

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

αὐτογενέτωρ ἀείζων θεός εἰωη ἰαω
 αιω αιω φνεως σφιντης αρβαθιαω
 ἰαω ἰαη ἰαα αιων ουηρ γονθιαωρ
 ραραηλ αβραβραχα σοροορμερφερ-
 γαρ μαρβαφριουϊριγξ ἰαω σαβαωθ
 μασκελλιμασκελλω. ὁ λόγος.

τελει μοι Μιχαήλ ἀγγέλων ἀρ-
 χάγγελε.

Vienna.

Self-created eternal God, eīdē
 Iaō aiō aiō phneōs sphintēs ar-
 bathiaō iaō iaē iōa aiōōn uōr
 gonthiaōr raraēl abrabracha so-
 roormerpher gar marbaphrioui-
 rinx iaō Sabaōth Maskellimas-
 kellō. Formula.

Help me, Michael, archangel
 over the angels.

K. WESSELY.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

XX.

THE GARMENTS OF THE RENEWED SOUL.

“Put on therefore, as God’s elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.”—COL. iii. 12–14 (Rev. Ver.).

WE need not repeat what has been already said as to the logic of the inference, You have put off the “old man,” therefore put off the vices which belong to him. Here we have the same argument in reference to the “new man” who is to be “put on” because he has been put on. This “therefore” rests the exhortation both on that thought, and on the nearer words, “Christ is all and in all.” Because the new nature has been assumed in the very act of conversion, therefore array your souls in vesture corresponding. Because Christ is all and in all, therefore clothe yourselves with all brotherly graces, corresponding to the great unity into which all Christians are brought by their common possession of Christ. The whole field of Christian morality is not traversed here, but only so much of it as concerns the social duties which result from that unity.

But besides the foundation for the exhortations which is laid in the possession of the New Man, consequent on participation in Christ, another ground for them is added in the words, "as God's elect, holy and beloved." Those who are in Christ, and are thus regenerated in Him, are of the chosen race, are consecrated as belonging especially to God, and receive the warm beams of the special paternal love with which He regards the men who are in some measure conformed to His likeness and moulded after His will. That relation to God should draw after it a life congruous with itself—a life of active goodness and brotherly gentleness. The outcome of it should be not mere glad emotion, nor a hugging of one's self in one's happiness, but practical efforts to turn to men a face lit by the same dispositions with which God has looked on us, or as the parallel passage in Ephesians has it, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children." That is a wide and fruitful principle—the relation to men will follow the relation to God. As we think God has been to us, so let us try to be to others. The poorest little fishing cobble is best guided by celestial observations, and dead reckoning without sun or stars is but second best. Independent morality cut loose from religion will be feeble morality. On the other hand, religion which does not issue in morality is a ghost without substance. Religion is the soul of morality. Morality is the body of religion, more than ceremonial worship is. The virtues which all men know, are the fitting garments of the elect of God.

I. We have here then an enumeration of the fair garments of the new man.

Let us go over the items of this list of the wardrobe of the consecrated soul.

"A heart of compassion." So the Revised Version renders the words given literally in the Authorised as "bowels of mercies," an expression which that very strange thing

called conventional propriety regards as coarse, simply because Jews chose one part of the body and we another as the supposed seat of the emotions. Either phrase expresses substantially the Apostle's meaning.

