

How Are You Dressed Spiritually: Clothed With Christ's Compassion & Rid of Any Bitterness?

Colossians 3:8-17

God is really into how we are dressed and what we wear.

Paul explains that truth as he makes a powerful statement in Romans 13:14 (NKJV), look at it with me for a moment:

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

CLOTHED BY CHRIST IS THE WAY TO LIVE

Paul explains in chapter 13 that we will live in an unfriendly world, with rulers we don't always like but must always obey. Surrounded by sinners, temptations, and trials. Now look at Romans 13:13:

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

Then comes v. 14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts." The key to the life we are to live is putting on Christ.

As Paul sat in a Roman prison at the end of his public ministry, he looked back at all those years of preaching the Gospel across much of the Roman world, and everywhere he went leading individuals to Christ, and then establishing New Testament churches. Now though chained, he continued that global ministry by praying through each day in prison, for those same churches of believers.

It was there during Paul's imprisonment that God began to pour out in his heart, the final needed lessons for Christ's church. Amazingly, that is where we find so much about the need for tender, forgiving hearts, as we live clothed in Christ's compassion. The specter of anger and bitterness always lurks when life gets hard; and life was getting harder and harder for the early church.

BY PUTTING ON CHRIST & PUTTING OFF THE OLD ME

As we turn onward to Colossians 3, think of these words being written from a prison cell.

Paul wrote his final letters to New Testament churches, from prison. These four New Testament books are aptly called Paul's Prison Epistles.

They are: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

This morning as we stand for our Scripture reading, look at the prison epistle of Paul to

the Colossians 3:8-17.

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

¹²**Therefore, as *the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on* tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;** ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; **even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.**

¹⁴**But above all these things put on** love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Pray

From this passage comes our goal today. Paul was moved by the Spirit of God to challenge every believer with the question:

HOW ARE YOU DRESSED SPIRITUALLY: CLOTHED WITH CHRIST'S COMPASSION & RID OF ANY BITTERNESS?

Remember the three foundational truths from last time:

- 1. Bitterness Ruins the Kind, Tenderhearted & Forgiving Life (Eph. 4:30-32)**
- 2. Bitterness is a Consequence of Un-forgiveness (Mt. 6:12-14)**
- 3. Bitterness Leads to Intense Inner Torment (Mt. 18:34)**

Our new lives in Christ were designed by God to it to have a daily component of getting rid of any old ways that come back to pollute our lives, and re-clothing ourselves with Christ.

That same process of getting rid of the old us and embracing the new person we are in Christ is what we see in Romans 13, here in Colossians 3, and last time in Ephesians 4.

Remember what we saw in Ephesians 4?

Eph. 4:30-32 (NKJV) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹**Let all bitterness,** wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking **be put away from you,** with all malice. ³²And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul said beware of the power of bitterness. Beware of allowing bitterness to destroy your life. One of the struggles believers have always faced while seeking to follow the Lord is: bitterness.

The immeasurable power of God is stopped when His people disobey. God's grace teaches us to deny ungodliness, but when we resist that grace our sin grieves and quenches the

Holy Spirit¹.

Bitterness is a very deadly, fast-growing, and easily spread form of spiritual cancer.

Do you see now why Paul lists bitterness first in the lineup of Spirit-grievers?

Do you see why he says “put away ALL bitterness”?

He says it is so deadly, so painful, so quick to spread that it must be dealt with right away.

A bitter person is cut and punctured by the words or actions of others.

Those wounds untreated by the healing grace of a tender-hearted-forgiving-attitude become a source of malignant bitterness, a hurtful condition that touches every part of their life.

What is the solution Ephesians 4:30-32 gives to us believers?

WHY GOD SAID “GET RID OF BITTERNESS”

1. **Bitterness imprisons a believer’s emotions.**

Failing to forgive another will imprison a believer in their past.

Bitterness nurtures pain and keeps it alive, never allowing the wound to heal.

The longer the hurt is dwelt upon the more our anger is fed, resentment grows, and joy is extinguished.

Forgiveness-energized by grace, opens our prison doors and sets us free from our past.

2. **Bitterness poisons a believer’s life.**

Bitterness is not just a sin; it is an infection that poisons our speech making it biting, cutting, sarcastic, and slanderous.

Bitterness poisons our emotions making them violent, unpredictable, intolerant, vengeful, and ungodly.

Bitterness poisons all relationships making them void of affection, devoid of love, and emptied of kindness. The writer of Hebrews warns, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled” (Heb. 12:15).

Forgiveness-energized by grace, replaces bitterness with love, joy, peace, and the other fruits of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22-23).

