

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"



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## Be Sure What You Wear

*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. (Colossians 3:12–15)*

Our youngest daughter has a delightful off-the-cuff sense of humor. On occasion when we are with her family in a public setting, invariably we'll see someone whose clothing simply does not match the person or whose choice of colors and style exhibit glaring bad taste. Leah will whisper to us, "Just because you can doesn't mean you should." Once in a public gathering my wife observed a man with a sport jacket that was in especially bad taste. She described the fabric as far more suitable for a saddle blanket than a sport jacket, but then perhaps the horse had already rejected the fabric.

Paul urges the Colossians, as well as us, to do more than talk a good talk about the spiritual and ethical clothes we wear. He requires us to "Put on...." Clothes are not an integral part of our inner constitution, but they clearly make a first impression on the people around us. The "old man" and the "new man" that Paul discusses in this context are also not integral components of our being. They are rather behaviors that we practice, like the clothes we wear, and, no less than the clothes we wear, they distinctly form a first impression on the people around us. They also either strengthen our spiritual character, or they erode our ethics and leave us vulnerable to spiritual infection and disease, such as errors in our beliefs or sins in our life.

Paul leaves no doubt about the order of action. He does not teach that we practice these traits in order to become God's elect. He rather directs us to "Put on..." these traits "...as the elect of God..." in other words, because we are God's elect. Human attitudes or behaviors cannot make one a child of God any more than the Jones child's behavior can transform the Jones child into a child of the Smith family. Front door or back door, human attitudes or human behaviors (the requirement for either faith/belief or faith plus godly behaviors, as in teachings that range from historical Arminian teaching, front-door salvation by works, to MacArthur's "lordship salvation,"

back-door functional salvation by works) do not transform a sinner, dead in his/her sins, into a child of God. Despite the protest of those who say that one's belief or faith is not a work, and thus is a necessary and causative prerequisite for the new birth, Jesus affirms that our belief is essentially a "work." (John 6:28-29) Paul describes the appropriate spiritual, behavioral wardrobe for people who are in fact God's elect.

We should observe that Paul doesn't so much as hint at the errant notion that, "If you are really one of God's elect, you shall surely put on these traits." He exhorts us to put them on; he doesn't indicate that we shall surely do so. Look into the mirror of your own life. Do you always practice these traits? Do they always form your spiritual identity in the eyes of those around you? Only the most deluded of minds will claim such perfect conformity to the ways of God. Most of us look in the mirror and realize that we always need to improve our spiritual wardrobe, a natural and designed objective for the mirror of the "...perfect law of liberty." (James 1:22-27)

I have read that a central component for training U. S. Treasury agents to recognize counterfeit money is to repeatedly expose agents in training to real money. After so much exposure to real money, agents will immediately spot a counterfeit. Scripture regularly requires us to make self-examination a major part of our spiritual growth. However, self-examination works as it should only when we examine ourselves in the mirror of God's "perfect law of liberty," Scripture itself.

Paul develops an interesting theme in the list of spiritual clothes he directs us to keep in our closet and to wear regularly. Every trait emphasizes the actions of love in one way or another. Our Western superficial culture has stereotyped "love" in terms of emotions, of how we feel, that most people find it puzzling and extremely difficult to think of love in terms of a command or of a behavior, not a sentimental

feeling. They seem conveniently to forget that one requirement in the traditional Christian wedding vow requires the husband and the wife to "love" the other.

1. ...*bowels of mercies*.... The reference to bowels here likely intends to direct us to the deep, inner qualities that energize our behaviors. In other words, do not put on a pretense behind teeth gritted and tongue bitten to prevent your harsh emotions to show. Mercy inherently reminds us of goodness not deserved. We are quite comfortable with the idea of God's mercy extended to us, but are we willing to practice toward others what God has shown toward us in that He saved us despite our not deserving salvation?
2. ...*kindness*.... Not only are we to control and reshape our emotions, but we are also required to manifest that transformed inner mercy in acts of kindness toward others.
3. ...*humbleness of mind*.... Paul exemplifies this trait in Acts 20:19. It requires us to be unassuming, even when we have done or very best. I recently heard about a man who preached a rather long sermon on a Sunday morning, but most of the time was spent telling the people how much he knew and how smart he was. Every preacher needs to remember every time he steps into the pulpit that, if he preaches on himself, he has chosen an unworthy and unedifying topic for his sermon. "We preach not ourselves...." (2 Corinthians 4:5) Some months back I heard a tape of a Sunday morning sermon in which the preacher named me and announced that my error in a brief snippet he extracted from some of my writings would be his topic that morning, a snippet that he conveniently misconstrued. When my wife asked what I thought about being the topic of a Sunday morning sermon, I told her that the man had a poor choice of subjects if he had nothing else to preach on that day.
4. ...*meekness*.... As humbleness of mind exemplifies a void of arrogance, meekness exhibits a void of harshness. We may well speak the truth to someone, but do so with such harshness as to alienate them rather than help them.
5. ...*longsuffering*.... Typically, when our King James Bible is dealing with a godly **endurance of circumstances**, it uses the term "patience. When discussing our **godly interaction with difficult people**,

