

Air travel wasn't an option in Paul's day -- of course -- but that doesn't mean he wasn't concerned about a dress code for those who would be traveling with the good news of Jesus Christ. If it's true that you are what you wear, Paul is concerned that those who represent Christ "put on" clothes that never go out of style and are always worn with others in mind.

Paul begins by reminding the Colossian church that it's never been about marking ourselves as different and claiming our individual rights regardless of how they affect others. If you are in Christ, he reminds the church, then you are a new person with a new wardrobe. "There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all and in all" (v. 11). All who love Christ are "God's chosen ones" who are "holy and beloved" (v. 12). Our dress, our demeanor, our posture and our attitudes are to reflect the one who chose us in Christ, which means we have to "put to death" the "earthly" and self-serving desires that are so common in this world (vv. 5-8). We "strip off the old self with its practices" and clothe ourselves with "the new self, which is being renewed according to the image of its creator" (vv. 9-10). It's not about calling attention to ourselves, in other words, but rather seeing our whole lives as pointing to the one in whose image we are made.

Paul goes on to outline the dress code for those who would board Air Jesus. The five pieces of clothing listed in verse 12 are all designed to communicate Christ to others and pay attention to their interests and needs. *Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience* are virtues that we should have on us at all times, whether we're boarding a plane or walking through the neighborhood. Wearing this kind of *character clothing* demonstrates to the world that we're not pushing our own personal agendas, but that our agenda is always about reflecting Christ.

*Compassion is sympathy for the situations of others.* That guy who is struggling to find a seat on the plane or who is giving you a hard time at work is likely dealing with things you have no idea about. When someone is acting out, the issue is usually not the issue, be it lack of space in the overhead or a perceived slight from another person. Most of the time our bad behavior is the result of something going on in our lives that has us stuck. Compassion looks for the opportunity to care for people where they are, to love them in spite of their situation.

*Kindness is the active consideration for others and their needs.* Think of it as *compassion taking action*. Rather than categorize people by their dress and demeanor, we look for ways to care for them where they are. We represent Jesus, whose kindness drew people to him rather than pushing them away.

*Humility helps us to see others as more important than ourselves.* This is an important theme for the apostle Paul: *With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another*

*in love* (Ephesians 4:2); *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves* (Philippians 2:3); *[Do] not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think* (Romans 12:3). And the apostle James adds, *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom* (James 3:13).

Saint Augustine said, "It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes humans as angels." Yet, sometimes it would appear that not many of us are interested in being "as angels," for the garment of humility is so infrequently worn these days. It's perhaps -- of all the items in the Christian's wardrobe -- the one garment we're likely to keep in the closet.

The irony is that this garment of humility is also a garment that goes with anything! It never clashes with whatever else you're wearing.

*Meekness or gentleness involves courtesy and consideration* for others, waiving our rights to personal gain in order to lift up the other. This piece of Christian clothing is sometimes mysterious to us. We're not sure just what it's about. It's like looking at some clothing -- a scarf, for example -- and thinking, "How in the world do I wear this thing?" Ever had that thought?

Pastor Rick Warren writes, "We've lost the true meaning of meekness. Meek doesn't mean weak. Jesus and Moses were described as meek, and they certainly were anything but weak. Meekness really means *strength under control*. The Greek word referred to a wild horse tamed or medicine that could tame a fever."

*Patience is the ability to not become frustrated and angry* when others intrude on us, but, instead, offer forgiveness for their shortcomings. After all, Paul says, we ourselves have tested the patience of God with our own sin. So, "just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive" (v. 13).

And then there's *love*. All of these virtuous pieces of character clothing are vitally important for the Christian traveler, but the one piece of clothing that goes over them all like a warm overcoat is love, "which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (v. 14). Paul writes about this outer garment elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 13: It is patient, kind, not self-seeking, keeps no record of wrongs and always rejoices with the truth. In short, love is the goal of the disciple's dress code. It's fashionable everywhere, and is always welcome when boarding a plane or anywhere else people gather!