Is it not beautiful that the series should begin with *pity*? It is the most often needed, for the sea of sorrow stretches so widely that nothing less than a universal compassion can arch it over as with the blue of heaven. Every man would seem in some respect deserving of and needing sympathy, if his whole heart and history could be laid bare. Such compassion is difficult to achieve, for the healing streams of our pity are dammed back by many obstructions of inattention and occupation, and dried up by the fierce heat of selfishness. Custom, with its deadening influence, comes in to make us feel least the sorrows which are most common in the society around us. As a man might live so long in an asylum that lunacy would seem to him almost the normal conditions, so the most widely diffused griefs are those least observed and least compassionated; and good, tender-hearted men and women walk the streets of our great cities and see sights—children growing up for the gallows and the devil, gin-shops at every corner—which might make angels weep, and suppose them to be as inseparable from our “civilization” as the noise of wheels from a carriage or bilge water from a ship. Therefore we have to make conscious efforts to “put on” that sympathetic disposition, and to fight against the faults which hinder its free play. No other help will be of much use to the receiver, nor of any to the giver. Benefits bestowed on the needy and sorrowful, if bestowed without sympathy, will hurt like a blow. Much is said about ingratitude, but very often it is but the instinctive recoil of the heart from the unkind doer of a kindness. Aid flung to a man as a bone is to a dog usually gets as much gratitude as the sympathy which it expresses deserves. But if we really make another's sorrows

ours, that teaches us tact and gentleness, and makes our clumsy hands light and deft to bind up sore hearts.

Above all things, the practical discipline which cultivates pity will beware of letting it be excited and then not allowing the emotion to act. To stimulate feeling and do nothing in consequence is a short road to destroy the feeling. Pity is meant to be the impulse toward help, and if it is checked and suffered to pass away idly, it is weakened as certainly as a plant is weakened by being kept close nipped and hindered from bringing its buds to flower and fruit.

“Kindness” comes next—a wider benignity, not only exercised where there is manifest room for pity, but turning a face of goodwill to all. Some souls are so dowered that they have this grace without effort, and come like the sunshine with welcome and cheer for all the world. But even less happily endowed natures can cultivate the disposition, and the best way to cultivate it is to be much in communion with God. When Moses came down from the mount, his face shone. When we come out from the secret place of the Most High we shall bear some reflection of His great kindness whose “tender mercies are over all His works.” This “kindness” is the opposite of that worldly wisdom, on which many men pride themselves as the ripe fruit of their knowledge of men and things, and which keeps up vigilant suspicion of everybody, as in the savage state, where “stranger” and “enemy” had only one word between them. It does not require us to be blind to facts or to live in fancies, but it does require us to cherish a habit of goodwill, ready to become pity if sorrow appears, and slow to turn away even if hostility appears. Meet your brother with that, and you will generally find it returned. The prudent hypocrites who get on in the world, as ships are launched, by “greasing the ways” with flattery, and by a perpetual smile, teach us the value of the true thing,

since even a coarse caricature of it wins hearts and disarms foes. This "kindness" is the most powerful solvent of ill-will and indifference.

Then follows "humility." That seems to break the current of thought by bringing a virtue so entirely occupied with self into the middle of a series referring exclusively to others. But it does not really do so. From this point onwards all the graces named have reference to our demeanour under slights and injuries—and humility comes into view here only as constituting the foundation for the right bearing of these. Meekness and longsuffering must stand on a basis of humility. The proud man, who thinks highly of himself and of his own claims, will be the touchy man, if any one derogates from these.

"Humility," or lowly-mindedness, a lowly estimate of ourselves, is not necessarily blindness to our strong points. If a man can do certain things better than his neighbours, he can hardly help knowing it, and Christian humility does not require him to be ignorant of it. I suppose Milton would be none the less humble, though he was quite sure that his work was better than that of Sternhold and Hopkins. The consciousness of power usually accompanies power. But though it may be quite right to "know myself" in the strong points, as well as in the weak, there are two considerations which should act as dampers to any unchristian fire of pride which the devil's breath may blow up from that fuel. The one is, "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" the other is, "Who is pure before God's judgment-seat?" Your strong points are nothing so very wonderful, after all. If you have better brains than some of your neighbours, well, that is not a thing to give yourself such airs about—and besides, where did you get the faculties you plume yourself on? however cultivated by yourself, how came they yours at first? And, furthermore, whatever superiorities may lift you above any men, and however high

above them you may be elevated, it is a long way from the top of the highest molehill to the sun, and not much longer to the top of the lowest. And, besides all that, you may be very clever and brilliant, may have made books or pictures, may have stamped your name on some invention, may have won a place in public life, or made a fortune—and yet you and the beggar who cannot write his name are both sinners before God. Pride seems out of place in creatures like us, who have all to bow our heads in the presence of His perfect judgment, and cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

