteristic list. All of the commandments of the book of Colossians are exhortations that we need to pay attention to in our daily lives. None of us is going to do any of these perfectly, but as we grow in the Lord we should be improving in all of these areas, by the grace of God and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit Who also dwells in us.

But now let me point out something very wonderful to you about putting on these characteristics. It is given to us in verse 13 in connection with forgiving others with whom we may have trouble. And this applies to trouble with unbelievers as well as with other believers. What is the pattern that we are to follow in forgiving others? It is, “even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

What does this statement tell us about all of these characteristics? It tells us that our Example in seeking to put on all of these characteristics is *Christ!*

So, if you want to know what it is to be merciful, take your Bible and learn about Christ. If you want to know what kindness is, learn about Christ. If you want to learn to be humble, learn about Christ. If you want to learn meekness, learn about Christ. If you want to know what long-suffering is, learn it from Christ. If you want to learn forbearance and forgiveness, learn from Christ. If you want to know what true love is, learn it from Christ.

This is why the Apostle Paul began this third chapter of Colossians as he did. We are to seek those things which are above, in heaven. Why? Because that is where you will find Christ. Why are we to set our affections on things above? Because that is where Christ is. Also when Christ comes and we see Him as He is, we are going to be like Him. Then we will all see really for the first time why the Lord has saved us. “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

But now let me take you to the book of Romans to put the clincher on all of this, if you need further evidence of what we are to put on. At the end of chapter 13 in Romans Paul was concluding a section of that epistle which sounds much like what we have here in Colossians. Turn with me to the book of Romans, chapter 13, and I want to read to you the last four

verses of the chapter, verses 11 through 14:

11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof (Rom. 13:11-14).

You will find the perfection of the seven godly characteristics Paul mentioned in my text for this morning, and much, much more, **in Christ**. And when you think about it, I feel sure that the Holy Spirit will show you that the best safeguard we have against sin, is to focus our attention always as we read the Word, or teach the Word, or hear it taught by others, is to look for Christ, and to learn of Him. While the Lord Jesus was here on earth, on one occasion when He was speaking to a group of unbelieving Jews, He said this about the OT Scriptures. And you will find these words in John 5:39:

39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

And anyone who reads the NT will see that from the Gospel of Matthew through the Book of the Revelation, Christ is in every book and all through every book. After our Lord's resurrection He was walking with two of His disciples who did not know Him, but had been confused about reports that He was alive. Then we are told that "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Later He did the same with the eleven apostles, "and opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Earlier the Lord had told His disciples, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29).

As we learn of Christ by reading the Word and meditating and praying over what we read, we will find that our reading will do two things for us:

- 1) It will turn us away from sin, and
- 2) We will be made more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: Next Sunday, the Lord willing, I want to go over these seven

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characteristics that we have in these three verses. But I wanted to establish with you today that they were all manifested by our Lord while He was here on earth, and that by His grace as we learn of Him from the Word, they will be more and more evident in our lives while we are here on earth.

Hopefully we will go ahead also to verses 15, 16, and 17. But continue reading through the epistle until you see the flow of Paul's thinking as he laid the foundation of the truth, and then sought to show the Colossians how their practical obedience was the fruit of understanding the truth.