

51-03-02.wpd --Fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness

humility, kindness, meekness, forgiveness, clothing, nakedness

Col 3:12-13

God wants to dress us up in behaviors that reflect the way He lives.

INTRODUCTION:

--**Title.** Are any of you one of those people who was born with *gentleness naturally* as a personal disposition. I won't ask for a show of hands on that one. God wants us to give us *gentleness supernaturally* as a fruit of Spirit, a Spirit-empowered distribution.

--The kind of gentleness God offers us is explained in (**text**)

Col 3:12-13 (NIV) *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. {13} Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

--Humans are very concerned about clothing in the USA [More than \$180 billion spent each year here on apparel]. But physical clothing does not make us acceptable to God [Adam & Eve made fig-leaf skirts for themselves; God gave them skins from animal sacrifice instead. They were interested in hiding themselves physically. God met their need for more durable garments that they would need later for protection, but at the same time He was covering them spiritually, by *atonement*.] The clothes God gives us is the kind that shows are relationship to Him ("*as God's chosen people...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*" [gentleness contains a bit of all those other qualities listed.]) [All newborn children are naked, but as they grow, parents dress them up like they themselves dress, according to cultural customs.] In a similar way, **HOM.idea**. *Gentleness* is one of those behaviors, and it is *seen in two kinds of spiritual clothing*, according to this **text**. The first one is...

I. The Inner Garment of Forbearance "*Bear with each other*"

- A. [In Bible times, there were basically two pieces of clothing worn by both men and women, a tunic (an inner garment), which was next to the skin, and a cloak or robe (an outer garment), which was heavier and warmer. A poor person was in trouble in cold weather, if they did not own a cloak. But in hot weather, people probably preferred the lighter tunic.] When we deal with people who are hard to get along with, it's "*hot weather*," and we need to put on the inner tunic of gentleness in order to "*bear with*" them.

B. *Forbearance* is an inner attitude of the heart that behaves differently with different people. (*in some situations it means...*)

1. "to hold up" (not falling apart) [like dealing with a problem child: a parent might say "*I could just scream!*" or "*I could pull my hair out!*" and by time the child is a teenager, the parent is voiceless or bald!] When people behave immaturely towards you, as if they're *not grown up yet*, remember why God calls us His children, however old we get.
2. "to hold one's self erect and firm" (maintaining your integrity)
 - a. One danger in dealing with difficult people is being pulled down to their level-- Prov 26:4, Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. (We can't always see this happening, but spectators of an argument see it clearly.)
 - b. As a safety measure, God gives us the fruit of gentleness when we are trying to get a difficult person back on the right track, and they can't see they're off-- Gal 6:1 (NKJV), Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.
3. "to sustain, to bear, to endure" (being actively patient: waiting on God, but treating the person gently in the meantime)
 - a. God may change their hearts ["*While there is life, there is hope.*"]
 - b. Sadly, some people will never change [C. S. Lewis said that God refuses to let people with hellish hearts spoil heaven for others, and Hell is the solution to that problem.] If that happens, let them go there with only one memory about us: *we treated them with gentleness*.

TRANS: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." My dad used to say, "*Being poor isn't so bad, it's just not handy.*" In Bible times, poor people often had only one garment, and in cold weather, that was hopefully a warm *cloak*. Since it was next to the skin, it was like having your inner garment be your outer one, too. **God wants to dress us up in behaviors that reflect the way He lives**. When we put on gentleness, we are dressing in a *cloak of forgiveness*, which is both an *inner* action and *outward* behavior. So, let's look at...

II. The Outer Garment of Forgiveness "*Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*"

- A. **v.13** has a focus for *forgiveness*? "*whatever grievances you may have*" (Retained *grievances* become bitterness, and bitterness is poison. God is concerned about spiritual clothing because we have a habit

of dressing toxically [English has many idioms that speak of wearing our attitudes: "She's wearing her emotions on her shirt sleeve." - "He has a chip on his shoulder." - "Boy, I'm glad to get that off my chest!" - "Smile, and put on a happy face."] [No one goes naked, even at a nudist resort: everybody wears behaviors emotionally.] God wants us to wear a *cloak of forgiveness*.

- B. Our standard for forgiving people is the same kind of *real* forgiveness that God Himself practices toward us:
1. It's inward, coming from His heart, so God expects us to forgive others from our hearts-- (When Jesus told the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, and how he was thrown into prison for not forgiving the little owed to him after he had been forgiven the humongous debt he owed, Jesus finished the parable with this exhortation in Mat 18:35, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.")
 2. God's forgiveness is outward, because He communicated it to us [Jesus was stripped completely bare to die on the Cross, but He did not die there *naked*. He clothed Himself with *gentleness*, by putting on the *outer cloak of forgiveness*.] As Christ paid for our sins, He prayed for us indirectly while praying directly for those who crucified Him, saying "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) (Difficult people don't know what a pain they can be. They may never know, in this life or the next. But in this life, we need to let them know, out loud, that we forgive them.

CONCLUSION:

--We meet many difficult people in our lives, and we sometimes hold *grievances* against them. But Jesus said in Mat 5:40, And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. That would leave us physically nude. God would not condemn us for walking out of the courtroom naked, but He doesn't us clothing ourselves with anger or resentment. God wants us to wear the spiritual garments of gentleness. We can put on the *inner tunic of forbearance*. We can wear the outer cloak of forgiveness. **God wants us to dress us up in behaviors that reflect Him.** God has been gentle with us, and gentleness is the dress He wants us to wear before a watching world.