

Clothed with the Graces of the Spirit

*“Put on therefore,
as the elect of God,
holy and beloved,
bowels of mercies,
kindness,
humbleness of
mind, meekness,
longsuffering.”
—Colossians 3:12*

THE APOSTLE PAUL HAD never visited the brethren at Colosse, as we are told in his epistle to them. “I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.” (Col. 2:1) He points

out that the ecclesia had been the fruitage of the ministry of Epaphras. “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.” (chap. 1:7,8) God had provided the Colossian brethren with the spiritual guidance and assistance that they needed for their Christian growth and development. We read, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that

ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you.”—chap. 4:12,13

APOSTLE PAUL’S EPISTLE

Paul’s message in our featured text is perhaps more clearly understood when considered from the perspective of a different Bible translation. Turning to the Diaglott, we read, “Be clothed, therefore, as Chosen ones of God, beloved Saints, with Bowels of Mercy, Kindness, Humility, Meekness, Patient endurance.” (Col. 3:12, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) The thought of the elect child of God being ‘clothed’ with the fruits of the Holy Spirit is more emphatically emphasized in the Diaglott, and will thus serve as a framework for this lesson.

According to our English dictionary, the word ‘clothed’ means to be covered, or clad, with suitable garments. We wear these garments to protect ourselves from the changing seasons and harsh weather conditions, and also to look presentable when we appear before others. However, this temporal covering is not the object of the Apostle Paul’s message to the brethren at Colosse. As we grow in the knowledge of the Truth and develop a deeper appreciation of God’s Word, we realize that the most important adornments that the Lord’s footstep followers are to wear pertain to the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit of God. He points to the need for our being clothed with mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering [patient endurance].

SPIRITUAL ADMONITIONS

The apostle further admonishes, “bearing with each other, and freely forgiving each other, if any

one for some things may have a cause of complaint; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do you forgive. And besides all these things, put on love; it is the bond of the completeness. And let the peace of the Anointed preside in your hearts, for which you were also called in one body; and be thankful.”—Col. 3:13-15, *WED*

When addressing the Colossian brethren, Paul spoke of them as being the ‘Chosen ones’ of God and as ‘beloved Saints.’ The word saints points to those who are being separated out of the world during this present Gospel Age. They are being called by God for a holy purpose as members of the body of Christ. The apostle speaks of their great appreciation for this wonderful privilege and gives worthy advice as to how they may succeed in their High Calling in Christ Jesus.

Concerning the consecrated followers of our Lord Jesus, we note also the Apostle Peter’s words concerning proper and improper apparel. He said, “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”—I Pet. 3:3,4

Peter cautions us that the outward adorning may lead to pride, and it can cause envy and possibly hinder the sacrificial life of the child of God. The ‘hidden man’ that he referred to is the inward, or spiritual, life of the consecrated follower of our Lord Jesus. It is renewed day by day; and this inward life cannot corrupt, decay, or lose value. It

points to the one who has a meek and quiet disposition, and this mark is of the highest value in the sight of God.

CLOTHED WITH MERCY

Considering these adornments that we are admonished to be clothed with, we turn first to the spirit of mercy. Mercy implies having a sense of compassion, and identifies one who is willing to exercise tolerance toward others. The Apostle Paul has used the expression ‘bowels of mercy’ which emphasizes that this grace of the Spirit is something that has great depth and comes from within our innermost self, rather than being shallow or superficial. We learn from God’s Word that he has a merciful character, and from the Gospel of Luke we read, “Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”—Luke 6:35,36

We are urged to offer help and encouragement to others whenever the opportunity may arise. However, we are not to obligate ourselves beyond what would be reasonable, or to an extreme which could injure our spiritual growth and interests. We should never turn away with a deaf ear from those who may be in need, but we are also not to give away that which could impair our own obligations toward our families. We may give a word of encouragement, a kindly look, or a helping hand when difficulties may arise. These may often be valuable and accepted with a deep sense of appreciation.

We should not hope to gain personally when we offer to help someone. We give what we can, not expecting anything in return. We learn that being kind is of utmost importance, even as God is to the unthankful and unbelieving, regardless of their personal feelings towards him. We are to be merciful toward others with the thought ever in mind that we also have imperfections, and understand that our Heavenly Father has made provisions to cover our imperfections in proportion as we show mercy to others.

Where the interests of the Lord's cause may be involved, it is our duty to act in defense of the Truth, but we are to avoid doing that which might reflect our own personal feelings. We read, "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart." (Prov. 3:3) Let us be mindful that mercy takes into consideration the weaknesses, failings, and sufferings of others and should be rendered with sincerity, purity, and uprightness when dealing with others, especially with our brethren. Jesus gave us good advice along this line when he said, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."—Luke 6:37

We are told to bind mercy and truth about our neck, as jewels and ornaments of character for all others to see, and to write them upon the tables of our heart. Writing the Divine character into our hearts in place of the old character, enables us to progress as faithful members of the body and bride of our beloved Lord Jesus. Mercy and truth reflect the character of our Father just as a beautiful gem reflects the glorious light.

