

The apostle's goal in writing this letter has been shown in 1:25-28, **“to make the Word of God fully known”** so that **“he might present every person complete in Christ.”** That is his goal, the Word of God fully known so that the people of God would be fully mature. Having shown us what it means to be complete in Christ, he has now begun to show us how that maturity alters the ways in which we relate to one another.

Now, the central issue which was being pressed upon them, as it is upon us, is the question of what our hearts are functionally relying upon to secure a place of belonging with God. How do we obtain whatever it takes to have a meaningful life, a sense of belonging, the state of being right with God? Now, we all want to belong and we all live with the subversive thoughts of whether or not we ‘have what it takes’ to be acceptable or have obtained ‘what it takes’ to live fully. But this desire to belong: to know another and be known by another without the fear of being cast out, or pushed away, or ignored, is something with which every human being wrestles.

And we all have sought to find ‘what it takes’ in various ways based upon various assumptions. Maybe we got these assumptions from our parents, or from our peer group, or we might have rejected those and come up with our own, but everybody has some expectation of achieving a ‘means of belonging’. We all have some presumed basis for our sense of belonging, what the Bible calls “righteousness.” We all have a sense of what it takes to be right and have meaning in life. These assumptions lead to comparison, competition, division, defensiveness, slander, gossip, and greediness of every kind.

But the Christian faith, says the apostle, is the end of such a distressing pursuit, it is the end of seeking to obtain any sense of belonging as the product of my own achievements

or my own performances, either good or bad. Rather, it is the receiving of the status of belonging as a gift, as the procurement of another's work. Believing in Jesus, then, is being willing to see that you can never live up to such a standard, that you will never have what it takes to prove that you're somebody, and only when you are willing to admit that and come to him and say, "Lord Jesus Christ, your record, and your life, and your works, are my only hope. I need to have you answer for me" will God then gift you His righteousness, His achievements, and His security as the basis for your belonging with God, your righteousness, your full and utter acceptance.

In grammar we have two moods of verbs that help us understand the intent of our language: the indicative, which simply expresses a statement of fact, such as "Johnny hit the ball", and the imperative, which expresses a command to take action, such as, "Hit the ball, Johnny!" Most religions puts these two types of verbs in the following order: the imperative precedes the indicative. In other words, you must obey in order to belong. You must do the command before you are accepted. You must 'have what it takes' before you belong. However, in the gospel the order is reversed. The indicative precedes the imperative. That is, you belong in Christ and therefore you obey God's commands. Because you belong, you then live righteously.

J. Gresham Machen, that staunch 20th century defender of biblical authority, showed how central this gift of God is, in what he called "the triumphant indicative":

"From the beginning Christianity was the religion of the broken heart; it is based upon the conviction that there is an awful gulf between man and God which none but God can bridge. The Bible tells us how this gulf was bridged; and that means the Bible is a record of facts.

Of what avail, without the redeeming acts of God, are all the lofty ideals of Psalmists and Prophets, all the teaching and example of Jesus? In themselves they can bring us nothing but despair.

We Christians are not interested merely in what God commands, but also in what God did; in a triumphant indicative; our salvation depends squarely upon history; the Bible contains that history, and unless that history is true the authority of the Bible is gone and we who have put our trust in the Bible are without hope.” — J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*

This union with Christ, that our lives are hidden in the bosom of God because we are united to Christ by faith alone, received into the closest intimacy with Him with full invitation and joy, is the foundation of Christianity. It is the work of God, regardless of the perfection of our doctrinal understanding or the thoroughness of our deepest repentance. It is a triumphant indicative, not a burdensome command. It is faith, or dependence, depending upon Jesus, the Son of God, who alone has what it takes, to bring us into the family of God and qualify us to be heirs of God. And faith is not a work of which we can boast; it is an *unwork*, the desperate cry of a weak man, the hopeful casting of one's soul upon an object of such solidity and security which alone can handle its burdened weight. And this promise is open to anyone who will thus depend upon Jesus alone to do so, who will cast their burdened souls upon Him.

Now, along comes a questioning presumption, that if God accepts you solely on the basis of Jesus' work, then this destroys the motivation for living rightly, for doing rightly, for obedience and holiness. But, **those who believe the gospel don't simply receive the righteousness of Christ, they also love Him for it and live consistently with**

His purposes. That is Christian maturity, that is the outcome of knowing the Word of God fully. As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Having been raised to the newness of life, put off the old clothes and put on the new ones, living as those who are complete in Christ Jesus, not as those still seeking to obtain something more.

So, what Paul is commanding here, as the NT authors often do, is simply to live like what you are! This is why he mentions our identity in Christ immediately preceding, that indicative fact that you are chosen, holy, and beloved, as the reason for walking in righteousness.

The gospel contains an ethic, and this ethic follows the fact that we belong to God in Christ Jesus through faith alone. His purposes are now our purposes, which is to do the will of the Father. Thusly, simply because our salvation is free to us, we know, and remember at this table, that it was not free to Christ Jesus, and any presumption that we can pursue sin as our means of really living, is inconsistent with the new life, the new creation, and inconsistent with a heart which has truly been redeemed. Therefore, the announcement of our identity in Christ as chosen, holy, and dearly loved is immediately followed by commands to live like those who are chosen, holy, and dearly loved; to live like those who are complete.

Your attire should not be that which is anxious to find meaning and significance and joy in something outside of Christ; not the old ways of expecting sexual pleasure or wealth or power to give us life, all those idols which we used to seek to obtain some sense of belonging, of rightness with the world, with ourselves, with others, and even with God. Don't dress in the clothes you were buried in, but put on the outfit suitable

to the newness of life. Dress like your father, for you belong there. Dress like you are in the King's family, because in Christ you belong there.

And what are these clothes of the kingdom? What is the uniform appropriate for the children of God? What is the attire of acceptance with God? It is the attitudes and actions which reflect the relational character, purposes, desires, and delights of God Himself! It is the character of Christ, the attitude of Christ, the desires of Christ, and the delights of Christ.

Paul lists a number of characteristics, metaphorical articles of clothing suitable to one who has been united to Christ Jesus. Ways in which the Christian ought to walk, not as a means of obtaining God's acceptance, or earning a place of belonging, but rather as the result of having been given such a great and illustrious gift, the response of a slave made a son, a traitor granted an inheritance, and a dead man granted new life.

It's not merely that it is right to behave in these ways, which it is, or that it is consistent and logically coherent to do so, which it is, but also that our union with Christ actually empowers us to do these things. That is, it shows the "how" we can put to death the earthly and idolatrous motivations and put off the old clothes of division, comparison, and competition, and instead find our motivation to relate to others in the manner of the new identity. It is because we are chosen that we don't need others to honor us. It is because we are adopted that we don't have to obtain or keep wealth or power in this world. It is because we are beloved by God that we don't have to appease or please others to somehow procure their acceptance or love. We are free to love others well, when it costs us our honor, costs us our wealth, costs us our earthly recognition and glory, even our very lives or livelihood.

Let's take a look at the first article of new clothing that we are to put on and then we will discuss how our union with Christ empowers us to wear it boldly and persistently.

The first article of attire which we are to put on is a “heart of compassion.” **Compassion is a tender concern which leads a strong person to use his strength to change the condition of a weaker person.** From the very core of our desires, our affections, and our longings, we are to seek and pursue, with warm-hearted affection, to work for the comfort of the distressed and suffering to the degree which we are able. Look at how the gospel of God's work illustrates this. Such compassion is suitable for kingdom attire because it reflects the character of God Himself, who did not consider our suffering something to be avoided, repulsed, or even ignored, but who, though he was existing in the form of God did not consider the honor of such equality with God something to bask in, but instead stooped down and took the form of a servant, he entered into our suffering, he experienced it from the inside, willfully enduring the title of criminal, powerless, impotent, fool, shamefully exposed, naked before all who deemed Him struck down by God, an enemy of God, and a deceiving liar. Though such things were untrue, He chose to bear them out of a compassionate heart, descending in humility all the way to shameful death in order to change our condition from children of wrath to children of God.

