

**BETHEL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**  
**FAIR LAWN, NJ**  
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**“The Garment Of Godliness”**  
**Colossians 3:12-14**

It seems that everywhere we turn there are people who are suffering from an identity crisis. They're struggling to know who they are and where they fit in. But for Christians, that issue can be easily put to rest, especially in light of the passage before us this morning. Paul's entire appeal of how we should live is based upon who we are. Christians, he reminds us, are chosen of God, holy and beloved (v. 12).

In the Old Testament, this was the three-fold identity that distinguished Israel as the people of God. As Moses was preparing the nation to enter the promised land, his exhortation to heed and obey the Law was grounded in their favored position before God: “Because He *loved* your forefathers and *chose* their descendants after them, *He brought you out of Egypt . . .* driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance . . .” (Deuteronomy 4:37-38).

As Christians we are the heirs of Israel's privileges. How then shall we live, knowing that we are the objects of His sovereign, saving love, *and* the people of His own possession? Paul's answer to that question is found in the passage before us.

This is a text which calls us to a holy life-style, consistent with our new identity. It is precisely because we have been chosen by God and now stand before Him as His beloved and holy ones, that we are to live up to what we are in Christ. To encourage us to do just that, Paul uses the metaphor of “putting on” a new garment. A new identity calls for a new look.

This garment of godliness consists of a number of Christian virtues. It is a seamless garment, in which these qualities are interrelated, if not inseparable. It's difficult to envision any Christian having one of them without have them all. Furthermore, these are virtues that are foundational to healthy relationships and a unified spirit within any local church. Paul names no less than eight of these virtues.

1. Put on . . . compassionate hearts (v. 12). Also translated “tender mercies” (NKJV), people with compassion are involved in caring relationships. They are committed to minister to anyone who needs their help, especially those whose lives are hurting and broken. (Cf. The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37) Oftentimes personal sacrifice is involved (Cf. 1 John 3:16-17). The opposite of this virtue is an attitude of detached indifference to others.

2. Put on . . . kindness (v.12). We have been saved because of God's kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7; Titus 3:4). Therefore we are called to extend to others the love and forgiveness God has extended to us, even when it may be undeserved. One of the most beautiful pictures of kindness in the Bible is King David's treatment of Mephibosheth, the lame son of

Jonathan, who was Saul's son (2 Samuel 9).

3. Put on . . . humility (v. 12). This is the attitude of seeking to put the interests of others before our own. It is an attitude that is evidenced by servanthood, where we are concerned about meeting the needs of others. The supreme model that we are to emulate is Christ's example of humble service on our behalf (Cf. Philippians 2:5ff). It's opposite is selfish ambition and pride.

4. Put on . . . meekness (v. 12). Closely related to humility, the word for meekness is sometimes translated "gentleness" (NASB). It's the capacity to deal compassionately and gently with others, whereby we are not easily provoked: "A meek spirit, like wet tinder, will not easily take fire." Again, the supreme model is the Lord Jesus: "I am meek (or gentle) and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29). It's opposite is being hostile, harsh and rude.

5. Put on . . . patience (v. 12). The NKJV translates this word "long-suffering;" it literally means "long-tempered." The short-tempered person speaks and acts impulsively; the long-suffering Christian, however, is marked by a self-restraint that enables him or her to bear injury and insult without resorting to retaliation. It is the opposite of having an attitude that is quick to judge and condemn others.

6. Put on . . . forbearance (v. 13). Forbearance and patience go together. A person who is truly long-suffering will want to "bear with" those whose faults and unpleasant traits are an irritant to them; they will also forgive those they have grievances against, which is the next interrelated virtue.

7. Put on . . . forgiveness (v. 13). Forgiving flows from constantly remembering that the Lord first forgave us and that we need His forgiveness every day of our lives. So it should not come as a surprise that we are called to forgive others as we ourselves have been forgiven. Its opposite is the attitude of harboring grievances within our hearts, which only leads to bitterness, resentment, anger, unkindness and malice.

8. Put on . . . love (v. 14). All of the previous virtues are but the manifestation of the love we are to have for one another. It's the most important of the Christian virtues, because it binds them all together. Without genuine Christian love, we will have little – if any – commitment to cherish and nurture these other Christian graces.

The fundamental failure of the people of God in the Old Testament was their unwillingness to live in light of who God had called them to be. They became a "stiff-necked" people, resisting and then rebelling against the standards of God's holy Word. Over the years, they assimilated into the culture and religions of their day, and were no longer a holy people. The world had essentially and effectively squeezed them into its mold.

As the people of God today, we face the same problem. Worldly thinking, carnal and fleshly attitudes and unloving and uncaring behavior have all had their way with us. Yet the challenge of this passage is still before us. How we are to function within the Body of Christ is always dependent upon remembering who we are – chosen of God, set apart for God, and dearly loved by God. Privilege always leads to responsibility.