3. **Bitterness opens a believer’s life to Satan.**

When Paul warned believers about improper anger he mentioned Satan’s horrible presence in Ephesians 4:26-27, “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

When Paul similarly charged the Corinthians he again joins Satan’s destructive influence upon believers who leave open this strategic door as he wrote, “Whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:10-11).

The Bible clearly warns that unforgiving-based-bitterness offers the most ground that Satan gains in our lives.

¹ Just as the armies of Israel were defeated because of Achan’s hidden sin, and the ministry of the churches of Asia Minor were halted because of the un-forsaken sins of each congregation—so the early church was forced to see that when God’s Spirit is grieved and quenched, the power of the saints to live the impossible life wanes.

Forgiveness-energized by grace bars that avenue of demonic attack.

4. **Bitterness closes a believer's life to God.**

Remember how soberly Christ spoke in the Sermon on the Mount? "If you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14-15).

Jesus was not saying that believers lose the completed, past forgiveness of salvation.

He was warning that bitterness robs them of their ongoing relational forgiveness with God the Father.

We cannot be right with God when unforgiving of others.

Forgiveness-energized by grace always restores us to the place of maximum blessing, returning us to purity, and the joy of fellowship with God.

God wants believers to avoid bitterness so much, that He constantly emphasizes the importance of forgiveness in Scripture. There are no less than seventy-five different word pictures about forgiveness that God has recorded in His Word, the Bible.²

We are to always be on guard against any start of bitterness. One of the ways to do that is start:

SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF BITTERNESS

What are the warning signs of bitterness? It is really not that complicated to recognize that bitterness has set in.

As I list off some of the most common signs of bitterness, ask yourself if are you showing any of these signs of bitterness.

Let's think of some of the characteristics that often show up in a bitter person's life:

1. **They show a lack of concern for others.** A bitter person cares very little about anybody else.
2. **They're very sensitive and touchy.** For instance, if a bitter person walks into a room where two other people are talking, and if those people get quieter as they walk in, the bitter person often thinks, "They're talking about me."
3. **They tend to avoid meeting new people, show little or no gratitude at all, and usually speak words of empty flattery or harsh criticism.**
4. **They hold grudges against people, often for a long, long time.** They find it extremely difficult to forgive.
5. **They often have a stubborn or sulking attitude.**
6. **They end up experiencing mood extremes:** very high and happy one minute, and the next thing you know, they're so low they can reach up and touch bottom.
7. **Bitterness can be called the seed of Hell because one of the worst things about bitterness is that it doesn't stop...** it keeps getting worse. It

² These points adapted, paraphrased, and drawn from MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians 4*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

may only start as a little seed of hurt, but then it grows and festers into a very dangerous thing.³

Bitterness is one of the more-deadly cancers of the spiritual life of the believer. If you are infected by bitterness, get out of your self-imposed prison now, don't stay in a moment longer.

Paul said that the Spirit of God, in the power of Christ's cross can set you free. The escape route has been marked for us by the One who should have had all the reasons in the world to be bitter but was not.

GETTING OUT OF THE BITTERNESS TRAP BY PUTTING ON CHRIST & PUTTING OFF THE OLD ME

Have you ever notice that line in the Lord's Prayer? Often we have said it so many times we skip right over it. "Forgive us God the way we have forgiven others". God wants us to forgive others and not cultivate bitterness.

Forgiving others isn't denying that they hurt us, or ignoring it either.

Getting out of the bitterness trap starts by honestly confronting hurts in our life—and energized by God's grace doing something about each one!

Here are some basic steps.

1. Make a list of the people who've hurt you.

This is always easiest for us because that is what we remember the best—the offenses others commit against us. Just jot names and things they have done to hurt you.

Here are some typical hurts: "My parents didn't keep their promises." "They gave more love and affection to other members of the family." "My dad took out his bad temper on me." "My wife tries to make me into something I'm not." "My friend wasn't there when I needed him," etc.

2. Make another list of the things you have done to hurt them.

Whoa, this is the hard part. Pride effectively edits our memories of the wrongs we do by shifting the blame, hiding our guilt, and so on. Our flesh likes our faults to stay hidden from others, so pray and ask God to shine the light of the Spirit upon your heart and expose ways you have harmed others.

One of the hardest things to do is to really clear the debts between parents and children. You could put down things like: laziness, ungratefulness (when was the last time you ever thanked your parents - just called them and thanked them?), deceitfulness (what have you done behind their backs to make them distrust you?), etc.