Then follow “meekness, long-suffering.” The distinction between these two is slight. According to the most thorough investigators, the former is the temper which accepts God’s dealings, or evil inflicted by men as His instruments, without resistance, while the latter is the long holding out of the mind before it gives way to a temptation, to action, or passion, especially the latter. The opposite of meekness is rudeness or harshness; the opposite of long-suffering, resentment or revenge. Perhaps there may be something in the distinction, that while long-suffering does not get angry soon, meekness does not get angry at all. Possibly, too, meekness implies a lowlier position than long-suffering does. The meek man puts himself below the offender; the long-suffering man does not. God is long-suffering, but the incarnate God alone can be “meek and lowly.”

The general meaning is plain enough. The “hate of hate,” the “scorn of scorn,” is not the Christian ideal. I am not to allow my enemy always to settle the terms on which we are to be. Why should I scowl back at him, though he frowns at me? It is hard work, as we all know, to repress the retort that would wound and be so neat. It is hard not to repay slights and offences in kind. But, if the basis of our dispositions to others be laid in a wise and lowly estimate of ourselves, such graces of conduct will be possible, and they will give beauty to our characters.

“Forbearing and forgiving” are not new virtues. They are meekness and long-suffering in exercise, and if we were right in saying that “long-suffering” was not *soon* angry, and “meekness” was not angry at all, then “forbearance” would correspond to the former, and “forgiveness” to the latter; for a man may exercise forbearance, and bite his lips till the blood come rather than speak, and violently constrain himself to keep calm and do nothing unkind, and yet all the while seven devils may be in his heart; while forgiveness, on the other hand, is an entire wiping of all enmity and irritation clean out of the heart.

Such is the Apostle’s outline sketch of the Christian character in its social aspect, all rooted in pity, and full of soft compassion; quick to apprehend, to feel, and to succour sorrow; a kindness, equable and widespread, illuminating all who come within its reach; a patient acceptance of wrongs without resentment or revenge, because a lowly judgment of self and its claims, a spirit schooled to calmness under all provocations, disdaining to requite wrong by wrong, and quick to forgive.

The question may well be asked—is that a type of character which the world generally admires? Is it not uncommonly like what most people would call “a poor spiritless creature.” It was “a new man,” most emphatically, when Paul drew that sketch, for the heathen world had never seen anything like it. It is a “new man” still; for although the modern world has had some kind of Christianity—at least has had a Church—for all these centuries, that is not the kind of character which is its ideal. Look at the heroes of history and of literature. Look at the tone of so much contemporary biography and criticism of public actions. Think of the ridicule which is poured on the attempt to regulate politics by Christian principles, or, as a distinguished soldier called them in public recently, “puling principles.” It may be true that Christianity has not

added any new virtues to those which are prescribed by natural conscience, but it has most certainly altered the perspective of the whole, and created a type of excellence, in which the gentler virtues predominate, and the novelty of which is proved by the reluctance of the so-called Christian world to recognise it even yet.

By the side of its serene and lofty beauty, the "heroic virtues" embodied in the world's type of excellence show vulgar and glaring, like some daub representing a soldier, the signpost of a public-house, by the side of Angelico's white-robed visions on the still convent walls. The highest exercise of these more gaudy and conspicuous qualities is to produce the pity and meekness of the Christian ideal. More self-command, more heroic firmness, more contempt for the popular estimate, more of everything strong and manly, will find a nobler field in subduing passion and cherishing forgiveness, which the world thinks folly and spiritless, than anywhere else. Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

The great pattern and motive of forgiveness is next set forth. We are to forgive as Christ has forgiven us; and that "as" may be applied either as meaning "in like manner," or as meaning "because." The Revised Version, with many others, adopts the various reading of "the Lord," instead of "Christ," which has the advantage of recalling the parable that was no doubt in Paul's mind, about the servant who, having been forgiven by his "Lord" all his great debt, took his fellow-servant by the throat and squeezed the last farthing out of him.

