

Putting on Christ

“As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other.”

—Colossians 3:12,13
(NASB)

THE KING JAMES VERSION

renders these verses: “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.”

From the outset, we note that these words are addressed to the chosen, or elect, of God. He has chosen a select group from the world of mankind during the present Gospel Age who desire to serve him and to seek for glory, honor, and immortality. These have responded to the call, “My son, give me thine heart.”—Prov. 23:26

PUT OFF THE OLD—PUT ON THE NEW

The foundation for our discussion is given earlier in Colossians, chapter 3. We are admonished to “Seek those things which are above. . . . Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.” (vss. 1,2) Before we can “put on” the things mentioned in our theme text, we must first adjust

our heart affections heavenward. We also must “put off the old man with his deeds.” (vs. 9) In another place, Paul gives us similar words: “Put off . . . the old man, which is corrupt; . . . And . . . put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”—Eph. 4:22,24

To put on Christ requires that we each transform our minds. This transformation requires nothing short of full consecration and service to the Heavenly Father. Only a heart which is daily fully dedicated to him will prove to be acceptable in his sight, and such faithfulness will require the sacrifice of our earthly interests, aims, and ambitions.

Bringing about this transformation will require much in the way of special testing. At times, fiery trials may be permitted by God to test our faith and the depth of our consecration. In these, our goal should be the realization that there is nothing of this earth which we should desire. If we have made this precious vow of consecration, we are reckoned as being dead with Christ to the things of this earth, and that our new life is “hid with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:3) Our life is hid with Christ in the sense that the Heavenly Father’s plan is being accomplished through Christ. It is he who has redeemed us, and through whose blood we are justified. We see this expressed in the words: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—Col. 1:27

If we are putting on Christ, and his character likeness is growing in us, our efforts along the lines of letting our light shine, and giving ourselves in service to the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren should be seen by others. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,

and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) Indeed, the desire of our heart and mind should be to serve the true and living God. Apostle Paul expresses the matter in these words, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men.” (I Thess. 1:3,4; II Cor. 3:2) To this Peter adds, concerning the footstep followers of Christ, that they are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:2) Having these words before our minds, we are able to claim the promise: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”—Phil. 4:13

BELOVED OF GOD

Let us now consider these words: “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” “He [God] hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Mark 1:11; Eph. 1:6) The term “beloved” is used in these texts with reference to God’s love for his son Jesus. It is also used many times by the Apostles as an expression of endearment with regard to Christ’s followers. For example, we read these words from John, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:2

To be counted “beloved” in God’s sight entails our becoming more Christlike in character—more

loving, gentle, compassionate, and merciful, as indicated in our theme text. These character traits are to have special significance to us at this present time as we strive to be obedient to our vows of consecration. The development of these graces mentioned by Paul will have a purifying effect upon us, assisting in the cleansing of our hearts from any wrong intentions and motives. Thus we will be refreshed through the Holy Spirit to continue on, though we walk through the “dry and thirsty land” of this world as pilgrims and strangers, until we hear the words, “enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”—Matt. 25:21

At the present time, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” (Rom. 3:10) However, we have the assurance, through faith in his blood, that we are covered under Christ’s robe of righteousness. In “the beloved,” our consecration and resulting sacrifice is deemed acceptable. By him we have a standing before God, who can now also look upon us as objects of his love, giving us the opportunity of also being sons—brethren of his only begotten Son. Paul describes this relationship, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”—Rom. 8:17

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” (II Cor. 5:17) It is as New Creatures that we are beloved in God’s sight, having been made acceptable through the merit of our Redeemer, and prospective members of his bride. We have entered “a new and living way” (Heb. 10:20), which Christ opened for us. Faithfully walking in this way, Paul says, is our “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1), requiring daily obedience to the divine will. Truly, our

sentiments should be, "We love him, because he first loved us." (I John 4:19) God's love for his people is expressed well in these words, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."—Jer. 31:3

THE CONDITION OF OUR HEART

To follow the way of the cross requires that we daily examine the condition of our heart. Its condition will go a long way in determining our success in cultivating the spirit of meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, and love, which is "the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. 13:10) If we develop these things to the best of our ability, in a good and honest heart, we will have part in this promise: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: . . . they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." (Rev. 20:6) Notice only those who are both "blessed and holy" in character will have part in this reigning company.