it uses the term "longsuffering." Paul's use of "longsuffering" here reminds us that someone else's harsh or offensive words never justify our harsh or offensive response.

6. *Forbearing one another*.... Our human nature strains to get the last word in, to strike the last blow in any battle of words. This word reminds us to avoid that attitude, to show more kind endurance, something of an added emphasis on the longsuffering trait just mentioned. Repetition or repetitive extension adds emphasis. Paul views this attitude and action as highly significant and important.
7. ...*and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye*. We love to cite, "I'll forgive, but I won't forget." From a truly Biblical perspective, this statement voices a rather shocking point. **Forgiving and not forgetting is impossible.** The person who makes such a statement will sooner or later demonstrate that he/she didn't forgive at all. Paul frames his exhortation of our forgiveness in terms of Jesus' forgiveness of us, "...even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Did Jesus wait to forgive us until we repented and no longer needed ongoing forgiveness? Did He suspend His decision to forgive or not to forgive until He saw our behavior? No, He forgave us because of who He is and what He did for us. We should likewise forgive those who offend us because of Jesus, not because the offending person deserves our forgiveness or has repented and is no longer offending us. At times in the gospels, Jesus indeed does frame forgiveness on prior repentance, and at other times He requires forgiveness with no consideration of the offending person's repentance.
8. *And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness*. Women refer to "accessorizing" their wardrobe. They refer to key articles that bring all the different garments together and make them match well. For our spiritual wardrobe, Paul adds the accessorizing quality of charity as the key ingredient that makes our whole spiritual wardrobe come together and really work.
9. *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body*.... Sadly, on a few occasions I have observed people who reluctantly tried to apply some or all of these traits to

their life, but they did so with bitter resentment, not with peaceful conviction that they were doing the right thing. God does not call us to resentful acquiescence to His commandments. He calls us to eager, peaceful embracing of them. Further, this exhortation reminds us of God's law that permanently resides in our hearts and minds, constantly influencing our conscience. When you consider succumbing to a temptation, that transformed conscience will react disruptively, not with peace. When you resist the temptation, or when you actively do the right thing, it will affirm a joyful, peaceful quality. Paul urges us to listen to that peace of God within and allow it to rule our hearts and lives.

10. *...and be ye thankful.* Paul does not mention a word about preconditions for our thankfulness. He doesn't tell us to be thankful when the bills are paid, the bank account is overflowing, and our health is ideal. A thankful heart must grow out of internal peace with God, not be based on external circumstances. The minute we rely on anything external for our thankfulness, we ensure that we shall never really be thankful. On occasion, when discussing this quality with folks who likely needed it, I've been both amused and frustrated with the response, "Well, I know I should be thankful." This comment distinctly confesses to the truth; this person is not thankful, and knows it, but he/she also knows that the present unthankful attitude is wrong.

Throughout this list describing the ideal spiritual wardrobe, Paul reminds us that it must be internal, not superficial or temporary. We need these traits as a way of life, a true "worldview" that comprehensively sums up our view of life and our interaction with life. We need this wardrobe around the house with family. We need it on the job with professional associates. We need it in our quiet time when we are all alone. And, yes, we need it at church where we interact with fellow-believers, with children of God. It will frame and shape the texture of our life and of our relationships with people. We've just had an enlightening consultation with an expert spiritual wardrobe consultant. Has our time with him reshaped our taste in clothing? Will our new knowledge appear in the spiritual clothes we put on the next time we face a testy, difficult situation in life? Let's pray that it does.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church

16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor