



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Dress for Success

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I missed being with you in Annapolis last week, but had a great time meeting with about 2,000 pastors in southern California for this year's Shepherds' Conference. Three days of great speakers, fellowship, workshops, and music always feed the soul and challenge the heart. Can you just hear that many men singing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"? It was tremendous. I also enjoyed the chance to see all of my Capitol Commission counterparts from 18 other states.

One of my roles is to challenge your constituents in Maryland to pray for you. 1 Timothy 2:1, 2 are verses that call the church to specifically pray "on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority." What do we pray for on your behalf? We do pray for your personal and professional lives, for wisdom in your decisions and favor in your jobs and families. But we also pray for you spiritually, that the truth of God's Word would enter your mind and heart and you would be receptive to the saving message of the gospel.

One of the outflows of a legislator hearing and obeying the Scriptures is found in how he or she treats others in every sphere of life. In our last study, we discussed several negative things that should be jettisoned from our attitudes and actions toward others ("put off" like dirty clothes). This week, we come across a list of positive elements that adorn the character of a follower of Christ and are crucial for God-honoring relationships. These are the "new clothes" we should put on.

Colossians 3:12-13 ¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on** a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

I. A CHRISTIAN'S IDENTITY (3:12a)

What a different world this would be if people actually treated each other this way! But the Scriptures are clear that we are not naturally born with the tendency to serve others and consider their

needs first. Why, then, would commands like this even be necessary?

Christians are the target of these verses since Paul addresses "those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved". This is a believer's identity which is the ground for relational behavior.

Note that this is God's doing. He chose those who follow Him. Some folks struggle with the concept that God chose, or elected, His followers since human will is also exercised to believe in Him. But we cannot escape the clarity of the truth that "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

None of us is perfectly holy, but are being made into His image as we progress in our walk with God. It means "set apart for holy use" for His purposes. A Christian has a holy *position* in Christ, but is growing into a deeper holiness in *practice*.

We are also called beloved. What a tremendous truth that the creator of the universe chose us, set us apart for His purposes and loves us. He is for us and not against us.

"GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US." ROMANS 5:8

II. A CHRISTIAN'S "GARMENT" (3:12b, 13a)

If we are to put off the soiled garments of anger, malice, slander and lying, et al., that we considered last week, then we have new clothes to put on. Some of these are inner attitudes, some are outward actions, but all overflow from people who have been changed because they are chosen, holy and loved by God.

Take a look at this list. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness. Could the capitol community use these qualities? Again, just desiring these things is not enough. Willing ourselves to act this way will not enable us to succeed. Having our hearts changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ ensures we have the power and ability to see these

BIBLE STUDY

LEGISLATORS: FRIDAYS @ 12:00PM, HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING (ROOM 153)

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good qualities flow from a heart that is being changed to be more like the King who is being trusted.

III. A CHRISTIAN'S EXAMPLE (3:13b)

We forgive because Christ forgave. That's the example and motivation behind a true believer's relationship decisions.

Is it possible for someone who doesn't have the identity a Christian has to display the list we just saw? Of course! Unbelieving people are capable of being very nice, giving, humble, patient, loving and gentle. But being these things does not necessarily mean that person has had a life-changing encounter with Christ. So how can we tell? An important verse gives us guidance here:

2 Corinthians 13:5 *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test.*

In other words, all people should hold their hearts and lives up to the plumb line of the Bible to see how their lives line up. If you know Christ you will believe in Him, trust Him only for salvation (not human works), have a desire to read His Word and love other believers. You will treasure Him so that sin is less attractive, pray and confess sin when He convicts along with many other confirmations we find in God's Word. A believer will love the Scriptures and will experience these verifications more and more during this wonderful life-long walk with the Savior.

Romans 8: 15b, 16 ... you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" **The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...**

AS A PATTERN, DO YOU DESIRE TO TREAT OTHERS THIS WAY, NOT WITH THE MOTIVATION OF PERSONAL BENEFIT, BUT WITH A TRUE DESIRE TO MAGNIFY THE GOD WHO MAKES SUCH BEHAVIOR POSSIBLE?

CONCLUSION: THE EXAMPLE OF HOSEA

The end of our passage emphasizes the importance of forgiveness.

There are at least two words for *forgive* in the New Testament. This one used here (*charizomenoi*) means *freely or graciously give*. The idea is of not exacting payment, but treating someone better than they deserve. So in this sense, you forgive when someone has wronged you, and therefore, they are in debt to you, and sheer justice says you have the right to exact some suffering from them in payment for the suffering they caused you, and you not only don't demand the payment, but you "freely give" good for evil.¹

Hosea is the Bible's poster boy for forgiveness. Old Testament prophets often illustrated God's character and message by their own life situations. Hosea's situation? God commanded him to "love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods..." (Hosea 3:1) Hosea's wife, Gomer, had strayed from him, yet He then stays with her in a monogamous marriage relationship.

To display the amazing grace of our merciful God, Hosea became a picture of His future forgiveness. "Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days." (Hosea 3:5)

Our God, by His very nature, is a giving and forgiving God. He delights to graciously cast sin away from those who repent. But He does not acquit without a punishment. The good news (the gospel) is that Jesus Christ took that penalty on Himself on the cross so that you and I could be forgiven and enjoy Him in this life and through eternity. We only must believe, obey and treasure Him.

¹ John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org. "Marriage: Forgiving and Forbearing" sermon from Feb. 18, 2007.