The great transcendent act of God's mercy brought to us by Christ's cross is sometimes, as in the parallel passage in Ephesians, spoken of as "God for Christ's sake forgiving us," and sometimes as here, Christ is represented as forgiving. We need not pause to do more than point to that interchange of Divine office and attributes, and ask what notion of Christ's person underlies it.

We have already had the death of Christ set forth as in a very profound sense our pattern. Here we have one special case of the general law that the life and death of our Lord are the embodied ideal of human character and conduct. His forgiveness is not merely revealed to us that trembling hearts may be calm, and that a fearful looking for of judgment may no more trouble a foreboding conscience. But whilst we must ever begin with cleaving to it as our hope, we must never stop there. A heart touched and softened by pardon will be a heart apt to pardon, and the miracle of meekness which has been wrought for it will constitute the law of its life as well as the ground of its joyful security.

This new pattern and new motive, both in one, make the true novelty and specific difference of Christian morality. "As I have loved you," makes the commandment "love one another" a new commandment. And all that is difficult in obedience becomes easier by the power of that motive. Imitation of one whom we love is instinctive. Obedience to one whom we love is delightful. The far off ideal becomes near and real in the person of our best friend. Bound to him by obligations so immense, and a forgiveness so costly and complete, we shall joyfully yield to "the cords of love" which draw us after Him. We have each to choose what shall be the pattern for us. The world takes Cæsar, the hero; the Christian takes Christ, in whose meekness is power, and whose gentle long-suffering has been victor in a sterner conflict than any battle of the warrior with garments rolled in blood.

Paul says, "Even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye." The Lord's prayer teaches us to ask, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we also forgive." In the one case Christ's forgiveness is the example and the motive for ours. In the other, our forgiveness is the condition of God's. Both are true. We shall find the strongest impulse to pardon others

in the consciousness that we have been pardoned by Him. And if we have grudgings against our offending brother in our hearts, we shall not be conscious of the tender forgiveness of our Father in heaven. That is no arbitrary limitation, but inherent in the very nature of the case.

II. We have here the girdle which keeps all the garments in their places.

“Above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.”

“Above all these” does not mean “besides,” or “more important than,” but is clearly used in its simplest local sense, as equivalent to “over,” and thus carries on the metaphor of the dress. Over the other garments is to be put the silken sash or girdle of love, which will brace and confine all the rest into a unity. It is “the girdle of perfectness,” by which is not meant, as is often supposed, the perfect principle of union among men. Perfectness is not the quality of the girdle, but the thing which it girds, and is a collective expression for “the various graces and virtues, which together make up perfection.” So the metaphor expresses the thought that love knits into a harmonious whole, the graces which without it would be fragmentary and incomplete.

We can conceive of all the dispositions already named as existing in some fashion without love. There might be pity which was not love, though we know it is akin to it. The feeling with which one looks upon some poor outcast, or on some stranger in sorrow, or even on an enemy in misery, may be very genuine compassion, and yet clearly separate from love. So with all the others. There may be kindness most real without any of the diviner emotion, and there may even be forbearance reaching up to forgiveness, and yet leaving the heart untouched in its deepest recesses. But if these virtues were thus exercised, in the absence of love they would be frag-

mentary, shallow, and would have no guarantee for their own continuance. Let love come into the heart and knit a man to the poor creature whom he had only pitied before, or to the enemy whom he had at the most been able with an effort to forgive, and it lifts these other emotions into a nobler life. He who pities may not love, but he who loves cannot but pity; and that compassion will flow with a deeper current and be of a purer quality than the shrunken stream which does not rise from that higher source.