To be one that "hath part" in the first resurrection, and to receive the divine nature, requires faithfulness in progressing toward the various attainments of development along the narrow way. These way-marks or mileposts, and our attainment of them, give us evidence and assurance that we are progressing toward the ultimate mark set before us—"the mark for the prize of the high calling." (Phil. 3:14) Paul, in another place, speaks of the desired goal of our progress, "That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."—Col. 4:12

"Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but

with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” (II Cor. 3:3) A heart of flesh is pliable, able to feel and understand the needs of others, and to show forth sincere love and sympathy to them. As “the epistle of Christ,” we must seek to develop our hearts, and conduct our lives, in harmony with these words. These are words of truth, and are part of that which washes us “with pure water.”—Heb. 10:22

We should also desire this: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” (Eph. 3:17) If Christ and the spirit of Christ dwell in our heart, we will be properly motivated as a true believer, and find ourselves “doing the will of God from the heart.” (Eph. 6:6) We should think of this process as the writing, or tracing, of the character likeness of the Master in our hearts. Thus, we desire to serve God, not with a heart of stone, hardened by sin and coldness of character, but with a heart that has been cleansed, washed “white as snow” (Isa. 1:18), pliable and usable in the hand of the Lord.

EARNESTNESS AND FAITH

As we seek to put on Christ, we should be continually aware of the earnestness, seriousness, and sincere determination by which we should be giving our all to the Lord. Much is required of those who would make up the bride class—the called, chosen, and faithful. The importance of earnestness is shown in these words of personal testimony from Paul: “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life,

or by death.” (Phil. 1:20) The earnestness Paul spoke of, and which we must emulate, highlights the importance of our pledge of fidelity to God in each and all circumstances, whether “by life” or “by death.” We can have such earnestness because of the assurance that daily we will be recipients of enlightenment through the Holy Spirit. God has also given us a foretaste, through his precious promises, of good things to come in the fulfillment of his plan. This knowledge also assists us in maintaining an earnest desire to be faithful. It is surely with seriousness that we “should earnestly contend [struggle] for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”—Jude 3

Earnestness goes hand in hand with faith. We must have a faith that fully comprehends and appreciates the depth of our Redeemer’s sacrifice. Likewise, our faith must be unwavering in the justification he has provided us, and in our standing as sons before God. We must, by faith, claim the promise, “Ye are washed, . . . sanctified, . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (I Cor. 6:11) Although this scripture applies to each one individually as a follower of Christ, it also should help us, collectively as brethren, to maintain our hold on the Truth and to have our feet be swift to serve one another along the narrow way.

As brethren, we are part of the “household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10) In the natural family arrangement, each member has faith and trust toward those who are part of the household. So it should also be in the household of faith. We must develop an attitude of heart and mind in which we have

faith in, and trust, our brethren's similar desires to be faithful. This requires that we learn to overlook the weaknesses of the flesh in our brethren, which most certainly will arise from time to time in our dealings with one another. It takes patience, love, faith, and trust to make this all work together in the brotherhood. Prayer, self-examination, and humility are also necessary in order that we place our viewpoints and our feelings in their proper perspective, when it involves matters of mere preference. In all things, however, we are to put the Lord first, and all other matters in our life will fit into their proper place. Let us remember the words, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."—Josh. 24:15

PUT ON CHARITY/LOVE

The Master stated, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. . . . These things I command you, that ye love one another." (John 15:12-14,17) Jesus certainly was the epitome of this, because he was both willing and able to lay down his life for his friends—his footstep followers of the present age. In Christ's kingdom, all of the world of mankind who are willing and prove obedient to God's righteous laws, will also become friends of Jesus, having developed a Christlike character. This love, whether developed now in Christ's footstep followers, or by and by in his kingdom by the world of mankind, is "the bond of perfectness"—or completeness.—Col. 3:14

It is evident that our love for the brethren has been, and continues to be, a special test to all of the Lord's footstep followers during the present Harvest time in which we are now living. Indeed, it has always been of great importance. However, conditions in the earth are such that today, more than ever before, selfishness, pride, and a general lack of love and brotherly kindness pervade much of the spirit of the world. This knowledge should raise the level of importance we place on the development of love, making it one of our chief priorities. It may be the final test in our desire to reach the mark of the prize of our calling.

BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER

To bear with one another implies several things. First, it can be viewed as a way of conducting ourselves—our manner—toward others, especially our brethren. It also includes the thought of endurance. It implies awareness and recognition of our brethren's individual circumstances or situations which may call for our "bearing" with them.

The *King James* translation of our theme text uses the word "forbearing." This has the thought of patient restraint, and requires much in the way of self control. We must keep self in check and examine closely our motives, words, and actions when dealing with others along the lines of forbearing. Paul often took note concerning what he had heard of or witnessed in his brethren. Although he certainly had to be forbearing toward them in their weaknesses, yet he went to great lengths to be positive in his assessment of their progress: "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it

is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.”—II Thess. 1:3

FRUIT-BEARING

Proper fruit-bearing is required in order to prove our acceptance to the Lord, and to maintain our standing as branches of the true vine. In John 15:5, Jesus states, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” Each consecrated member of the household of faith is a branch in this vine, and is to seek the development of the same fruitage, and to run for the same prize—the one hope of our calling. As branches together in this vine, we are yokefellows with each other and with our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. Together we are being fed, watered, shaped, and pruned in order that we produce fruitage unto the character likeness of our dear Lord.

The Apostle Paul lists the various fruits which we are to produce as we abide in the true vine. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance. (Gal. 5:22,23) To develop these fruits requires that we separate ourselves from earthly ambition, as it is out of harmony with our consecration unto death and with the Holy Spirit which engenders these Christlike qualities. Thus separated, the Spirit of the Lord extends an even greater influence over our lives, allowing more and more production of fruitage.

To make fruit-bearing possible requires first an output of effort and energy. In the natural sense, fruitage must be preceded by proper growth of the plant, which is provided

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(Continued from page 31) by nutrients from the soil, energy from the sun, and sufficient watering. Pruning is also needed to yield the sweetest and largest fruit. In the spiritual sense, our fruit-bearing must be preceded by an ample supply of nutrients from the good soil of our heart, life-giving rays from the Sun of righteousness, the water of the word of truth from the Scriptures, and the pruning trials and experiences of life. All of this must be accompanied with a zeal and fervor to be pleasing to God.

Fruit-bearing should be manifested in a variety of ways—toward our Heavenly Father, his son Christ Jesus our Lord, our brethren, and toward all mankind in proportion as we have contact with them. This is a lifelong work, and we are reminded to not become tired in its accomplishment: “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9) Rather, let us always have close to our heart these sentiments: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD.”—Ps. 19:14

FORGIVING EACH OTHER

We should, with everything pertaining to our spiritual lives, go back to the words and teachings of our Lord Jesus for guidance. When one of his disciples requested of him, “teach us to pray,” Jesus included these important words in the model prayer he provided: “When ye pray, say, . . . forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us [who trespass against us].” (Luke 11:1,2,4) It is important to note that Jesus was not

in need of speaking these words when he prayed to his Father, being “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) However, he knew that his footstep followers had need of praying for forgiveness. Similar words are recorded in Matt. 6:14,15: “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” What a serious thought this is! We will be forgiven only if we have the same spirit of forgiveness in our heart toward others. If we do, we have the promise that “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”—I John 1:9

We, and all others, are imperfect and cannot keep the divine law as we might desire. We should not expect perfection from any during this present time in which we are living. Perfection of thought, word, and deed is reserved for a future time. Rather, as our Lord told us when giving the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) If we are merciful, we have a blessedness because we have been both its recipient as well its giver. To continue faithfully in such an attitude will result in true pureness of heart, and permit us to “see God.”—vs. 8

The very essence of Christian principle is found in love, sympathy, and the spirit of forgiveness. In Matt. 18:21, when Peter inquired of the Lord concerning how many times he should forgive someone, he asked, “till seven times?” Peter perhaps thought that this was proper, since the number seven was a symbol of completeness and perfection. Our Lord, however, stated clearly, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” (vs. 22)

In reality, Jesus meant that the spirit of forgiveness in our character and the desire to exercise it toward others should be without limit.

Let us then, as those chosen of God, holy and beloved, strive to fully put on Christ. Let us have a heart, thoughts, words, and actions developed into a fullness of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, daily bearing with our brethren, and forgiving one another. This is truly our reasonable service. ■

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

*—Romans 15:5,6,
New International Version*