

Title: *What to Wear?*

Text: Colossians 3:12-17

This past Christmas season, Nike released the retro Air Jordan basketball shoes. They quite literally proved to be all the rage as people did whatever they could to try to land a pair of the coveted shoes. Sellers at Amazon were asking \$600 to \$975 per pair, while the going price on e-Bay has generally been in the \$400 to \$500 range. The shoes have an original list price of \$180. If you were having a tough time making ends meet, would you spend \$180 on a pair of tennis shoes? One reviewer, with his tongue firmly in his cheek wrote, "My big brother CJ bought a pair of Nike Air Jordan 11 Retro Concord and as soon as he put them on his feet started to smell like roses. His acne was gone in three minutes, his missing front tooth grew back and by night he was two feet taller.

In the rush to get the new Air Jordans, there were fights, stabbings and incidents of pepper spray.

Different people have different preferences on what they like in clothes. With Jonathan, it has to be Aeropostale. My mom like Albert Dunner. Christopher likes it if it has Veggie Tales or Lighting McQueen on it. Me, I'll be happy when the new Kohl's opens here in Rolla. My wife is proud when she finds a bargain at Goodwill or some other consignment shop.

What will you wear is a big deal for a lot of folks. The more style conscious and status conscious you are, the harder time you'll have finding something to wear.

Of course, Christians have a different standard that we aspire to. Like we sometimes tell our children to be thankful that they have something to eat, we should also be aware that there are children around the world who wear rags and for whom even a second-hand t-shirt that doesn't have holes in it would be a really big deal.

Paul tells us, though, that we are to clothe ourselves with a whole catalogue of Christ-like qualities or virtues. That word and the form that it is used here are used a couple of times in the New Testament. In Romans 13:14, he says, "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh."

In Ephesians 6, he says, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

In a similar way, Jesus tells us, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

So we're told that we should "put on" Jesus Christ so that we can be strong enough to withstand the temptations that come our way – our human desire to indulge the flesh. That we ought to put on the armor of God which largely could be interpreted as spiritual disciplines that equip us to withstand all of the attacks of our enemy who would like nothing better than to destroy us and to obliterate our witness.

Paul tells us that since we are to place our thoughts on those things that are above, and to take off all of those things that are a part of our old nature and to put on our new self. In verse 8 and following, he says, "But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

He tells us to put on the new self and he tells us in verse 12 what is to characterize that new self – compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. In nearly every one of Paul's letters, he has some sort of list of Christian virtues that ought to characterize our lives. In Galatians, he gave us the list of the fruit of the Spirit which we looked at this past Summer – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

I said during that sermon series and have repeated it several times, when I look at the fruit

of the Spirit, I think to myself, “That describes the kind of person I would really like to be.” More loving, more joyful, more patient.

Paul says, “God has chosen you.” You are God’s chosen people. Now when we hear that word “chosen”, we have a tendency to become kind of nervous. We don’t really like the idea that there may be some who are not chosen, who have no opportunity for eternal life through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We’re not talking about chosenness for privilege, but chosenness for service. Chosenness for the opportunity to show the greatness and the glory of God to a spiritually hungry and desperate world.

As people who are set apart for God and dearly loved by him and entrusted with an awesome privilege, we are to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Again, if you look at those 5 qualities, you are looking at a picture of Jesus Christ. You become God’s person through a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ so putting on these qualities comes through yieldedness and surrender to him.

We hear the words compassion and kindness and we say, “Well of course.” That’s only through the influence of 2000 years of Christian teaching and influence on our culture. Prior to the coming of Jesus Christ and the spread of Christianity, compassion wasn’t something that was valued that highly.

William Barclay wrote, ‘If there was one thing the ancient world needed it was mercy. The sufferings of animals were nothing to it. The maimed and the sickly went to the wall. There was no provision for the aged. The treatment of the mentally handicapped was unfeeling. Christianity brought mercy into this world. It is not too much to say that everything that has been done for the aged, the sick, the weak in body and in mind, the animal, the child, the woman, has been done under the inspiration of Christianity.’ That is a perspective we rarely hear today: programmed as we are in our society to hear only bad things about the Christian faith.

Gentleness is that ability to tell someone something that they may not want to hear or may be difficult to hear in such a way that they are able to hear it and grow from it and become better because of it.

Part of the practical outworking of this is forgiveness. The ability to relinquish your right to retaliate and do as much as you can do to restore the relationship. Ray Stedman points out that forgiveness means at least three things:

First, it means that we are not to bring up to the person whom we have forgiven the thing we forgave. We are to treat him as though it did not happen. We are not to constantly harass him or her with reminders of the evil things they did in the past.

The second thing forgiveness means is that we do not tell anybody else about the matter that is forgiven. We do not gossip about it to others. It is not that we actually erase it from memory – we may think of it from time to time – but we are not to dwell on it. We are not to allow it to take over again, to awaken feelings of resentment and unfairness and play it all over again. We can do that because we ourselves have been forgiven. Let us remember how graciously God has set aside our own failures.