One of the four cardinal attributes of our Heavenly Father is justice. We know that he is a God of justice, and we are assured in his Word that, coupled with justice, there is always the matter of mercy. In this connection, it is written, "Justice and judgment are the habitation [establishment, *Marginal Translation*] of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face." (Ps. 89:14) Therefore, as we seek to imitate God, let us not think to do so only by imitating his justice, but also by tempering justice with mercy even as he does. We are able only to judge the acts we see in another person. However, God can judge the motive, or the intention, of the heart.

As New Creatures in Christ Jesus, we are not competent to be judges of someone else. We cannot fully comprehend and appreciate the Divine law of love that governs all, and it is quite evident that few can read their own hearts unerringly. We do not know what the thoughts or actions of others may be, and should be careful to give them credit for any good motives they may claim to have. We should not condemn another person because only the Lord knows how to judge their true heart motives. Rather, we should note our own weaknesses and imperfections, and realize how very much we need our Heavenly Father's guidance and help. We thus desire to follow the same rule of love and mercy towards our fellowman, and be willing to forgive others, because heart forgiveness will leave no sting, no animosity, and no grudge. Forgiveness and good will toward all should be the only feeling that we harbor in our hearts, no matter how seriously we may have been trespassed against. The

very basis of Christian principle is love, sympathy, and forgiveness of the faults of others. If we can forgive others for their daily shortcomings, then we also can be forgiven in turn by our loving Heavenly Father. This is the golden rule.

CLOTHED WITH KINDNESS

Kindness identifies one who has a sympathetic and gentle nature. This is another important fruitage of the Holy Spirit, and it is very closely related to mercy. We are admonished to show forth this mark of Christian character development at every opportunity. There is no excuse for any of us to be unkind toward someone else, and the Apostle Paul has so advised. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4:31,32) Kindness is thus emphasized as one of the chief elements of love.

Our Heavenly Father is kind toward those who are unthankful, and he is also just toward those who act unjustly. We, too, should always strive to put the kindest interpretation on the words, the actions, and the natural tendencies of one another. This means that we should do unto others as we would like to have them do unto us. By following this golden rule, we learn that it is much better to show kindness and to be a peacemaker than to be a strife maker. Love for our brethren should always be the blessed tie that binds us together and marks our degree of growth in the principles of true Christian grace.

This is manifest when speaking a kind word sympathetically and lovingly, and showing an interest in our brethren at a time when they may be experiencing difficulties. Little acts of kindness should also be extended even to our enemies, so that we might better cultivate this wonderful fruit of the Holy Spirit. We are to be sympathetic and willing to suffer one for another. We learn that kindness and forgiveness must come from our heart, and should be extended even before it is asked for, and as freely as possible.

Concerning a certain occasion, it is recorded, "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matt. 18:21) We appreciate our Lord's loving reply to the apostle. "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."—vs. 22

The influence upon our hearts and lives, when we freely and openly forgive someone who has transgressed against us, will show growth in the wonderful ways of God. The trespasses of others that may be turned against us are nothing compared to our obligations to the Lord. We must forgive each other, because in many things we all fail, and share the same fleshly bodies together with their imperfections, and shortcomings. The larger our attainment of forgiveness, the more pleasing we will be in the Father's sight. Our forgiveness is based on our capacity to forgive others. The merit of Christ's sacrifice is the basis for our own forgiveness through the merit of Jesus' blood. When we realize our own weaknesses it makes us sympathetic with all others. With indebtedness to the Lord for the forgiveness

of our own sins, the more we should seek to copy his glorious character, realizing how beautifully his righteousness is manifested.

God is spoken of as being merciful and kind, and this is recorded in many scriptures. We read, "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." (Joel 2:13) Again we read, "He prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." (Jon. 4:2) Let us also strive to be more Christlike in this wonderful grace of the Spirit.

CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY

Humility is the opposite of pride, and describes someone who is low in self-esteem. We are told that we must be clothed with this wonderful disposition. In this connection, the Apostle Peter wrote, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." (I Pet. 5:5,6) James also wrote, "He giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:6,7) Further to this, he said,

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”—vs. 10

Humility includes submitting ourselves as far as possible to every reasonable regulation of the country in which we live, and yet have sufficient courage to stand by our conscience that it not be violated. The Spirit of a sound mind dictates that we determine and prove all things according to the Word of God. It means being subject to the Lord and his every ordinance. We should be willing to listen to the humblest of the flock, and be willing to give up our own preferences so far as our best judgment and conscience will permit.

