

**August 31, 2008**  
**“A New Wardrobe” (Compassion)**  
**Colossians 3:12-14**

I hate to say it, because I love the summer, but Fall will soon be here. We will be putting away our summer wardrobe and taking out our Fall clothes. Of course, the Fall fashions have been out in stores and magazines since the middle of the summer.

I use to work in the garment industry. In the summer we were making winter coats. My uncle owned a factory on a second floor with no air conditioning. My dad was the foreman. When I got out of the Army they gave me a job there so that I would never want to work in a coat factory again, but would do something better with my life. There's nothing like being hot and sweaty, and carrying bundles of wool and fur around. In those days we actually had salt tablet dispensers on the wall for anyone who felt they were going to pass out.

Every year the fashions change, so that you will have to spend your money buying new clothes. What you wore last year is outdated, however, as they say, if you hold on to it and wait long enough it will probably come back in style again. I saw women's shoes in a magazine the other day that my grandmother used to wear! (we used to make fun of her shoes...now their “cool”). Do you wish sometimes the styles didn't change, and you didn't have to be concerned about changing your wardrobe every year? Actually there are some people who live that way! (by the way, has anyone noticed that Lou Potter's plaid pants are back in style?)

What about appropriate clothing. Of course, times have changed as to what is appropriate. I remember an older man telling me that years ago he was very upset because he saw the pastor's wife wearing red shoes. Wow, how things have changed...my wife wouldn't be caught dead in red shoes! (Just kidding, that's not the point at all). He was embarrassed and ashamed that he felt that way at one time. But, back in his day decent women didn't wear red shoes... I guess.

Times change, and what was inappropriate at one time has become acceptable today. Although, some things people wear today should not be acceptable. Can I remind you that Paul told Timothy (1 Timothy 2:9 NLT), “...I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves...” (And that would go for men too. My wife and I saw a young man the other day wearing his pants below his rear end. We were wondering how he could walk without tripping). A young lady I knew was asked by a teen how she knew if what she was wearing was appropriate or not. The young lady's response was, “I look in the mirror and I ask myself how I would feel if Jesus was going with me. If I could feel comfortable in His presence dressed the way I was, then it was appropriate.”

I want to talk to you today about a different kind of clothing then your fall wardrobe. On a different level, Christians today are not dressing appropriately in God's sight. Did you know that God has picked out a wardrobe for you? Take a look at Colossians 3:12-

14 (NLT) Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.

Let me read verses 12 and 14 again from The Message: So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline...And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

You see the message today is not about putting on the latest fashion, it's not about putting on the latest Pierre Cardin (is he still a popular designer?), it's about putting on The Lord Jesus Christ.

Why must we put on the wardrobe God has picked out for us? Why must we look like Jesus? Paul gives us the reason why (v12), "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must..." Because God has chosen you and you belong to God; Because He wants you to be holy; & because He loves you so much, you must put on the wardrobe He has picked out for you. If you want to dress like the best, dress like Jesus. What did He wear? Love. What did His love look like? Tenderhearted mercy or compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Over the next few weeks we are going to look at God's fashion for us, that is, each one of these attributes. We begin today with the topic of compassion, tenderhearted mercy. This is the first piece of clothing God wants us to wear. To God spiritual fashion and attractiveness begins with compassion and tenderhearted mercy for others. This is an attribute of Jesus, Who is described as compassionate and who acted so on our behalf.

(Joke)

The next time you need a shirt dry cleaned, don't take it to the cleaners and pay \$4 to have it cleaned. Bring it to the Salvation Army. They will clean it, press it, put it on a hanger and ... then you can buy it back for \$2.

Compassion is a genuine sensitivity and heartfelt concern for the needs of others. Compassion is both an emotion, and an action. We are to have sympathy for the suffering of others, including a desire to help, and act kindly to those in need. The opposite would be coldness. Those with compassion we call people "with a heart." People who don't show compassion are said to have "no heart." Jesus said (Matthew 24:12) that in the last days, "the love of many will grow cold." Are you dressing appropriately for this season? We must not fashion ourselves after the world, but after Christ. Even in a society, where many seem uninterested in the needs of others; when many are insensitive, and pre-occupied with themselves, Christians are called to have a deep interest in others. We are to dress like Jesus, who had great compassion for the crowds, Matthew 9:36 (NLT) "He

felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd.”

Jesus looked below the surface of a person's outward behavior. He looked passed their sinful habits. He saw more than the outward appearance. He saw the need of their heart and felt compassion and showed mercy. Christians are not to pick out the faults of others to judge, condemn, and complain about them. Christians are to dress like Jesus.

Put on compassion and let your heart be stirred by what others are going through. No matter how people appear on the outside, inside they are struggling with feelings of insecurity, inferiority, and pain. Show mercy.

We need to show compassion even when we are hurting ourselves. Actually, it is a good way to forget your own grief for a while. Mother Teresa tells this story: One night a man came to our house and told me, “There is a family with eight children. They have not eaten for days.” I took some food with me and went. When I finally came to that family, I saw the faces of those little children disfigured by hunger. There was no sorrow or sadness in their faces, just the deep pain of hunger. I gave the rice to the mother. She divided the rice in two, and went out, carrying half the rice. When she came back, I asked her, “Where did you go?” She gave me this simple answer, “To my neighbors – they are hungry also!” ...I was not surprised that she gave, because poor people are really very generous. But I was surprised that she knew they were hungry. As a rule, when we are suffering, we are so focused on ourselves we have no time for others.

People often need compassion more than advice. Remember Job and his friends. Advice doesn't often get through to hurting people; first they need compassion (oh, if only every husband could learn this...often your wife needs compassion not advice.).

A mark of a Christ-like person is compassion, we share the compassionate heart of Jesus. Compassion flows from a heart of goodness. God has compassion according to His great and unfailing love (See Nehemiah 13:22). Psalms 145:9 (NLT) “The LORD is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation.” God's compassion comes to us even when we don't deserve it. Isaiah 30:18 (NLT) tells us that “...the LORD still waits for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion.”

Jesus said (Matthew 5:7 NLT), “God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” James wrote in the negative (James 2:13 NLT), “For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others.”

And don't give up on others. It's easy to give up on some people, but God never gave up on you and never will. Jesus showed compassion for you, and even gave His life for you, and you must not exhibit an ungrateful spirit by being insensitive to the needs of others or giving up on them. Take off the old garments of insensitivity, and put on the clothes God has for you. Dress like Jesus with tenderness and mercy.