Then the third thing forgiveness means is: you do not remind yourself of what has been forgiven! Even in your private thoughts you never allow the offense to come up and to color your attitude toward the one you have forgiven. If it does come up, you must put it away and remind yourself that you too need to be forgiven. You do not want people mulling over your sins and dredging them up all the time. No, forgiveness means to put it aside even to yourself because that is what Christ has done for you.

Then over all of these, put on love. The fruit of the Spirit is love. Love which is not sentimentality. Not just warm feelings. Not just an emotion. It is genuine concern that wishes for others those good things that you wish for yourself whether you particularly like them or not.

Sometimes, people do stuff that is really hard to love and really hard to forgive. Here is none humorous story (now, but not at the time) of one man whose actions had a negative impact on thousands of people. One man's behaviour brought the New York rush-hour to a standstill.

'Thousands of New York commuters were stranded after a man's arm became wedged down a train toilet as he tried to retrieve his mobile phone. Rescue crews had to dismantle the toilet with Edwin Gallart's arm still stuck in the u-bend. He had dropped his phone down the toilet shortly after the train left Grand Central Station.

Metro-North spokesman, Dan Brucker, told the BBC, "That was enough of a problem, but then under some completely misguided notion he stuck his hand into the toilet to extricate the phone. Then he went and stuck his arm all the way down. He didn't get the phone out and he didn't get his arm out either," he said.

Crew members unsuccessfully struggled to free the man before fire-fighters and police were called, and the toilet was dismantled using blowtorches. Thousands of dollars were spent in putting on extra trains and crews for stranded commuters during the incident.

"When his cell phone went down the toilet," Mr. Brucker commented, "so did our evening rush-hour, so did thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money, and so did our 'on time' performance. Everything went down the toilet with it."

When asked, Mr. Brucker added that the rail company was "not particularly interested" in going through the toilet's waste tank to retrieve the lost phone.'

Sometimes, it's those "little things" that have the biggest impact on someone else and can really test our love and our ability to forgive.

Love is the rule of thumb that will enable you to clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, gentleness, humility and patience. Sometimes we confuse love with tolerance. Josh McDowell writes:

"Tolerance says, "You must approve of what I do." Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will love you, even when your behavior offends me."

Tolerance says, "You must agree with me." Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will tell you the truth, because I am convinced 'the truth will set you free.'"

Tolerance says, "You must allow me to have my way." Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will plead with you to follow the right way, because I believe you are worth the risk."

Tolerance seeks to be inoffensive; love takes risks. Tolerance glorifies division; love seeks unity. Tolerance costs nothing; love costs everything.

Those are the things that we are to clothe ourselves with, but what are we putting the clothes on? What's inside the soul over which we are putting the clothes? There is a statement out there that clothes make the man, but we all know how false that is. That's only true if what's on the outside is a true manifestation of what's on the inside.

What should be on the inside is a heart that is at peace. Let the peace that comes from Jesus Christ rule in your heart. We were called to peace. Peace with each other but also peace with ourself. Where does this peace come from? Paul tells us in Philippians 4, "6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

You can't conjure up peace any more than you can conjure up some emotion. You can make it your habit, by discipline to pray and to ask God for the peace and the understanding. When that is your habit, you can get to the place where you know a peace that this world can't explain. To me, it's closely related to forgiveness.

I like to take pictures. I download all of them onto my computer and I have the pictures

set as my screen saver. I don't delete any pictures because I figure for good or for bad that's the story of my life and they're a part of my history. Occasionally, I'll be sitting at my desk and a picture will come up of someone who's hurt me, someone that I'm basically estranged from. I've been tempted to delete the photos of certain people or maybe to move them to some different folder where they don't come up in the rotation so I don't have to look at them, but I haven't done it. You may say that's not very smart, I probably should. I look at it this way, if a picture comes up and it's someone who has hurt me and I tense up and have a reaction, I know that I haven't completed the work of forgiveness that I need to complete in order really to be at peace. It also is a reminder to me that the Bible says, "As much as it depends on you, live at peace." I'm forced to ask myself, "Have I really done everything that I can or should so that I can be at peace?"

Paul next says, "Be thankful." Those pictures may also be a reminder to me to give thanks for the positive experiences and memories that we share that would make me want to have taken the picture in the first place, if that makes sense.

As you do all of that, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Establish a method or a plan of meditating on Scripture, which is God's word and allow it to speak deeply to you and to shape your character and to set you free in those areas in which you need to be set free. As you do that, you'll have a song in your heart. Paul says in Ephesians, "Be filled with the Spirit,"¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The closing exhortation is "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father through him. Ruth Graham had for years a sign over her kitchen sink that said, "Divine services held here three times a day." Washing the dishes can be an act of worship if you do it in the name of the Lord, as unto him.

Can you do everything you do as unto the Lord as an act of worship for him? You can if you've got the right stuff on the inside, covered by the right stuff on the outside.

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