

Clothing Ourselves with Love

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Bible Text: Colossians 3:12-13
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We read together Colossians 3.

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. 5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: 6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: 7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. 8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: 11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. 12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. 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. 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. 18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. 20 Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. 21 Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. 22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: 23 And

whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

We read that far in the inspired Scripture.

The text is verses 12 and 13.

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

Beloved people of God, as we well know, we have been through a trying time as a congregation. We've been through some difficulty over the last several years, and then a controversy. There has been some misunderstanding on both sides. There's been disagreements and whenever there are such trials in the church, there is potential for much hurt, much offense, and there is the possibility that we do not behave properly towards one another in the midst of our disagreements. Of course, that's always the case. We are weak, we are sinners, and we dwell with one another and, of course, those among whom we dwell are weak and sinners so there is always the likelihood, the possibility that we offend one another, hurt one another, but especially in trying times is that the case. We need to be, then, even more careful than normal under such circumstances. The devil watches, the devil waits and seeks to exploit differences in the church, differences in understanding various issues in the church, and seeks to exploit those to turn us against one another so that he can destroy the unity, the blessedness of the church, and ultimately destroy the church, or at least that is his goal.

So we need to proceed with one another very carefully, but we also recognize, or need to recognize that in such circumstances we do have an opportunity to reveal the grace of Jesus Christ, the opportunity to reveal the grace of Jesus Christ in us by our behavior. Unique opportunities present themselves in the midst of difficulties. We have the opportunities to show our faith, to show we are motivated by thankfulness, to show that we believe the unconditional covenant of grace; that we believe we are justified by faith alone and all the rest. We have the opportunity to put on display what we believe as we live with one another.

Put on love. That's the calling. That's the opportunity that we are given by God. Put on love and the word that we hear tonight and the word that we meditate on this evening which is that calling, fundamentally that calling to put on love, is not directed, this sermon is not directed at any given individual or groups of individuals. The sermon is directed to myself, first of all. I need to hear this. I do. But it's also directed to each of us and each of us ought to take hold of the word of God that we hear tonight not as it applies to someone else, not as someone else ought to hear it, but as I ought to hear it. Let each of us humble ourselves before the word of God and receive it in that way this evening.

We consider the text, then, under the theme "Clothing Ourselves with Love." Clothing ourselves with love. The command, first of all; secondly, the pattern as that is brought out in the text including also the motive; and then finally in the third place, the basis.

The word in the text translated "put on" is literally "clothe yourselves." We see that at the beginning of the text, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind," etc. Put on these things. So in that sense, we put them on or are called to put them on as we would put on clothing. The clothing, stepping back now, not looking so much at all of the individual virtues but stepping back and seeing the larger picture, the clothing that the Holy Spirit speaks of here is love. In one word, love. That's made clear by verse 14, the verse that immediately follows the verses that we especially focus on this evening, verse 14 says, "And above all these things put on charity." Above bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing with one another, and forgiving one another. Above all these things, put on charity. Charity, literally, love. Put on love.

Now we need to understand that when the apostle says and when the Spirit inspires him to write "above all these things," he does not mean that charity and love is more important than all the other things that he's listed previously so that all the other things are important but above all them stands this one great calling of love that is more important than all the others, but above all means that love is, in a sense, the fountain out of which all these other virtues come. We put on love, then really we put on all the others that are listed in the text. All the virtues listed in our text, then, are forms, expressions of that principal virtue of charity.

So we must, I must, you must clothe ourselves with love. We must put on ourselves the clothing of the Christian virtues listed in the text: bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. We notice this is a command of God. This is a command, "Put on," in the imperative, "Put on" these things is the command of God, the calling, the requirement, the duty of the child of God, to use some of the words that our creeds use for this command.

It is our duty. You must do this. I must do this. Of course, our ability to do this command comes from God. One who does not receive the ability from God absolutely cannot put on love, cannot put on any of these virtues. Our ability comes from God and that ability comes to us through his word even through this text, through this command. He works in us by the power of his gracious command. As justified, alive, thankful people of God, he works in us to do what he calls us to do, put on love.

It's possible for us to obey this command because we have put on the new man already, therefore in principle, we have already put on love. That's the "therefore" of our text. The text says, "Put on therefore," all of these virtues. That "therefore" points back to verse 10 where we read after we read, "seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds," then we read in verse 10, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge

after the image of him that created him." We have put on the new man, therefore in principle have put on love. We can view that new man in light of the text which uses a word which means to put on as if to put on clothing, then we can use or view rather the new man as a wardrobe full of clothes that God gives to us that is ours, that he has put within us, the clothing of Christian virtues that is already ours.