Nor is it only the virtues enumerated here for which love performs this office; but all the else isolated graces of character, it binds or welds into a harmonious whole. As the broad Eastern girdle holds the flowing robes in position, and gives needed firmness to the figure as well as composed order to the attire; so this broad band, woven of softest fabric, keeps all emotions in their due place and makes the attire of the Christian soul beautiful in harmonious completeness.

Perhaps it is a yet deeper truth that love produces all these graces. Whatsoever things men call virtues, are best cultivated by cultivating it. So with a somewhat similar meaning to that of our text, but if anything, going deeper down, Paul in another place calls love the fulfilling of the law, even as his Master had taught him that all the complex of duties incumbent upon us were summed up in the love to God, and love to men. Whatever I owe to my brother will be discharged if I love God, and live my love. Nothing of it, not even the smallest mite of the debt will be discharged, however vast my sacrifices and services, if I do not.

So end the frequent references in this letter to putting off the old and putting on the new. The sum of them all is, that we must first put on Christ by faith, and then by daily effort clothe our spirits in the graces of character which He gives us, and by which we shall be like Him.

We have said that this dress of the Christian soul which we have been considering now, does not include the whole of Christian duty. We may recall the other application of the same figure which occurs in the parallel Epistle to the Ephesians, where Paul sketches for us in a few rapid touches the armed Christian soldier. The two pictures may profitably be set side by side. Here he dresses the Christian soul in the robes of peace, bidding him put on pity and meekness, and, above all the silken girdle of love.

“In peace, there’s nothing so becomes a man,
As modest stillness and humility;
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,”

then “put on the whole armour of God,” the leathern girdle of truth, the shining breastplate of righteousness, and above all, the shield of faith—and so stand a flashing pillar of steel. Are the two pictures inconsistent? must we doff the robes of peace to don the armour, or put off the armour to resume the robes of peace? Not so; both must be worn together, for neither is found in its completeness without the other. Beneath the armour must be the fine linen, clean and white—and at one and the same time, our souls may be clad in all pity, mercifulness and love, and in all the sparkling panoply of courage and strength for battle.

But both the armour and the dress of peace presuppose that we have listened to Christ’s pleading counsel to buy of Him “white raiment that we may be clothed, and that the shame of our nakedness do not appear.” The garment for the soul, which is to hide its deformities and to replace our own filthy rags, is woven in no earthly looms, and no efforts of ours will bring us into possession of it. We must be content to owe it wholly to Christ’s gift, or else we shall have to go without it altogether. The first step in the Christian life is by simple faith to receive from

Him the forgiveness of all our sins, and that new nature which He alone can impart, and which we can neither create nor win, but must simply accept. Then, after that, come the field and the time for our efforts put forth in His strength, to array our souls in His likeness, and day by day to put on the beautiful garments which He bestows. It is a lifelong work thus to strip ourselves of the rags of our old vices, and to gird on the robe of righteousness. Lofty encouragements, tender motives, solemn warnings, all point to this as our continual task. We should set ourselves to it in His strength, if so be that being clothed, we may not be found naked—and then, when we lay aside the garment of flesh and the armour needed for the battle, we shall hear His voice welcoming us to the land of peace, and shall walk with Him in victor's robes, glistening "so as no fuller on earth could white them."

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH.

V. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES.—CHAP. VII. VIII.

FOR two years Zechariah saw no visions. Nothing came into his mind which he could honestly communicate to the people as a fresh word of God. To those who enjoyed his visions and waited for them more impatiently than we wait for an important speech from a leading statesman or a new poem of the Laureate, this was disappointing; and strong pressure must have been put upon the prophet to discharge his function. Matters were all the while emerging which it was a strong temptation to decide by an oracular utterance. Questions must often have been put to Zechariah concerning affairs of which he had his own private opinion, and he would not have been human had