

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Clothing Ourselves With Humility Toward One Another

by Dan Trygg

“I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban.” Job 29:14

“...in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, <sup>23</sup> and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, <sup>24</sup> and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Ephesians 4:22-24

“...put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” Colossians 3:12-14

“But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.” 1 Thessalonians 5:8

“You younger ones, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5

We have been studying the twenty-one “one another” responsibilities that God’s word says we are to exercise toward each other in the Body of Christ. Today’s study is the last one in this series. As I look over the list of these, I am struck with how **these “one another” actions are primarily (a.) to affirm and build up the other *individual* in his self-perception as a son or daughter of God, by expressing acceptance, welcome, value and love, and (b.) to foster healthy, helpful *relationships with each other* in the Body of Christ.** Aside from “pray for one another”, **none of the “one another” responsibilities is directed toward God, at all. They are all about us.** They are all about processing what God did for us in Christ in our own *self-understanding*, as well as *learning to see and treat each other differently* in the outworking of our faith. Again, this makes sense, if we understand what the “gathering-together of the saints” was *for*. **Early Christians did not primarily gather together for worship.** God was with each of them all week long, why would it be necessary to wait until they met together to acknowledge Him, ...or to offer expressions of loyalty, submission and obeisance to Him? Adoration, praise, and obedience were part of everyday life. **No, the purpose for coming together was to do things that they could not do when they were apart. What was that? To help one another refocus, learn, be encouraged and supported, so each person would press on after Christ and become productive in their faith.** God did not need them to come together to honor Him. He is already full and complete in Himself. He is surrounded by praise, day and night. Sure, it is nice to be appreciated, but God gives out of the fullness and overflow of His heart. **God does not need our praise or acts of acknowledgement.** On the other hand, *we might need to be reminded of who He is, and we might need to be refocused on Him as our Source and our King, ...we might need to read His word, and have someone explain it to us, ...we might need to be treated with love and respect, after being disregarded and buffeted by hostile or indifferent people during the week, so we can recover our self-dignity and joy, ...we might need the help of other people, as they encourage us, admonish us, minister to us through spiritual gifts, and even help to meet practical, physical needs. God doesn’t need that stuff, we do! The purpose of meeting together is for us to help mature and assist each other in our walks with God, ...not to ignore each other to focus on God alone.*

The other reality I am impressed with, as I look over the list of twenty-one “one another” responsibilities, is that **every one of us is to be actively serving others, as well as receiving from others. Each one of us has something valuable to contribute. Of course, that will never become evident, if we do not express ourselves when we meet.** The church of Jesus Christ is meant to be a place where we *all* come to invest. We come to bring something to the table. It may not seem like much at the time, but it *is* valuable. Even a *little bit* of spice can change the flavor of a meal. Our very willingness to participate can encourage others to also share. **Our obedience to share what the Spirit brings to our minds and hearts is an important part of the “tuning in” process.** How can we *learn* to be led by the Spirit without *experimenting*, by responding to the righteous, loving leadings that come into our hearts? **It is through the learning laboratory of the Body of Christ that we can develop skills of responding to God and expressing ourselves in a safe environment. These attempts to minister to others will sharpen us, and give us confidence to take risks to step out in faith at other times.**

What about the admonition for today’s study, “clothe yourselves with humility toward one another”? You will notice from the passages listed at the top of the page that **the image of putting on clothes is a word picture used**

numerous times in the scriptures for putting on attitudes, character qualities, or a different orientation. If you imagine changing out of dirty, grubby work clothes, and putting on new, fresh garments, ...especially a new suit, or a nice dress..., you can appreciate how, oftentimes, you *feel different*, and even your *behavior changes*.

