

**CROSSING THE BORDER**  
An Expository Study of Colossians

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**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**HIS GUIDANCE ON GARMENTS - 3:5-14**

IF YOU are a soldier, you must dress the part; if you are a cricketer, you must dress the part; if you are a bus driver, you must dress the part; if you are a Christian, you must dress the part. The resurrection life demands a complete change of costume.

What a practical person is this inspired correspondent. He deals in his letters with the highest of themes; but it is never long before he brings them down to the level of the workaday life, and shews how the heavenly doctrine is intimately related to the homely details of everyday living.

Think, for instance, of that great teaching on full surrender, in Romans 12:1-2, and mark how at once, from verse 3 onward, he applies it all to the common round.

See, too, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, how in the first part he is in the Heavens, and in the closing chapters he is in the Homelies, speaking of the mutual obligations of wives and husbands, of children and parents, of servants and masters.

Like the apostle John, he regards the truth, not merely as something to be held, or to be admired, or to be taught, but as something we are to "**do**," I John 1:6.

Doctrine, is always linked with Doing. Paul pursues this same habit here in Colossians. "Habit" - why, the French use that word to describe clothes - a habit may refer to a coat, a skirt, a suit.

It is interesting to observe how often Paul speaks of our personal habits and characteristics under the illustration of clothes. He does so in our present passage.

**THE WARDROBE OF THE SOUL**

*The Old Clothes* - first claim our attention.

(a) What they are - truly a lot of junk, and worse. Look at the moth-eaten garments in verse 5, and that other list of disreputable pieces of apparel in verses 8-9.

Do you notice that, in the latter list, so many iniquities are those of the mouth? What a power speech is for good will - a bit for control, a helm for guidance, in the one case; a fire, a beast, a poison, says James 3:2-8.

In the first list, it is interesting to note the Phrase. "**covetousness, which is idolatry**". But do

Christians worship idols? Yes, alas. The covetous man in the phrase has made an idol of some possession, some position, which he covets, and which, perchance, he will seek to secure by hook or by crook.

(b) What GOD thinks of such clothes - "**for which things sake the wrath of GOD cometh on the children of disobedience**". (6).

All too often we play with sin, and trifle with GOD - we speak of our foibles, our weaknesses, our failures - when GOD calls them sins. We trade on His mercy, and forget the awful reality of His wrath. Our disobedience incurs His displeasure - and that is gravely serious.

(c) What we all wore once - "**in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them**", (7). Walking about in rags; for even if we were respectable citizens, in our own and in others' eyes, we were not so in GOD's eyes. He says concerning humanly-well-thought-of people. "**all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags**," Isaiah 64:6. However well-dressed we were in a material sense, we were wholly unattractive in spiritual vesture.

(d) What had we best do with these old clothes? - "**Put off all these**". (8). Discard, and destroy them - "**mortify**", (5). They are fit for nothing but the rubbish bin and the furnace.

*The New Clothes* - now come under inspection.

(a) What they are: a lovely list, as is to be seen in verses 12-14.

(b) Why should they be worn - "**as the elect of God**".

The elect should always be select. As we said earlier, if we are Christians we should dress the part. A believer who is spiritually down-at-heels, and out-at-elbows is a disgrace to his profession; and he could be so well-turned-out. When, in our Lord's parable, the king punished the "**man that had not on a wedding garment**". Matthew 22:11, it was the fellow's own stupid fault, for the festive robe was offered at the entrance.

- Perhaps he said he could not afford one - but they were free to all the guests.
- Perhaps he thought his own clothes were good enough - but that did not satisfy the king.
- Perhaps he was late, and rushed in at the last moment - but he should have allowed nothing to hinder his coming to so important a function.

Why I am quoting the incident here is because the right dress was available and he could have it for the receiving. So we will remember that all these wonderful qualities of Christian demeanour and behaviour can be ours.

(c) What to do with them - "**put on**", (12). It is not enough to admire them, or to covet them. In another connection, when speaking of a Christian soldier's uniform and accoutrement, Paul says, "**put on the whole armour of GOD**". Ephesians 6:11.

So, then, as you seek to match the new life which you have "**in Christ**," two immensely important things await you - "**put off**". (8), and "**put on**". (10).

(d) But, one moment: don't you like that overcoat - "**above all these things put on love**". (14). As we go out to face life, we shall often find it very chilly. Cold winds of opposition may come about us, to blow at our allegiance to CHRIST; dark clouds of disapproval may frown on our Christian stand for Him - don't let us go out without our overcoat. The love of GOD will warm our hearts and spirits. What matter the cold looks of men? The saintly Horatius Bonar says.

"Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;  
The Master praises. what are men?"

We remind ourselves, too, that this very overcoating of the love of GOD-His for us, and ours for Him-will also kindle within our hearts a love for others, even for those who oppose themselves. So may people admire our overcoat, and seek to enquire where they can get one like it.

And now for -:

### THE WEARER OF THE CLOTHES

A change of personality precedes a change of dress. **It is useless to speak to non-Christians about all these Christian qualities. To expect them to wear such characteristics is like expecting young David to sally forth to meet Goliath in Saul's armour - "I cannot go with these,"** I Samuel 17:39.

"**Ye have put off the old man,**" (9). This is not the old nature. Paul's name for that is "**the flesh,**" the entail of Adam's fall, which is in every child of Adam, down through the human race, and which remains with us till the end of our days here below.

We have our temptations from without - from the world, and the devil; and these are aggravated by temptation from within - this "**flesh,**" acting like a spy in the castle, in league with the enemy without. If left undealt with, it will lead us far astray, wandering off in the ways of wickedness.

The ancient game of bowls provides an excellent illustration of this working of "**the flesh**" within us. A little white ball - the "jack" - is trundled along to the other end of the green, and the player has to bowl his "wood" to lie as near to the jack as he can. It looks so easy, if you have a straight eye.

But, try it and see. Inside your wooden ball is a piece of metal, a bias, which will cause it to go astray, in spite of your careful aim. The skill is in allowing for the bias, and thus counteracting it.

Our old sinful nature, "**the flesh**" within, is destined to lead us astray, in collaboration with the temptations from without - "**every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed,**" James 1:14.

Thank GOD, there is a way of control. "**The flesh lusteth [fighteth] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh,**" Galatians 5:17. The Christian has become a two-natured man: the abiding old nature wars for control, but [the Greek allows that for the "**and,**" as the same word is translated in verse 22] the indwelling new nature fights, too.

The secret of conquest is to let the HOLY SPIRIT take over the conflict. But, we have ourselves been straying here. All this is about what the "**old man**" is not.

What, then, is he? Very simply, the old man is the man of old - the person we used to be before our conversion.

(a) The old man's Decease - "**our old man is crucified with Him**," Romans 6:6, by the reckoning of GOD, through the *Identification by Faith*, of which we spoke at some length in our last chapter.

(b) The old man's Dress - "**ye have put off the old man with his deeds**," Colossians 3:9. His conduct is being likened here to his costume.

(c) The old man's Double - "**ye put off as concerning the former conversation** [manner of life] **the old man**," Ephesians 4:22, the way you used to go on in the old regenerate days. Alas, it sometimes happens that, because he is taken off his guard, a believer is betrayed into doing, or saying, something that was habitual in the old days, but which, at his New Birth, he has discarded, and for the moment he behaves like the old man's double. In such an event, if a Christian came down to breakfast in a temper, it wouldn't be a bad idea for his wife to rebuke him with the remark, "My dear, you've got the old man's waistcoat on this morning".

"**Ye have put on the new man**," (10). That poor deformed savage Caliban, in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, spoke better than he knew when he said -

"Ban, 'Ban, Ca-Caliban  
Has a new master; get a new man."

When CHRIST is our Saviour and Master we have to put on the new man. May I remind you that "**if any man be in Christ he is a new creature**," II Corinthians 5:17?

Being a Christian, he is to dress the part. "**The garment of praise**," says Isaiah 61:3; "**He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness**," verse 10 of the same chapter.

Some sightseers, wandering about the grounds of a famous castle on an "open" day, came across an old man, evidently, by his old clothes, one of the gardeners, and they asked him, "Is the Duke in residence?" - it was the Duke! Just then he wasn't dressing the part. So far as the Christian uniform is concerned, the Christian soldier must never be in mufti.

The story is told of the thorough-going conversion of an old disreputable blackguard, whose wife and children had been miserably beaten and bruised in his drunken brawls. Everyone in the town knew of old drunken John, unsavoury character that he was. On his conversion, he knew that everything must now be different - he thought of the way he had treated his family; he decided that he must leave his wretched hovel of a house, and find a decent home for them.

On going to the agents, they made it plain to him that they were not going to entrust one of their respectable dwellings to an old reprobate like him. They knew old John. But his answer was, "I

think you're making a mistake. I fancy you're confusing me with somebody else. Old John is dead; I'm new John".

