

## School Clothes

2/4 *School Supplies Series*

Colossians 3:1-14

08 08 2010 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

### Scripture: Colossians 3:1-14

#### Introduction

During childhood, my mother made me participate in our annual back-to-school shopping trip. My father worked at the Sears-Roebuck offices in Atlanta, so his employee discount guaranteed our customer loyalty. We rode in the family station wagon to the local mall to buy **school clothes**. In those days, Sears strategically placed snack bars in the center of their stores. I still associate the start of school with the aroma of Spanish nuts, popcorn, and fruit slices.

My mother and sister spent endless hours looking at new clothes. I could have cared less. Three pairs of pants and a few shirts met all my fashion needs. My mother bought me the Sears' brand of blue jeans called *Toughskins*. The pants had double-layered knees and industrial-strength rivets. The new denim stunk with chemicals, and the stiff fabric chafed in unmentionable places until softened by a washing machine.

The only clothing item that REALLY interested me was a new pair of tennis shoes; but not just any shoes would do. I insisted on wearing **Keds**—“*the shoes of Champions*.” The commercials promised that the sneakers enabled the wearer to “*run faster and jump higher!*” With my laced-up tennies, I could race the wind and win while leaping broad canyons with ease.

#### I. Changing Clothes

This morning we are continuing our August worship series entitled ***School Supplies***. Today's sermon is entitled ***School Clothes***. As school begins, it is a good time to check our fall wardrobe. God's children of all ages may need a change of clothes.

Today's Scripture lesson comes from Paul's letter to the **Colossians**. Colossae was a small town in present-day Turkey. The church there had been founded by one of Paul's converts. The apostle wrote to encourage the believers to reject worldliness and embrace holiness. In the third chapter, he listed some *Rules for Holy Living*.

Paul wrote about the importance of practicing holy lives “*since you have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*” (**Colossians 3:9**) The apostle used the imagery of **changing clothes** to make his point. Christians are called to take off their old clothes of sin and put on their new clothes of righteousness.

#### II. Old Clothes

In Christ, we are new creations in which the old has passed away and the new has come. The old passing away, however, is both an event and process. We spend a lifetime shedding our old, worldly ways of thinking and doing.

Many of our older members recall when **shift robes** were common pieces of furniture found in homes. A shift robe is a large chest with doors that contains a rod for hanging clothes. They were popular in the past because older homes were often built without **closets**. In simpler times, families did not need much storage space.

Today's homes have storage on steroids with large walk-in closets. However, we STILL don't have enough space! Part of the problem is that we are an affluent society addicted to more and more possessions. We also keep a lot of stuff that needs to be thrown away.

One closet consultant—and there really are such people—said that any clothing item that has not been worn in a year should be thrown away. But we have emotional attachments to our clothing even if they're **out of style**; and I'm still convinced that leisure suits, 100% polyester shirts, and wide ties are coming back! I look back at old photos and cringe—but back then I thought I looked GOOD! Laugh, but you have some old clothes that are just as bad in YOUR closet!

Just for fun, take a look at these photos from some old church directories—you may recognize some clothes from your own wardrobe!

Closet space also contains clothing that we have **outgrown**. This is expected with children who can grow through a size or two of clothing over the summer. But it also happens with adults. Everyone knows that clothes that hang too long in a closet will magically shrink and become too small!

Finally, we have "**comfort clothes**" that are worn out from frequent use, but we love to put on our stretched t-shirts and raggedy sweat pants. This may be acceptable in private but may not be appropriate in public. I've seen a whole lot more of a whole lot of folk on Friday mornings at Wal-Mart than I ever wanted to!

Let's face it: most of us could use a clothing intervention and a closet makeover.

Now take a look in the dark corners of your **soul's closets**. What old, out-of-style, outgrown, worn-out things need to be thrown away? What worldly attitudes and actions persist in our new life? What addictions, habits, and lifestyles need to be transformed?

In Colossians 3, Paul called God's people to "*set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*" (Colossians 3:2) He wrote: "*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.*" (Colossians 3:5). Then the apostle quit preaching and started meddling as he made a specific list of things that do not belong in the Christian's life:

- ❖ Sexual immorality: Human sexuality is a good gift given by God that finds its fullest expression between a husband and wife in marriage. Some years ago *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* put it this way: "*Celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage.*" I suppose you could say more on the subject, but that pretty much sums it up!
- ❖ Impurity: God calls us to the highest standards of purity; but we often are willing to settle for something less with the rationalization, "Well, it's not that bad." Our Lord desires our very best.

- ❖ Lust: Jesus said that the thought is as bad as the deed. Grasping thoughts have a way of becoming grasping deeds.
- ❖ Evil desires: God created humanity with desires and passions. Either we rule our desires or our desires will rule us.
- ❖ Greed which is idolatry: Our culture preaches a materialistic religion of MORE. Covetousness and greed are a form of idolatry that worships the created rather than the Creator. However, 1 Timothy 6:6 reminds us: “*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*”

But Paul wasn’t finished. In Colossians 3:7-8, he continued: “*You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these:*”

- ❖ Anger: Slow-burning anger simmers and stews. We nurse grudges and unforgiving spirits.
- ❖ Rage: Sudden rage occurs when we lose our temper in flash-fires of anger. Careless words and deeds can cause long-term devastation. We either control our temper or our temper controls us.
- ❖ Malice: Malice is a general viciousness of spirit that envies others good fortune and secretly hopes for their misfortune.
- ❖ Slander: Slander occurs when our words tear down rather than build up.
- ❖ Filthy language: Versus obscenity, blasphemy, etc.
- ❖ Do not lie to each other: Jesus said that the tree is known by its fruit. People of integrity and truthfulness do not lie to one another.

