

Colossians 3:12-17
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Hampton Baptist
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“Do Your Clothes Match?”

I love the fall; it is my favorite season of the year; autumn colors combined with Bulldog football and in recent years, Red Sox baseball in the post-season. This fall, I'm one-for-three. I enjoy seeing what God's paintbrush does with the leaves. Around this time every year, I am reminded of how beautiful our world is. I don't have to travel to the mountains to see vivid colors. Trees all around us will be wearing their gorgeous tints and hues; the leaves' colors will match the season.

Speaking of matching colors, I have trouble matching my clothes. When I get a new shirt, a new tie, or a new suit, I have to ask Jennifer or Ally if a particular tie goes with a shirt and suit. I know certain shades complement others . . . kinda. Occasionally, both of them will leave before I do and when I come home in the afternoon, I've received this comment, “Did you pick that out all by yourself? Good job.” Even adult men like positive reinforcement; those statements are like receiving golden stars on some sort of chart. It has been a big joke in my family for years; I am also a terrible shopper when it comes to finding coordinating clothing. My college roommates used to threaten me with Garanimals, color correlated clothing for children.

As a non-student of fashion and color, I sometimes get styles confused. Jennifer will say, “The colors might match, but you don't want to wear *that* kind of shirt with *those* pants.” So much for my picture being on the cover of GQ magazine.

To me, styles change so quickly. I still wear some styles that I wore in seminary (like does a light-blue oxford button-down shirt ever go out of style?) Seemingly to me, some styles are “timeless,” but then again, I am “fashion-inhibited.” Most of us can remember when we changed styles or types of clothing and for what reasons.

I remember a big change in my wardrobe when I entered the tenth grade. I was entering a new high school; my former school was overcrowded and a newer school was built closer to our house. From the first through ninth grades, I wore Toughskins jeans from Sears. Anybody remember Toughskins? My mom loved to buy from the Sears and Roebuck Catalog; we'd drive to the Jamestown Shopping Center in College Park, Georgia to pick up the orders.

My cousin and I were attired with Toughskins for fall, winter and spring, and camper shorts in the summer. Camper shorts had special types of pockets, a key clip, and a loop to hold a hammer. We were not campers nor carpenters, and as children, we didn't carry keys; the shorts were inexpensive clothing for little boys. Our camper shorts were red, blue, khaki and green. But our Toughskins, with reinforced knees so they wouldn't wear out, were only blue, coarse denim for rambunctious boys. In Fulton County Georgia in the 70s and 80s, high school began in the eighth grade; elementary school went from first-seventh grades. We had no middle or junior high. I can remember the year that I changed high schools. For nine years, I had been wearing Toughskins; as a tenth grader, I switched from Toughskins to Levis. Most, if not all, ninth graders did not wear Toughskins jeans. I was a small fellow, not even breaking the 100-pound mark until the tenth grade, but finally I wore Levis to school. My clothes finally matched my age.

Do *your* clothes match? Some folks are better judges to answer that question than others. But when I pose the question today, I am not speaking of cotton, silk, rayon, wool or even, dare I say it, polyester. Paul wrote to the Colossian church to *clothe* themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. He addressed these church folks as God's *chosen* people, dedicated and beloved. The significance of his words was that every one of these words originally belonged to the *Jews*. *They* had been the chosen people; *they* were the dedicated nation; *they* were beloved by God. Paul was communicating that God's love and grace had gone out to the ends of the earth, and that there was *no* “most favored nation” in God's order.

The new converts were to take off their former lifestyles and be clothed with compassion,

kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Let's look at each of these garments.

Paul said to put on compassion. We all know the old story of the beautiful princess who kissed the ugly frog. You will remember the frog is really a handsome prince changed into a frog by a wicked witch. It seems to be an irrevocable curse since the only way to break the spell is for someone to kiss the frog. (There's not usually a long line waiting to kiss frogs). But the princess kisses the frog out of the depth of her *compassion*, and the prince emerges. What a lesson for us! To free the prince, the princess had to let go of all she'd been taught about *ugliness* in others. In putting on compassion to serve Christ, we have to get into the frog-kissing business. Our faith enables us to abandon all we have been taught about ugliness and unacceptability in others so that we might seek and find the "prince" in others.

In this Christian life, we are also to put on kindness. Have you ever felt like giving up? Have you ever wondered, even in what you try to do for God, whether it is doing any good? In 1876, a little girl named Annie was ten-years-old. She was put into a poor house for children called the Tewkesbury Alms House in Massachusetts. Her mother had died, and her father had deserted her. Her aunt and uncle found her too difficult to handle.

She had a bad disposition, a violent temper . . . stemming in part from eyes afflicted with painful trachoma. She had been put in the poorhouse, because no one wanted her. She was such a wild one that at times she had to be tied down.