Well done! And now he is going to dress the part. It is so with all new-born people of GOD. Whether they are Greek folk, or Jewish, Barbarian, Scythian, slave or free (verse 11), they all dress alike. "**Christ is all, and in all.**" This spiritual suiting is the height of fashion in the circles of Heaven, and the old clothes look so drab beside them. No wonder that Christians are exhorted, "**As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance,**" I Peter 1:14, when, not knowing any better, you thought yourselves looking very smart. And now one last thing -:

### **THE WORTHINESS OF THE APPEARANCE**

"**After the Image of Him that created him,**" (10). We have been talking about putting on various Christian virtues, and we have seen how becoming they are in a Christian; but now, in finishing this Study, we take the matter a step further.

We, of course, recall that when GOD formed man, "**in the Image of God created He him,**" Genesis 1:27; and now that we come to man's new creation in CHRIST, we learn that a like principle obtains - "**after the Image of Him that created him**" anew. This likeness to Him is, indeed, of the very purpose of our redemption - "**for whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son,**" Romans 8:29. May we not say, then, that GOD cares intensely to produce this Christlikeness in His children.

It is very moving to observe that He so often uses the untoward circumstances of our life to impress this pattern on believers' hearts and lives.

Paul knew that so well, and he had suffered much. Listen to him: "**We know that all things work together for good to them that love God,**" Romans 8:28 - we don't always think it, understand it, appreciate it, but "**we know**" it.

Let an old patriarch say, in effect, the same thing, and he knew what he was talking about: "**He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold,**" Job 23:10. Even as I write these lines, I am thinking of a friend of mine in whom I have seen this very thing happen. A strong, healthy, vigorous, young sportsman - full of life, "full of beans". He was suddenly struck with crippling affliction. There has been no repining, no complaining. He has accepted it trustfully as in GOD's plan for him; but how remarkably his suffering has sweetened his disposition - "**as gold,**" yes, indeed. And it is such a joy to see how he is triumphing over his disability.

Let us listen to one further testimony, from the last of the prophets, "**He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver,**" Malachi 3:3 - "**sit,**" because the operation is a very delicate one; and the refiner will be satisfied with his work when he can see his face in the purified metal.

One day we shall be perfectly "**like Him,**" I John 3:2, in an appearance of soul consonant with all His work for us, and in us. And in that day, wonder of wonders, "**He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied,**" Isaiah 53:11.

And meanwhile - "**As Christ . . . so . . . ye,**" (13).

While we move amongst others, it is GOD's plan for us that we should represent Him to men. As the moon reflects the sun in yonder sky, so are we to reflect "**the Sun of Righteousness**" on earth - albeit, of necessity, a pale reflection. "**As He is, so are we in this world,**" I John 4:17. If we are CHRIST's, we are called upon to live what my friend, the late Dr. W. Y. Fullerton, used to call "the Christly life". It is our exceeding privilege, by the character of our demeanour and behaviour, to remind people of Him. I shall never forget how this was pressed upon my own conscience by a saying of a little boy. Years ago I was leading the Children's Special Service Mission at one of our South Coast holiday resorts.

As I was approaching the beach one morning, this little fellow was going along there, too. As he caught sight of me, he said, "Mummie, here comes the JESUS man".

He only meant that I was the man who spoke to the children about the Saviour; but his remark meant far more to my heart that day. What right had I - have I - to be called a JESUS man? What degree of resemblance is there about us?

I wonder if you have read that moving story of Jerome K. Jerome's called *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*?

Roughly, the tale is of a poor-class lodging house, where lived a heterogeneous company of needy and seedy folk, and where there was a poor, ignorant little servantgirl, a good deal of a slut, and ready to sell her virtue for a worthless' trinket.

Into the place there came one day a lodger who at once seemed to be different, and who occupied the third floor back. He quickly revealed himself to have a very kind heart and way. He always had a kindly word for the little slavey, usually so ignored and downtrodden. She soon almost worshipped him.

The other lodgers, too, owed him much for his many deeds of helpfulness. He was always doing something for somebody, in his kindly, sympathetic way.

At last the day came for him to move elsewhere. The little maid watched him, open-eyed, as he walked with his bit of luggage to the front door; and as he turned to her with a smile and a gentle pat on the shoulder, she took her leave of him with the words, "Please, are you 'im?"

Is there any need to point the moral? The moving story was fiction. Could anything like It be fact in our lives? "**Like Him.**" It is the HOLY SPIRIT alone who can do this for us, in us, II Corinthians 3:18.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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