In fact, it's love that puts the Christian on the journey in the first place. Interestingly, the word for "binds" in verse 14 is the same Greek word for "ligaments." In the human body, ligaments keep the bones connected and enable the body to move. If the ligaments of love are healthy in the Christ-Body,

then the church will always be on the move. Without love, on the other hand, we stay buckled in place, unable and unwilling to go anywhere for Christ. Building a wardrobe of love is thus one of the key tasks of the church.

But how do we do that? How do we maintain this wardrobe in a world where people tend to dress their lives in ways that are hostile or tempting or offensive?

We take our wardrobe to the cleaners, that's how. Paul says we should take our character clothing to the cleaners, i.e., the church. Worship and community are crucial. Paul calls the church to worship and practice love within the fellowship so that when the members are apart from one another, they are still uniformly dressed to take the gospel to the world.

*A style that is always fresh: peace. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were indeed called in the one body, and be thankful,* says Paul (v. 16). We gather as the people of God to check our wardrobe, insuring that it communicates peace.

*Cleaning agents:* teaching and "admonition." "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom" (v. 16a). We gather to hear the word of Christ, to teach one another, so that we can be equipped with the wisdom to wear and communicate Christ-like character to those we meet.

*Accessories:* praise and gratitude. And last, we express praise and gratitude. We worship "with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God" (v. 16b). An old Latin proverb says that as we worship, so we believe, and so we live. We may (or may not) put on our Sunday best to come and worship, but the character we wear on Monday as a result of that worship is even more noticeable to the people we will meet on airplanes, in our workplaces, in our schools and in our neighborhoods.

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him* (v. 17). If you're going to wear any sort of message on your shirt or, better yet, on your heart, it's gratitude. We may not put on a suit to get on the plane to go home for the holidays, but we must always put on Christ, reflecting his influence in every word, deed and act of love. That's a dress code that will never go out of style!

#### Sources:

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## The Dress Code

Sunday, December 27, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

### *Colossians 3:12-17*

Imagine it's Christmas week in 1955 and you're getting ready to board an airplane to head back home to grandma's for the holidays. If you're getting on the plane at all it means that you're probably having a very merry Christmas given that your bank account must be fatter than Santa's. Commercial air travel is still a fairly new concept in 1955, and the tickets are outrageously expensive. A flight from Phoenix to Chicago could cost up to \$138 round trip, which equates to \$1,168 in today's money.

Of course, you might not mind, given that you're served a meal of lobster on real china and glassware, and all your drinks (alcohol included) are free and unlimited. You stretch out in your seat with the extra three to six inches of legroom and relax.

And, of course, *you are properly attired* for the occasion. Flying on an airplane is a sophisticated adventure in 1955, which means "dressing to the nines": suit and tie for men, appropriate dresses for women. The passengers look so good that they often line up for a group picture before getting on the plane. Everyone dresses like movie stars because it took a movie star's salary to fly in the first place!

Fast forward now some 60 years, and it's an understatement to say that things have changed. At the airport, you have to get through security, do the TSA striptease and produce ID, something our air-traveling ancestors never had to do. You fight for space in the overhead compartment, you wedge yourself into a seat with less legroom than prisoners get in solitary confinement, and you eat your six mini pretzels and wash them down with a half-ounce of ginger ale.

Then you look around at your fellow passengers and notice that, while a few may be dressed for a business meeting, others look like they're headed to a punk rock concert. And 85 percent of the passengers are wearing flip-flops. The relaxed standards notwithstanding, if you're dressed inappropriately, you could get tossed off the plane.

Getting thrown off a plane for wardrobe infractions was virtually unheard of in the 1950s, but today it's becoming more common. One woman is reprimanded for showing too much cleavage. A man with a four-letter expletive on his T-shirt is told to put something over it or get off the plane. Another man is barred from a flight because his shirt says, "Terrists gonna kill us all" -- an intentionally misspelled message that he says is a protest against racial profiling.