We are to harmoniously cooperate together as one body in humility and meekness, building one another up in love and all of the Christian graces, while striving for the general advancement of the work of the Lord. Sometimes, because all are anxious to serve and are exercising their own independent feelings, there may be different plans and arrangements to consider in the various ecclesias. At times, it may take patience, forbearance, and love on the part of all concerned. Humility must be very childlike, and should dictate that our will never opposes or thwarts the will of God being done in us.

The spirit of humble-mindedness should manifest itself in all things. Our Lord strongly disapproves of pride, and he resists those who harbor it. It is written, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. 16:18) The self-seeking and proud in spirit could not be trusted by the Lord in any high position, therefore only the humble will share with him in the future inheritance of his kingdom of truth and righteousness.

We must be careful to not only exercise humility, but to always be aware of this particular grace of the Spirit. We must strive to perfect the humbleness of character on a daily basis, and always pray to our Heavenly Father that he might provide us with experiences to develop this worthy grace.

It was pride that led to Satan's choice and course, and the Scriptures are very plain in revealing his ultimate destiny. We read, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [O day star, *Marginal Translation*], son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell [the grave], to the sides of the pit."—Isa. 14:12-15

The Lord bestows his blessings upon the humble-minded and those who manifest a humble disposition. He gives good things to those who are poor in spirit—the penitent, the meek, the teachable, and the submissive. Jesus taught, "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." (Matt. 23:12) Jesus humbled himself, and is now exalted to the very position to which Satan, through pride and ambition, had so strongly aspired. Jesus never took credit for the things that his Heavenly Father had created and provided. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way."—Ps. 25:9

When coming to God's Word, it is important to remember that our attitude should be that of the

student and not of the teacher. Putting one's self last is another very important lesson, and we as members of his body are also learning. We are admonished to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace when we come together to study the Divine Word, and to help one another as fellow members of the body of Christ.

The Scriptures provide many examples of humility. Among them we note, "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty; and before honour is humility." (Prov. 18:12) The Apostle Paul, using our Lord Jesus as an example, also said, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."—Phil. 2:3-5

Self-glorification and striving to be important are the greatest enemies to the Spirit of the Lord, and to the attainment of his wonderful blessing. Submitting ourselves to be humble is an indication of true faith, not in ourselves but as evidence of the watch-care of our Heavenly Father and his written Word. When we consider the words in the opening passage of the Lord's Prayer, we are impressed with the fact that our Lord Jesus sought first his Father's will and purpose on every occasion. We are familiar with the words in which he thus instructed us. "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:9,10) All of our strength comes from God, from the simple act of breathing in the breath of life, to the words that proceed from our mouths. All is possible

only by the power and providence of our loving and eternal Father in heaven. This is a sobering thought and realization, especially when we consider the marvelous works accomplished by our Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry.

As a group of the Lord's people living during the closing years of the present Gospel Age, we must be ever alert to his providence, and pray daily that we be not taken into error because of pride or selfishness. This does not mean that we should ignore our talents and abilities, but rather that we should learn to use them as humbly and as faithfully as possible.

The good qualities that others may possess are what we are encouraged to look for, rather than focusing on our own presumed accomplishments. If one of our brethren possesses a quality of character that outshines one of our own, we should be ready and willing to recognize their spiritual growth and rejoice with them. If we cannot speak well of our brother, we are not to speak evil of him. If we look at our own imperfections and compare them with the good qualities of others we shall find ourselves more and more appreciative of them.

God did not seek to force his mind upon Christ, nor is he seeking to force it upon us. Jesus willingly made himself of no reputation and became poor. Our Lord gave up his former glory and honor when he emptied himself and stooped from his high and glorious position at his Father's hand. As the Logos, he humbled himself to take a lower nature, and to do a work that would involve humiliation, pain, and suffering. The Master became a man, was tried and tempted like we are, and experienced the physical

strain of becoming weary, hungry, and sorrowful. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul wrote concerning Jesus' earthly ministry. He noted, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."—Heb. 5:7-9

Jesus gave his life in sacrificial death to satisfy the requirements of justice, and in doing so he set an example for us to follow. Paul again said, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." (II Cor. 8:9) We know that our Lord did not merely pretend to be poor, but that he actually became poor as we read. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) He humbled himself under the mighty hand of his Father.

CLOTHED WITH MEEKNESS

To be meek describes one who endures injury with patience and without resentment. Our Lord, as the Master teacher, spoke of meekness and the possession of a quiet spirit. He spoke of them as marks of Christian growth, and said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall

find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30) This scripture refers to those who are striving to know and serve our loving Heavenly Father. It speaks to those who are heavy laden, despairing, and the brokenhearted. However, these have the advantage that their condition is favorable to the development of the wonderful working Spirit of our Lord.