We, too, in taking up His attire, in wearing the King's uniform, must, with warm-hearted affection, do the same. **How do we do this? Well, remember that this command immediately follows the triumphant indicative that we are chosen, holy, and beloved.** When you forget these things, we naturally begin comparing ourselves with others, our own achievements, our own ability to “get everything right”, which we

depend upon for our means of life and of belonging. As such, it does not lead us to be compassionate, but to fearful depression, so concerned with how I am doing or have done that I can't even see the needs or sufferings of others, or when I do, I am too afraid to enter into their suffering to walk with them. Or, when I think that I have done well, and that is why God accepts me, then I will never reach out to those whom I don't deem to be good people. I will feel that they should simply "do better" like I, presumably, did. I won't seek to help the weak or the poor, because I have minimized how greatly Christ helped me.

But, when I really grasp that I am chosen, holy, and dearly loved, then I am fearless and self-forgetful. I'm not worried about what I need to do, or how I need to prove how right I am or good that I am or strong that I am. I can truly become a servant to the sufferer, an aide to the afflicted, and a balm-bearer for the burdened. **When I know that I am completely and utterly secure in Christ, then I can give away my strength in this world, my wealth in this world, my time in this world to change the condition of another.**

So, this questionable presumption that if Christ is our righteousness it will somehow lead to a lesser motivation to love others well, is absolutely backwards.

In fact, only when you know that you are completely secure in the love of God will you ever be strong enough to admit your greatest weaknesses of character, greatest wickedness of lust, and most shameful abuses of others, because you know that you have already been scrutinized and judged and accepted in Christ Jesus. Therefore, you can be *truly* humble, not merely pretend to be humble. You can take criticism, you can give it to yourself, and still be full of hope of glory, joy, peace, and rest.

Now, having said that, I think it is prudent to consider that **there is a malformed imposter of compassion that we, especially as Christians who value compassion, can be deceived to obey.** It is called compassion, but really it is a self-centered and fearful silence which is afraid to upset another person by calling them to uncomfortable change.

Biblical compassion, that which is consistent with the character of God, only acts according to holiness, to what encourages the holiness and purity and good of those whom are weak. Jesus did not die for no reason, but to present us complete to God, holy and blameless and without reproach. He died, according to Titus 2, to purify for Himself a people for God's own possession, zealous for good works. He died to redeem us, to restore us, to reconstitute a redeemed people to holiness and godliness: humble, dependent, zealous for righteousness, who live lives in line with the glory of God.

But often, what people call compassion is actually a justification of sin and an encouragement to continue in it. Our Father's compassion, however, is always encouraging and moving us towards repentance, in gentleness towards those in error, but never giving quarter to the error itself. To encourage or to excuse sin is not compassion, it is hatred. To increase comfort in the pursuit of sin will not ultimately alleviate discomfort, but may be storing up wrath and greater discomfort in the coming Day of the Lord.

We must be wise in seeking to alleviate discomfort and to ease suffering, for some suffering is an aspect of repentance, of the exposure of sin, and we must never seek to hide or excuse that which may bring discomfort in the name of compassion when it is the proper work of repentance. Sometimes, compassion says 'No!'. It puts its foot down

for the sake of the weak. We must comfort others where we are able, even when suffering is due to their own sin, but we must not enable others to continue in sin by presuming that compassion would not do or say something which makes someone uncomfortable.

As an example, in Matthew 18 Jesus shows us that exposing sin is an act of kindness and compassion for our brother when we go about it in a gently progressive manner. We go privately to expose sin, knowing that a brother may simply be ignorant of it. There is no need to expose it to more people if he turns to fight it immediately. If he repents, then there is no more to be done but to forgive and walk with your brother. However, if he refuses to acknowledge or fight against sin, then you are to bring another brother, effectively exposing his sin to another person, bringing into more light. If he repents, it goes no farther, and you have won your brother and can comfort him in his repentance. However, if he doesn't listen to two or three, then you are to expose his sin to the entire church, says Jesus, in the hopes that he will listen to the community. So, what we see is that compassion seeks to minimize discomfort, but it does not reject the pursuit of holiness because it brings discomfort. When we cannot, in good conscience, comfort others because of sin's consequences, compassion grieves for them, even though it cannot alleviate the suffering. Pride simply speaks, but compassion speaks with grief.