Someone might prepare themselves to come to be with God's people to worship God, as a man might put on his socks, shoes, pants, shirt, tie, coat, so we put on all of these various Christian virtues that are ours, that have been earned for us by our Lord Jesus Christ in principle, and planted within us in the new man, how we take them out of the wardrobe, so to speak, of that new man and put them on, wear them, let them be seen, let them come to open manifestation in our life, attitudes, behavior, speech and our actions toward one another.

So God addresses us. You are in Christ. You are risen with him, reminded that that's how the chapter begins. We're reminded once again, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." You are in Christ. You are risen with him. You are alive, as we heard that this morning. You are alive. You have put on the new man in principle as God by his grace has freely given you that gift of a regenerated heart and, therefore, a new man.

Now God says, "Now I command you, put on the virtues of this new man. Put on the various garments of love as you live with one another." That's especially the focus of the text. Of course, we must love God and we must live in love toward God and that directly, obeying the first number of commandments of the 10, but this text especially says, "Love God by living in love towards one another," or to put it another way, "Put on the virtues of love. Put on the clothing of love, love toward God but love toward one another as well as you live with one another, as you deal with one another as members of one body." And God says in the text or intends to mean in the text, as you go out to live with one another as members of Jesus Christ, don't go out with dirty filthy clothing of the old man, don't live with one another displaying all that sin and ugliness of the old man, put off those clothes, don't wear those, verse 8, "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." Don't go out of the house, so to speak, to dwell with one another with that filthy, old, sinful clothing on. Don't go out with some sloppy casual clothing on of half-hearted concern for the brother, which is really only selfishness. Don't live that way with one another but put on your best as you live with one another. Put on love. Put on that clothing that I have given to you and put on all the virtues of love.

The text lists out all of those virtues and it's good for us to contemplate them one by one and even good for us because God, by his own power and grace, draws out of our new man into expression and into manifestation these virtues as we hear them described by our Lord Jesus through his word.

First of all, then, bowels of mercies. Unusual. Not unusual for the Scripture but unusual for us today to speak of bowels of mercies, but the meaning is in speaking of bowels, the meaning is to refer to the center of a person, that place within us where we feel emotion, deep emotion, compassion for one another. That's the idea, too, of mercies. The idea is that of compassion; that of sympathy, sympathy, of pity. Bowels of mercies, then, means be moved with sympathy for one another within yourselves. Then not only, of course, be moved within ourselves but let that come out in our speech towards one another, in our dealings with one another, how we behave and act towards one another. Put on that it may be seen, this beautiful virtue, bowels of mercies.

Mercy, beloved, responds when we see someone needs help. An example of mercy is that of the Good Samaritan. He saw someone in need of help and he stepped in and he gave help, he gave assistance. Mercy gives help not as we want to help but as that person needs that help. Mercy seeks to lift one up out of their misery and lift them up to joy and blessedness. That's the mercy of God towards us and that's the way that we reveal mercy towards one another as well. Then as we're motivated by mercy and as we put on mercy, we look for those who need help. One who puts on mercy sees those who need sympathy, who need compassion, and then helps, and then helps in the way that the other needs it.

Mercy really when we put on this attitude of bowels of mercy, we put that on and we live amongst one another with that attitude of mercy, really we view every other saint, every saint as one who needs mercy, one who is in misery. Misery of one sort or another, we all are. We all struggle against sin. We all have the bondage of sin in us to some degree or other. We struggle under our sin and that sin causes us misery and so we look at one another not so much seeing the sin but as seeing the misery in one another and we seek to help, we have pity and compassion one to another and seek to lift one another up out of our misery.

Kindness is the second virtue we're called to put on, "Put on therefore, kindness." Of course, all men appreciate kindness shown to them. We know what it feels like to have someone be kind to us but the text here calls us to show that kindness to others. Be considerate, friendly, gentle. Show true genuine kindness one to another. We can point out in that connection, too, that when the text says put these things on and when we express that by saying show these things to one another, of course we don't mean a hypocritical external show. Our goal isn't to convince others that we're kind but to truly put on kindness from the heart and therefore, then, exhibit that kindness and deal with one another with true, heartfelt, sincere kindness as members of Jesus Christ.

The text goes on to list humbleness of mind. It means that we ought not think too highly of ourselves. Humbleness is expressed in Philippians 2 with these words, "Let each esteem other better than themselves," Philippians 2:3. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Put on that clothing, God's word says. View others as more worthy of promotion, more worthy of being lifted up and helped and advanced and all the rest, encouraged. Don't boast. Don't brag. Don't try to draw attention to ourselves. Put off that filthy clothing and

put on clothing that seeks to promote others and to do so with genuine humbleness of mind.

