

GETTING DRESSED FOR CHRISTMAS: A LITTLE HOLIDAY PREPARATION

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INTRODUCTION:

Holidays are frequently times when people get trapped by the expectations game. Because everyone around you assumes that the day is going to be “really good,” “special,” or “fantastic,” and is constantly telling you to have a “merry” one, it is easy to assume that having a merry Christmas is an actual possession of yours, and if not a possession, at least a birthright. Consequently, the tendency is to sketch out in your mind what you would like that possession to be like. But it turns out, metaphorically speaking, that you get socks instead of the shotgun, or cookware instead of pearls, and the expectation lost is a set-up for real disappointment. This is one of the reasons why holidays can be such an emotional roller coaster ride for so many, and Christmas is no exception.

THE TEXT:

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:12-17).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

The text obviously deals with how we as Christians are to live all the time, and not just during the holidays. But the holidays are nothing other than what we normally do, ramped up to the next level. And so as we prepare our hearts for this celebration, ramp this up as well. Problems arise when we exert ourselves physically, emotionally, financially, and so on, and we don't exert ourselves here. Think of this as getting dressed for the season—here, put this on. What should you put on? Tender mercies, kindness, humility of mind, meekness, patience (v. 12). That is holiday garb. When you are clothed this way, what are you dressed for? Snow pants are for going out in the snow, right? What is this clothing for? It is getting dressed for forbearance and forgiveness (v. 13). You are all dressed up and therefore ready to drop a quarrel, and to forgive as you were forgiven (v. 13). But that is not enough—you need to put on another layer. Over everything else, put on charity, which is the perfect coat, the perfection coat (v. 14). When you have done that, what are you ready for? You are ready for peace with others, and that peace is saturated with gratitude (v. 15). You are also ready for some music, and particularly the music of grace and gratitude (vv. 15-16). And then, to crown all else, you are dressed for everything—whatever you do, whether in word or deed, you can do it in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to the Father (v. 17).

GETTING DRESSED BEFOREHAND:

Many Christians know what they are supposed to be doing, and so they try to do it. And they feel bad when they fail. But for some reason they don't prepare themselves beforehand for what they know is coming. They don't know that how they are dressed for the task is affecting their performance of the task itself. Now, let us suppose that for the last seventeen Christmases in a row you have gotten out of fellowship about something—for gifts you didn't get, for lack of adequate enthusiasm for gifts you gave, for lack of adequate help with the meal, etc. Seventeen years in a row. Now, is it possible to tell which day this will happen the next time? Sure, it is this next Friday. The 25th. It is marked right there on the calendar, leering at you. So started getting dressed for it now. You don't really want to be surprised again.

GIVING AND RECEIVING:

When you are clothed as you ought to be—in kindness, humility of mind, and charity—you will be able to take more delight in gifts you give freely, than in the gifts you receive. You delight in both, of course, but what does Jesus teach us? “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). There are two basic things to remember here. First, giving is better than receiving. Second, this truth is so obviously clear that many people have had to work out complicated ways of receiving—i.e. receiving credit for being so giving (Matt. 6:2-3). As you give, you need to avoid running a trade deficit, with all categories—emotional, physical, and spiritual—taken into account. Remember that gifts are gifts, and gifts are also symbols. And symbols are also layered.

THE GIFT GIVES YOU:

“For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account” (Phil. 4:16-17). Or this: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (1 Thess. 2:19). What is our crown? Is it not you?

In giving a gift, you are attached to it. In receiving a gift, the blessing that comes to the giver is your chief delight. And the you that is attached to the gift that is given is either a gift just like the physical gift, or it is booby-trapped box full of hidden emotional expenses. Do not be like the woman that C.S. Lewis said lived for others—and you could always tell who the others were by their hunted expression.

You give the gift, certainly, but the gift also gives you. And it will always give the “you as you are” and not the “you as you appear in your daydreams.” And this is why you must prepare yourself for the giving. You don’t want the gift to give you, and have that “you” be a cheap toy that doesn’t make it through the afternoon of Christmas day.

This is why you must get dressed for the day.



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