For example, let's say that a friend is demeaning his wife, belittling and dishonoring her by expressing his own sorrows and sufferings in his marriage, it is not compassion to join him in demeaning his wife or by belittling her in an effort to make him feel better. Surely it is not compassion to demean your own wife in an effort to show sympathy.

Instead, a heart of compassion and kindness grieves loss with him, but also calls him to holiness in how he speaks of his wife, casting hope upon the Lord who comforts and restores and who died for her, too. In spite of what is often assumed, it is possible to hold both the comfort of the gospel and the call of the gospel to repentance at the same time. Thus, compassionate hearts speak the truth in love, with both encouragement and admonition, confirming the comfort of the gospel (Christ is your life) and the call of the gospel (so put on compassionate hearts) to holiness.

Listen to me, Church! There are those who would seek to make you guilty for calling them to repentance by claiming that you lack compassion, or that you don't really love them when you do. Surely, it is possible to bring up sin as an arrogant jerk, but the act of calling one to holiness is not without compassion in itself, but can be the very core of compassion, knowing that holiness brings about the greatest joy and peace and sin brings about the greatest suffering and despair, that we believe that sin is a greater harm than suffering, and holiness a greater treasure than comfort. Don't be deceived by manipulative men, who threaten guilt and shame upon you for walking in the light. Be compassionate from a heart which longs for holiness and which grieves sin and its consequences. Be kind, doing what truly benefits others, that which corresponds to holiness and dependence upon the Christ who died for our sins (there is hope!) and was raised for our justification (there is hope for change!).

At the same time, it is we who have been granted so much grace and given so much honor who should frequently and extravagantly giving our focused time, our emotional support, our financial strength, and our tender words to those who are struggling and

weak in any fashion. We should never excuse heartlessness, carelessness, or ignorance of need because Jesus didn't treat us that way.

Rather, we ought to slow down our own lives and walk with those who struggle, in humility, as one who is also weak and needy of God's compassion. Pick them up when they stumble, give of your abundance to meet their needs, comfort them when they lose, by reminding one another again and again, that Christ is our hope of glory, Christ is our life, Christ is the foundation of our belonging, and do so with tenderness because you, too, are not heirs of God because you have done well, but because Christ has done well for you.

There is much more to be said about the attributes of this attire, these attitudes which produce actions consistent with our souls resting in the completed works of Christ Jesus on our behalf. Those, due to time, will be picked up next week.

However, what I hope that you see today is the attire addressed here is relational. Paul is giving us a view of what the people of God ought to look like and how we ought to relate to one another. Just like the old clothes were relational, causing division and comparison and competition because they strived to produce, procure, and protect their own righteousness, defending against any accusation of failure and despairing when found out to be needy, so these new clothes are relational, but seek instead to cause unity, intimacy, community, togetherness, and the expression of belonging rather than division.

If idolatry, seeking to establish our own sense of belonging by obtaining something other than Christ, leads to comparison, competition, division, defensiveness, and the

like, expressed through anger, slander, covetousness, and the use and abuse of one another, then the fact of the gospel, that we are united to Christ Jesus who is our life, who is our righteousness, in whom we have belonging, then we don't need to compare ourselves, or compete with one another to prove ourselves, slander others to cast the blame away from ourselves, or use and abuse others to show our strength.

Rather, because we are already complete in Christ, already forgiven because of His debt-payment on the cross, already right with God because of His record, then we are freed from the need to compare and fight and devour one another. Instead, we can show compassion, lay down our rights to be recognized, give of our strength, physical, financial, emotional. We can call others to repent because it is what is best without the paralyzing silencing fear of whether or not they will let us belong with them, and we can have our sin exposed without defensiveness and competition because we know that Christ is our righteousness.

We can truly live for the sake of another, just as Christ lived for the sake of us sinners, in the humility and gentleness and kindness which flows from those who entrust themselves to God in the full knowledge that He is our life, and it is right for us to belong there, freed from the fear of being cast out, we can give ourselves for the sake of others and use whatever strength or power that we have to change the condition of the weak to comfort and strengthen their hearts.