The footstep followers of our Lord during the present time may occasionally become weary and discouraged with their imperfections, weaknesses of the flesh, and frailties of various kinds. But it is only when earthly hopes become blighted that we learn to reach out to the Lord and seek his providential strength, and receive comfort and blessing from his written Word of Truth. The child of God has peace and rest of mind through the obtaining of a knowledge of God’s plan and his character. The secret of this rest is in the possession of a meek and quiet spirit. Only those who have meekness and lowliness of heart are prepared to humble themselves, acknowledge their own unworthiness, and their need for help. They receive the Lord’s grace and assistance and are strengthened by it.

God has always chosen the meek to carry forward his plans and purpose, and has used them for every great work. This is particularly true in connection with our Lord Jesus’ earthly ministry, but it also holds true with the prophets of old, the Ancient Worthies, the twelve apostles, and others whom he has chosen. It is also true concerning the followers of Jesus during the present Gospel Age. These also strive to set aside their own will and have taken upon themselves the yoke of the Father’s will. We

have our Lord's assurance that we will not be burdened with more than we can bear, and that he will always be with us as the great burden-bearer, assisting us in every step of our consecrated walk.

Some are prone to incorrectly associate meekness with weakness. This may come about when someone is not firm when making decisions or dealing with a certain problem. Those of the world do not have respect for a meek person. Yet, Jesus, who was meek and lowly of heart, invites us to learn of him, and we appreciate the words that he spoke. On one occasion, we read, "Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." (Matt. 11:25,26) Jesus is here showing his love and appreciation for the Father's great wisdom by not allowing any but those who possess the proper heart condition to see and more clearly understand the High Calling of the church during the present Gospel Age.

The world's view of the wise and the prudent class who are being called during this age is no doubt seen as a life of failure. The Lord's people are seldom seen among the honored and successful class, whether in business, political, or other positions. The word meekness suggests a mild disposition and identifies someone who is not aggressive. When we study our Lord Jesus' life and ministry, we are impressed with the fact that he possessed a meek and quiet spirit and we want to imitate his spirit. In this way, we learn to know the Father as Jesus said. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father:

and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”—Matt. 11:27

How blessed we are to learn that the Son has chosen to reveal the Father to us who are pupils in the school of Christ during this Gospel Age. If it pleased the Lord to make known to us certain features of his glorious purposes, it would be most disrespectful on our part to not feel a deep sense of interest in his plans and purposes and seek to know him. The followers of Christ thus show evidence of having a meek and quiet spirit when they are teachable.

CLOTHED WITH LONGSUFFERING

Longsuffering pertains to someone who endures patiently, and characterizes that quality of self-restraint although confronted with provocation, who is not hasty and does not retaliate. It is the opposite of anger and is associated with mercy. It is taken from the Greek word meaning forbearance or patience, and as was previously noted, is translated “patient endurance” in the *Diaglott* translation.

In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Hebrews, he wrote, “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.” (Heb. 6:10,11) After having acknowledged their diligent service to our loving God, the apostle then gave them further counsel and encouragement. “That ye be not slothful, but followers

of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (vs. 12) Paul stressed that patience was necessary, and used the same word that is translated “longsuffering” in our featured text. They were thus encouraged to exercise faith and patient endurance in the blessed promises of God.

The apostle also used this word when writing to the brethren at Galatia. In his letter, he said, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance.” (Gal. 5:22,23) Again he stressed the need for longsuffering [patient endurance]. In Paul’s letter to the brethren at Ephesus, he also said, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering [patient endurance], forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph. 4:1-3) These are important admonitions from the great apostle to greater determination in making our calling and election sure. It will surely require longsuffering in our walk in newness of life, and as we strive to be faithful unto death.

The Apostle Peter also said, “We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering [patient endurance] of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.”—II Pet. 3:13-15

CONCLUSION

When we arise in the morning and dress ourselves for the new day at hand, we may sometimes ask ourselves whether we have dressed appropriately. More importantly, however, we must ever keep in mind the apostle's admonitions concerning how we have clothed ourselves spiritually for the day. In the sight of our eternal and loving Heavenly Father, that which is of the most importance to us concerns the adornment of our Christian characters with the fruits and graces of his Holy Spirit.

Having thus considered our responsibilities as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, we should proceed diligently, and strive to put on mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering to properly prepare ourselves for a position in the future kingdom of truth and righteousness under our Lord Jesus. May we all be inspired to greater faithfulness and endurance regarding our wonderful High Calling in Christ Jesus. ■