Job said that he “put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban” (Job 29:14). In the context, he is recounting what kind of man he had been. He helped the poor, the widow and the orphan, defended the weak and opposed those who were oppressive. How did this come about? He “put on” righteousness. He “dressed himself” with righteousness. This implies a conscious choice or habit. Again, referring to the word picture, when he chose his “wardrobe”, he chose “righteousness” rather than “injustice”. In other words, he consciously chose to live by and exhibit righteousness. That is how he wanted to live and be known. **In the process of choosing to put it on, day by day, eventually righteousness “clothed” him.** In other words, **the righteous attitude and values he kept taking up, and putting on, eventually became who he really was.** It was like a suit of clothes that fits well, and you are comfortable in. Or, another scenario where we may experience what Job is referring to is when we get a new job that requires a uniform. At first, we feel stiff and uncomfortable in that new uniform, and the new job it represents. After weeks and months of going to work, the uniform seems to become part of who we are, when we are on the job. We come to effectively live out what the uniform represents. Why? Because we have been applying ourselves to master the job represented by the uniform. Somewhere along the way the uniform seems familiar, not strange. It is who we are.

Paul uses this same word picture to describe putting aside the old, selfish way of living. We can choose to strip off that old orientation, with its stains and torn pockets, and take up our new self (Eph. 4:22-24). We can dress ourselves in this new spiritual orientation, and live differently. We *are* a new person. If we forget that, and fall into old attitudes and behavior, we simply acknowledge that, confess our sins, and choose to embrace again the new identity Christ has made available to us. We “take” and “put on” this new person, and live according to our new identity. Imagine being relocated into a witness protection program. You are *given* a new identity, with a new job, a new house, a new car. It is *up to you* to *keep* that new life, ...to not drive back into the old neighborhood, or put on your old clothes, or do what you did before. **The new identity leads to an entirely different life. It is offered to you, and you choose to take it, to “put it on”.** Of course it will feel weird. And you may find yourself thinking about your past life, or driving toward familiar places. BUT, as soon as you realize it, you just have to refocus, and live according to who you now ARE. Paul says we are to PUT OFF the old self, be renewed in your mind (learn your new identity, and how to walk in it), and then, PUT IT ON! Live according to who you now *are*, ...a new person in Christ! He expands on that in the Colossians passage cited at the top of this study. **We not only put on our identity, we put on the character qualities, attitudes and mindset that goes with our identity.** It is like the uniform for our new job. We put on the compassion, humility, gentleness and patience as consciously as we would choose to put on pants, shirt, or a belt. As with Job, if we find ourselves “out of uniform”, we remedy the situation by simply “getting dressed” in the right stuff. **As we repeatedly do this, we will find these qualities will “clothe us”, ...they become comfortable, part of who we are.** They are part of our *persona*, part of how we relate to the world.

It is important to be able to appreciate this word picture, to grasp the applicable insights we can take from it. It is vital, however, to grasp that this is *more than just a word picture!* This is not some mind-over-matter, talking-myself-into-something kind of thing. This is *not just imaginary*. **WE TRULY ARE A NEW PERSON. To experience that, however, requires a conscious choice. We must PUT IT ON!** We must *exchange* our old life for the new one Christ would live through us, as we keep in step with the Holy Spirit’s leading. In I Thessalonians, Paul wrote, “**Since we ARE of the day, we might now be clear-headed**, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and the hope of salvation for a helmet.” **It is not a question of who we ARE, if we are in Christ. It is a matter of whether or not we tap into who we truly are.** Will we continue to live the old way, or will we consciously *put on* what Christ has made available to us? **We don’t have to walk in stress, anxiety, condemnation or shame. We can consciously apply what Jesus did for us by putting on His righteousness, His salvation** (Eph. 6:13-17). We can then trust in Him, and experience the peace and love that flow from the release of our self-striving and introspection.

Finally, Peter admonishes us to “put on humility toward one another”. Humility is the opposite of pride and arrogance. It is *not* thinking that you are better than others. The Greek literally is “lowly-mindedness”. It is a *mindset* of voluntary submission and respect toward others. We can *put this on*, by a voluntary choice and a renewed mind. It is a *choice* to not be pretentious or to inflate my appearance or importance, or to compete with others for respect. **It is a choice to be content, to live simply, to not strive for status, or to be the center of attention.** I can choose to let *others* talk, let *them* go first, delight to see *them* honored. **When we are genuinely humble in this way, we will see opportunities to serve and edify others.** And, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to those who are humble. **Instead of opposition and discipline from God, we will receive His blessing.**