Making a list of those I have wronged is vital. Only when we agree with God about our sin, and see it as He sees it—can we be forgiven (I John 1:9). One of the results of making such a list is that we find that in most of the ways that we have been hurt—we also have hurt others. My pride maximizes others faults and minimizes mine. This exercise will bring reality into focus.

3. Take a good look at how you have hurt the Lord.

³ This list was drawn from an article called HURT AND BITTERNESS by Winkie Pratney.

Now we are at the most important place in our grace-prompted journey out of bitterness. This is the most life-changing step.

Get down on your face before God and ask Him to reveal all the ways you have hurt Him. God's Word says He is grieved when we sin. Do we miss that terrible truth? Spurgeon said,

“For it is an inexpressibly delightful thought, that He who rules heaven and earth, and is the creator of all things, and the infinite and ever blessed God, condescends to enter into such infinite relationships with his people that his divine mind may be affected by their actions.”

Each area the Spirit convicts you about, revealing where you have grieved God, confess and forsake, making no excuses to God.

God said Christ's blood cleanses away our sins not our excuses. We are transformed as we see that though God has been deeply hurt (grieved) yet He loves and forgives us and NEVER gets embittered towards us.

People closest to us can hurt us the most—right?

Now as a believer think about who knows every thought, hears every word, feels every emotion we have ever had. God does, right? We have the potential to hurt God so much, and we do. Yet He forgives. Because He forgives He demands that we must do so also to all who hurt us.

The Bible says that “The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain.” (Genesis 6:6)

The phrase “heart filled with pain” literally means ‘to have difficulty in breathing’.

God made this beautiful creation, and then He sees people not only hating and killing each other, but hating Him, too. And all that hurt goes deep, deep into His heart. We forget that God has a perfect memory. We only see a little bit - He sees it all, continuously. We only live a short time - He lives forever. When God looked at the world He made, He gasped with pain and horror. It hurt Him.

4. Pray, and ask the forgiveness of God and man.

Now comes the simplest and hardest part of our task. Get alone with your list of how you hurt God and others and ask God to work in your heart. One by one confess them to God, then ask for and receive His forgiveness for every thing you have listed (and more as He reminds you).

Then you need to tear up that list and get rid of it. Just doing that is a picture of how God wipes out, erases, washes clean, and removes our sins.

Then you need to get in touch with those you have hurt and either by letter, email, phone, or in person ask for their forgiveness.

5. Destroy your files.

Finally, there is one more vital step to take. There is still a copy of that list, it is in your mind. God says that He can also wipe that file clean.

Hebrews 9:14 and 10:22 say that the blood of Christ, through the Eternal Spirit will purge your conscience from things that defile, and will allow you to get close to the Lord

with a pure heart, confident you are right with Him, and as much as is possible with others.

Open the filing cabinets of your mind, take out all the files, and get rid of them.

Tear up your list and burn it. You must release it all to God. Forgiveness is opening the filing cabinet before God and clearing the debts. "I'm not going to hold this against them. I'm not even going to keep a record of it."⁴

"The importance of being forgiving cannot be overstressed. We do this for the health of *our own souls*. Bitterness causes innumerable ailments—emotional, physical, spiritual—within us. We do it for the health of the *church*. The church is weak and defeated because of refused forgiveness among its children. We do it for the sake of the *world*. The world has not yet discovered what Christ is like. But it can, if we will truly forgive.

Do you need to forgive your spouse? Covenant to do it right now.

Have you been unwilling to forgive your parents? Promise God right now that you will do it.

Have you forgiven your employer who wronged you? You need to do it now—and you can, with Christ's help.

Do you have a grudge against your last church? Its pastor, its elders? Forgive today!"⁵

No record. That's what God does with you. Do you want Him to remember and recall all the debts He has cleared you of? You do the same.

The Bible says, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matt. 6.14-15)

It's a choice you must make in response to God's offer of forgiveness to you. What will you do?

HOW ARE YOU DRESSED SPIRITUALLY: CLOTHED WITH CHRIST'S COMPASSION & RID OF ANY BITTERNESS?

Christians *ought* to be the most forgiving people on earth, because they have been forgiven as no one else has.

Our new lives in Christ were designed by God to it to have a daily component of getting rid of any old ways that come back to pollute our lives, and re-clothing ourselves with Christ.

That same process of getting rid of the old us and embracing the new person we are in Christ is what we see in Romans 13, in Colossians 3, and in Ephesians 4.

Eph. 4:30-32 (NKJV) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

⁴ This list was quoted and paraphrased from an article called **HURT AND BITTERNESS** by Winkie Pratney.

⁵ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 415). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.