### III. New Clothes

In Christ, we are new creations where the old has passed away—we are called to take off our old clothing a piece at a time. The second half of the process is to put on the new clothing of holiness.

In 1913, George Bernard Shaw published a play entitled *Pygmalion*. The play was later made into a movie in 1964 with Rex Harrison. Professor of phonetics, Henry Higgins, made a bet that he could transform a Cockney flower girl named Eliza Doolittle into a British lady. It’s the old story of the ugly duckling becoming a beautiful swan that has been remade over and over again in literature and movies.

During childhood, our family attended church each week. When my mother told me on Sunday morning to put on my “**church clothes**,” I knew exactly what she meant. The clothes were different from the jeans, shorts, and t-shirts that I wore during the week. I wore slacks and a dress shirt with a boa constrictor tie—and in the cooler months, a suit coat or sports jacket as well. The dress shoes pinched my toes. I was about as miserable as a boy can get. The clothing standard was more about propriety than theology; but I intuitively understood that you dressed your best when you went to church.

Over the years, the term “church clothes” has lost much of its meaning. Some folk still dress up for Sunday morning but others attend much more casually. We invite people

to “*come as they are.*” And as a man who was once a boy squirming in the pews with a tie choking off my air supply, I approve of some of the changes. I am glad that our children feel more comfortable and at home in God’s house.

I read an article in *The Wesleyan Christian Advocate* about a fellow pastor who moved to a new church this past June. On his first Sunday, he wore a shirt, tie, jacket, and . . . Bermuda shorts! But, wait, there’s more! He completed his ensemble with knee high dress socks and shoes! About six inches of white leg showed between the top of the socks and the bottom of the shorts! In the article, he explained that he wanted to make “*a lasting impression at my new appointment.*” I have no doubt that he did!

But I want you to play with that phrase in your mind: “church clothes.” What is appropriate dress for the Christian? What practices of holiness do we need to put on? Paul continued his letter to the Colossians by writing: “*Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with:*

- ❖ Compassion: Compassionate Christians possess tender hearts and spirits. The pain of others affects us as well. We stand with our brothers and sisters in the breach of heartache and hurt.
- ❖ Kindness: John Wesley’s first two “General Rules” of the church were “Do no harm” and “Do good.” Sam Jones put it even more succinctly, “Quit your meanness.” Like a parent quieting arguing children, our heavenly Father says to us, “Play nice!”
- ❖ Humility: Humility is all about perspective. We see ourselves—and others—from God’s perspective. We are God’s children of infinite worth and value.
- ❖ Gentleness: Gentleness goes beyond self-control to God-control. The Holy Spirit tempers our emotions, words, and actions.
- ❖ Patience: Patience is in short supply in our society. We often find ourselves praying, “God, give me patience, and give it to me NOW!” Take a deep breath and be mindful that most things that upset us so won’t matter a 100 years from now. See the world and life from an eternal perspective.
- ❖ Bear with each other: Bear with each other . . . even when the other person is acting like a bear! You can pick your friends but you’re stuck with your family! We are the family of God, and we are going to spend eternity together. Celebrate other’s virtues and accept their shortcomings as well.
- ❖ Forgive grievances: We’ll talk more about this during next week’s sermon entitled *Eraser*; but here’s a preview: Forgive others as God forgives you.

Then Paul concluded the section with these words: “*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*” In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul discussed the rich variety of spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives the church. He concluded the chapter with the words, *And now I will show you the most excellent way.*”

1 Corinthians 13 goes on to describe the gift of Christian love. Although we typically hear these words during wedding services, they describe how God’s people live in heaven’s kingdom:

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails . . . . And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor. 13: 4-8; 13)*

## **Conclusion**

There’s a poem by Louise Fletcher Tarkington that I often use in sermons. She expresses our longing to have fresh starts and new beginnings, along with the need to shed the old and don the new.

*So I wish there was some wonderful place  
Called the Land of Beginning Again,  
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches  
And all our poor selfish grief could be dropped  
Like a shabby old coat at the door  
And never put on again.*

There is such a place in God’s kingdom. In partnership with the Holy Spirit, we are invited to shed our old, soiled, worn out, and outgrown clothing. As we grow in Christ, we are clothed in holiness and righteousness.

In his commentary on Colossians 3, William Barclay recalled the baptism services of the early church. When believers were baptized, they went down into the water and shed their old clothing. They emerged from the water to put on a pure white robe. The practice beautifully symbolized how the old had passed away and the new had come.

In Christ, we are new creations; however, we are recreated over a lifetime of discipleship. It’s time to clean out our closets and get a new wardrobe.