The text also describes meekness. Put on meekness. Put on that unique virtue. Out of that new man that is within you, take that meekness that God has given, bring it out and deal with one another with true meekness. Meekness means one is able to let go of his own rights. One who is not meek is always talking about his rights, his cause, what he wants, what he deserves. That's not meekness. Meekness is saying, "I'm willing to let go of my rights. I'm not concerned about that. I will take abuse if it is given to me, and I will do so, by God's grace, without retaliation." That's meekness. Being meek, God says, put on that meekness when you deal with one another and even we should say, perhaps, especially when that abuse is undeserved, when someone harms us or hurts us and we don't deserve that. Especially then, put on that meekness quickly before you retaliate, before you speak. Put on that meekness and deal with one another with that virtue of meekness. The great example of the Scripture aside from our Lord Jesus Christ, of course, but the other great example in the Scripture is that of Moses, how often wasn't he abused and yet he took that without retaliation and walked as a man of great meekness. An excellent example for us.

Then the Scripture mentions longsuffering. Longsuffering. Longsuffering is a kind of patience, one who is able to suffer long in a quiet emotional state; one who doesn't become riled up quickly; one who doesn't respond with a great outburst when someone does something that they disapprove of or that hurts them. Longsuffering is an ability, again, to suffer the sins of others; not to become easily agitated, easily agitated within ourselves or easily agitated in how we deal with one another over things that affect us in negative ways. To put it another way, one who is longsuffering is one who is not very easily offended; one who is not quick to take offense. That's one who is longsuffering. That's what that virtue, that spiritual clothing looks like.

Then, again, the Scripture says here forbearing one another, the last two, forbearing one another and forgiving one another. First of all, forbearing one another, a similar idea to longsuffering and some overlap even with meekness, but forbearing one another means, again, exercising self-restraint and tolerance. It's an attitude that says, "I will not strike back. I will not." Forbearing one another means, again in other words, to put up with one another. That's the calling. Each of us recognizes that we are sinners, it doesn't take long either to recognize that we dwell amongst others who are sinners and rather than make a big issue of that constantly with one another and be offended easily with one another, rather we say we put on forbearing one another and we say, "I will bear with one another. I will bear with my fellow saints even as I pray that they bear with me."

Notice the other virtues were not followed by the phrase "one another" but now we reach forbearing and the Holy Spirit adds behind forbearing the words "one another." This is a virtue that is meant to be reciprocated; something that we must show to others and something that we hope and pray that they will show to us too. Again, reminding ourselves in all of this as we put on these things and as we hear about these things, that we need not only be concerned about dealing with others' sins but we ought to be

concerned also about how they must deal with our sins. So the calling is put on an attitude of forbearing one another.

Then, last of all, forgiving one another. Again, forgiving followed by the two words "one another," recognizing that I not only need to put up with and endure and bear the sins of others, they must forbear and endure my sins as well, but here now too, I not only must be a very generous and benevolent person who forgives others but I know that they must forgive me too because I, too, sin against them and offend them. We put on that attitude, an attitude of understanding, a reciprocated forgiveness of one another.

The text says with regard to forgiving one another, "if any man have a quarrel against any," and Scripture there according to the original reveals that the idea isn't if it might happen possibly that someone has a quarrel against another, here's what you must do, you must put on a forgiving one another attitude, a spiritual clothing of forgiveness towards one another, but the point rather is when, when you have a quarrel with another. It's simply going to happen as we live in this world and as we live amongst sinners and as we, ourselves, are sinners. There will be differences. There will be disagreements. That's not to surprise us. That doesn't shock us or stun us. We expect that. Scripture says, then, when anyone has a quarrel against any other, put on the spiritual clothing of forgiving one another.

It's really true, too, that we only can forbear, put up with and bear with one another when we have this attitude, this virtue firmly put on, the attitude of being convinced and convicted that we must forgive one another and put on the attitude of forgiveness, a desire to forgive and a seeking to forgive as much as is possible for us. Put these on, is God's word to me and to you tonight. Put these on. Of course we can only do that when we are putting off the old man and his deeds and his works and his attitudes. The word of God to us is be daily in repentance. Give yourself to daily, give myself to daily repentance, search our hearts for those, that clothing of the old man which seeks to come upon us and to corrupt and pollute us and put away that old man, repent of the sins of the old man, put off that clothing, throw it away, burn it up. Put on now this clothing of love.

The pattern for us to follow is none other than the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. The text includes that in verse 13 at the very end of that verse, "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." It means to say, "Look at Christ. Look at the Lord Jesus Christ. There you find the power and the motive and the pattern to put on all this clothing of love as you live with and deal with one another. Look at Jesus Christ. Look at how he forgave you." First of all, look at how you offended him. We look at how we have sinned against him and how many times and in how great of ways, and yet he forgave us and he forgave us without any stipulations, without any conditions, without anything for us that we have to do first of all. He forgave us all our sins and he forgave us all our sins at great cost to himself. He suffered and died. He bore the agonies of hell so as to forgive us our sins and not only some of our sins, not only most of our sins, not only the many many sins we might judge are small and insignificant, really none of them are, are they? Not as their sin over against the most high majesty of God. But he forgave us all of our sins.