But there was another inmate named Maggie who cared for Annie. Maggie talked to her, fed her, even though Annie would throw her food on the floor, cursing and rebelling with every ounce of her being. But Maggie was a Christian and out of her convictions, she was determined to love this dirty, unkempt, spiteful, unloving little girl. It wasn't easy, but slowly it got through to Annie that she was not the only one who was suffering. Maggie also had been abandoned, and gradually Annie began to respond. Maggie told her about a school for the blind, and Annie began to beg to be sent there, and finally, consent was given, and she went to the Perkins Institute. After a series of operations, her sight was partially restored.

She was able to finish her schooling and graduate at the age of twenty. Having been blind so long, she told the director of Perkins that she wanted to work with blind and difficult children. They found a little girl seven years old in Alabama who was blind and deaf from the age of two. Annie Sullivan went to Tusculum, Alabama to unlock the door of Helen Keller's dark prison and to set her free. One human being, in the name of Christ, helping another human being! That's matching the clothing of kindness to the expectations of a Christian. (www.esermons.com Robert W. Bohl)

Paul also wrote that Christians are to put on humility. One of the best stories of humility I've read is that of a man who arrived in 1953 at the Chicago railroad station to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. He stepped off the train, a tall man with bushy hair and a big mustache. As the cameras flashed and city officials approached with hands outstretched to meet him, he thanked them politely. Then he asked to be excused for a minute. He walked through the crowd to the side of an elderly black woman struggling with two large suitcases. He picked them up, smiled, and escorted her to the bus, helped her get on, and wished her a safe journey. Then Albert Schweitzer turned to the crowd and apologized for keeping them waiting. It is reported that one member of the reception committee told a reporter, "That's the first time I ever saw a sermon *walking*."

No matter who we are, no matter how important a person might feel, if we call ourselves Christians, we are to clothe ourselves in humility. (Roy T. Lloyd)

Paul also recorded that meekness was a garment to be worn by God's chosen people, those who have claimed to follow the Lordship of Christ. Use the word "meek," and we immediately conjure up

a vision of a kind of Mr. Milquetoast. Think of the analogies that we use: "Meek as a mouse" - a shy, frightened, scurrying little soul, flitting around the edges of life trying to keep out of everybody's way. "Meek as a lamb," we say. Well, lambs may be lovable, but we pity them for their stupid helplessness. We certainly don't admire their spirit. (www.esermons.com Jon Joyce)

But the Greek word for meekness is actually translated as "power under control." A word picture offered is the bit used to control a horse. Attached to the end of a bridle and found in the mouth of a strong animal, the bit controls what that mighty horse does. *All* of us have power; the question is not whether anyone *has* power, but the bigger decision is if we will use our power for good. Putting on meekness is when a Christian uses what power they have for the good of the Kingdom of God.

This is why in The Beatitudes, Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Use your power for good, by being clothed in meekness.

Christians are also to put on patience. People grow and mature at different rates. Thomas Edison's teacher said he could never amount to anything and advised his mother to take him out of school. Winston Churchill was admitted to school in the lowest level classes and never moved out of the lowest group in all the years he attended Harrow. Albert Einstein seemed so slow and dull that his parents feared that he was mentally deficient. One observer has said, "Great minds and high talent, in most cases, cannot be hurried and, like healthy plants, grow slowly."

It is so with God's Kingdom. We scatter the seed, but we are not ultimately responsible for its growth. We cannot *make* things happen. The process by which the kingdom of this world becomes the Kingdom of God proceeds very slowly, and it exasperates us. But, at the same time, if we have faithfully scattered the seed, we are not responsible for its failure to grow adequately. (www.esermons.com Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost, David G. Rogne, CSS Publishing Company) All God asks is that we continue to be faithful, to continue to do what we know God has called us to do for the Kingdom of God.

Paul also encouraged the believers to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. Reminiscent of our earlier sermon series on the model prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," Paul reiterated that point to the Colossians. The fellowship of those volunteers in the congregation would depend wholly upon their willingness to forgive. Seeking reconciliation rather than revenge, forgiving and forgetting was also listed as a motive with the inclusion of the phrase, "As the Lord has forgiven you, you also must forgive."

The final piece of clothing mentioned by Paul, maybe the wrap worn over all other clothing, was love. Paul said putting on love would bind everything together in perfect harmony. The tendency of any body of people is sooner or later to fly apart; love is the one bond which will hold a group together in unbreakable fashion.

Are these attributes worn out? Untimely? Old fashioned? Not stylish? *Bless be the ties that bind our hearts in Christian love.* Truly love has the power to bind us together.

And like the church in Colossae, this kind of loving atmosphere leads to peace. The inverse is also true: an unloving atmosphere leads to discord. Inward peace and community peace depend very much upon the effort to love one another.

Paul encouraged the Colossian Church to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God. We are not only to honor Christ by what we do and say, but we are also to be thankful that we *can*. It is a privilege to serve such a wonderful God.

Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus is another way of saying "do everything in love."

A life so clothed with the character of Christ has indeed put on the new nature, renewed after the image of its creator. If an individual Christian or a church, is doing everything in love, then surely their clothes match. If someone is putting on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and

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forgiveness, while adorning themselves in love, then that person's clothes certainly match the label of Christian and the true name of Church, the Body of Christ.

Again I ask the question, "Do *your* clothes match?"