

# **“Dress For Success”**

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The epistle reading for today is taken from the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 24 and into the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, verses 1 and 2. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. “Clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” This is God's word for God's people. Thanks be to God.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians the apostle Paul states what Christians believe. In the last three chapters he discusses how to apply what we believe. Our new nature is God's nature, and our calling is to clothe ourselves with this new nature and cultivate it as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Our hearts have been given new incentives and motives because the spirit of God resides

there. Everything is different! At the moment we receive the Holy Spirit into our hearts the transformation begins. Over time, as the mind begins to understand what's required of us, and we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, we are dynamically transformed. We're learning to put on new clothes, and we're dressing for success!

Paul gives us commands, and they are pretty different from our old ways of behaving. It gives a list of things to not clothe ourselves with. Today I'm going to focus on anger. Let's ask ourselves these questions. "Do my actions consistently express what I believe? Am I imitating God by expressing love and kind words to those I interact with more and more?"

Take a look at the front cover of the bulletin. Here we see paper doll clothes. Some of us remember cutting these out and folding back the tabs on the doll, and then, abracadabra—we have a happy paper doll clothed with happy colors. Unfortunately, many of us don't feel happy every moment of every day, and on Sunday, we may feel like we've got to put on a happy face to hide how we really feel inside. We don't *feel* like speaking kind words or forgiving the person that insulted us. After all, it was their fault. Why should I be expected to be tender-hearted and forgive when it wasn't even my fault? Verse 1 of chapter 5 says we're to imitate God and live in love because Christ loves us. So, let me ask the question again, "Do our actions and how we relate to others express what we believe?" Are we imitating God by expressing love and kind words to those we interact with?

As a Christian, how *do* we dress for success? Do we put on a happy face, and then brush by the person we're angry with and ignore them? Do we refuse to accept any blame for a situation that got out of hand? . . . . . Does it really matter whose fault it is? Relationships aren't about being right anyway. In the verses that were read Paul begins by telling us what not to wear. Well here's an opportunity to examine our wardrobe and throw out some of those clothes we don't need as Christians.

The author says to clothe ourselves with the new self; that means we don't put on bitterness and anger and slander. Our aim is to cooperate with God and to allow God to change the inside of who we are. Then we don't need those fake happy paper doll clothes. We want the inside of us to change, to feel peace, to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, and forgive one another. God has provided the power. That's dressing for success!

We know that putting on a paper doll face and clothes is not the solution. We need to change who we are on the inside! Unfortunately, the inside of who we are comes right to the outside. We're not really hiding. Our ultimate aim as Christians is to regard others as better than ourselves, to be critical of our own faults, and charitable of others' shortcomings. To be quick in observing our weaknesses, but quick to overlook and give grace to others—this is how we dress for success. Anger is something that hinders our relationships. It hinders our power to receive from God, it steals our joy, and it robs our quality of life.

Scripture tells us to not let the sun go down on our anger. The anger in this passage is not an outward momentary reaction or a boiling over rage that resents. It's one that's deep-seated. It doesn't let go easily. In other words, it's who we are inside, but how do we change it? With God's help and our cooperation with the Holy Spirit we can change. We can change anger that's self-defensive and self-serving. Now some anger is okay, if it's anger for injustice and based on love for God and concern for others—that's righteous anger. But anger can be obsessive, and we can make it a personal thing quickly. We need to remind ourselves to lay down our pride, to live in love, and to *let forgiveness have the last word*.

I think we all agree that anger is part of the human experience, but what we need to do is to make forgiveness much *more* a part of who we are. Learning to forgive more quickly is a process. We must decide to love and forgive, and then when anger raises its ugly head, we refuse to respond to that emotion. It's

something we grow into; it's a process. We *practice* kindness and having a tender heart. What I see in my own life is that little by little I decrease my tendency toward anger because I want to extend grace. I want harmony and peace and love to prevail. Our goal in growing into maturity as a Christian disciple is to live a life that resembles the life of Christ more and more.

As a church, we're intended to purposefully live a life of love and forgiveness. It's not easy, but we're expected and called to live a life of love. Verse 25 says we are members of one another. We're all deeply connected, and we should treat each other with care, tenderheartedness, compassion, and do all we can to imitate Christ, our great example.

Let's dress for success. Clothe yourself with love and forgiveness; these are qualities that imitate God and aren't temporary like fake paper doll clothes. Let's dress for success and be genuine! Let's pray. God of love and forgiveness, change our heart so we might change our speech. Help us to recognize and resist anger and habit of harboring unforgiveness. Help us to put on the clothes for success by living in love and imitating you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.