Every one of them. With regard to each and every one of them, he says, "I have paid for it and, therefore, I forgive you."

Then look at Christ, the one who forgave us, and there we find our motive, too, don't we? Great motive. Beautiful, glorious motive with thanksgiving to our God for Jesus Christ and on account of what he has done for us, for Christ forgave me, each one of us says, Christ forgave me all that. He forgave me all that, then I will walk in thankfulness to him and put on that new man, put on that love and all those virtues that he calls me to put on in his word.

He says then in the text to follow his example, even as Christ forgave us, so also ought we to forgive one another. Forgiveness. Forgiveness is mentioned because, really in a very real sense it all begins there. If we can't forgive one another, we can't put on any of the other clothing either. None of the other virtues will be manifest in us. And if we persist in not forgiving one another, the more and more the old man clothing will be present and manifest on us and less and less we live with one another with the clothing of the new man.

He forgave you, so also do ye towards one another, and then remember, too, he forgave you for that much, forgive a brother or sister for the relatively small offense that they have rendered against you. He forbears with you. He puts up with us, doesn't he? Isn't that a thought? Think of how we live with him day after day after day and yet he bears long with us, he puts up with us in the right sense of the word. He's longsuffering towards us. He's patient towards us. So very very patient towards us. And if he is so longsuffering towards us, then let us put on that same virtue that he has given to us. It's his own longsuffering, let us put that on and live that way towards one another. And he is meek towards us. He doesn't retaliate. He doesn't strike back. He is as Moses was, a faithful, patient, gentle, meek leader of God's church and he became humble because of our sins. Again, Philippians 2:6 and following, Christ Jesus, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He humbled himself that far to come from heaven to be here and live in our midst and take the curse that was due to us upon himself. He humbled himself that far. Let us, then, put on humbleness of mind, lowliness of mind, and deal with one another in that humility.

And he is kind to us, and he is merciful to us. Isn't that one of the virtues that he shows to us that so overwhelms us? Here we are in our sin and the misery that comes upon us on account of our own sin, and yet he has pity upon us. He sympathizes with us. He shows us compassion and he helps us and he lifts us out of our misery into his own arms of comfort and into the highest blessedness and glory that he is able to give to us, in part now and perfected in glory. He is merciful to us, let us, then, put on that bowels of mercies as we deal with one another.

Can we? Should we? The text emphasizes that we can and that we should for we are, according to the text, we are the elect of God, holy and beloved. Election, of course, is the center of all of those. Election is the basis for all the rest as we are elected in Jesus Christ and in eternity. The text comes to us and says, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness," and all the rest. Put these things on as you are the elect of God. Remember what that means. There is no such thing as election without a reprobation. God has elected us whereas he has rejected others. He's elected us in his love and in his grace freely, unconditionally, undeservedly. He has elected us to be his own and because he's elected us, we are holy, we are separated from the world and consecrated unto himself, called out of the world, gathered out of the world, drawn near to himself. We are holy and we are beloved as we are viewed in the Beloved, the Beloved Son of God, Jesus Christ. So also we are the beloved of God. He loves us with an everlasting love.

We should, then, and we must, then, put on love for we are God's elect, and it's only fitting and proper that we behave as God's elect. He's elected us unto good works. He's elected us unto holiness. He's elected us with a view to that not because we are holy, not by any means, but he's elected us freely and graciously that we might be holy before him and walk in love before him. And we can. We can, too, because we are God's elect.

We do these things not to become elect but we do these things because we are elect. Out of thankfulness to our God and out of love to our God for his great electing love towards us, that he chose us, that he forgave us, that he elected us in love and now calls us and views us and treats us as beloved. As we are, therefore, the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on, put on love and live with one another with that spiritual, beautiful, God-given clothing. Let us, beloved, so walk to the glory of our God's name. Amen.

Father, we thank thee for thy word and we thank thee for reminding us of who we are and how we ought to be, how we ought to live before thee as thy people. Fill us, Lord, with the power and life and the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Equip us and strengthen us especially as we think upon how he has forgiven us and what all he has done for us and how daily he deals with us. So let us, then, show to one another that we know, that we taste that great grace of our God and Jesus Christ. May we live towards one another not so that they may admire us but that they might admire thee, seeing these beautiful virtues that thou hast clothed us with in Jesus Christ. Strengthen us, Father, unto this that we might live in love, in peace, in unity one with another to the glory of thy great and gracious name now and forevermore. Amen.