

"Put On Therefore..."

"...as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving each other..." (Col. 3:12f).

The apostle's appeal "put on" is an appeal to dress oneself with the qualities he has named. Peter used the same figure urging elders to "clothe" themselves with humility (1 Pet. 5:5). As fornication and uncleanness result from sins of the heart, which things we must lay aside, assuring good deeds result also from the heart. Repeatedly we are told that the heart is our "epic center." Jesus said "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speak" and "from within, out of the heart of man, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries..." (Matt. 12:34; Mk. 7:21). Little wonder that Jesus said "not that which entered into the mouth defileth the man, but that which proceedeth out of the mouth, these defile the man."

Paul's command that brethren "put on" a heart of compassion, etc., which followed his command to "put off," compliments Jesus' teaching about an unclean spirit which had been cast from a man which "passed through waterless places, seeking rest and findeth it not. Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out: and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state becometh worse than the first" (Matt. 12:43-45). And so we must put on...

A Heart of Compassion which "translates" into sympathy, putting oneself in the other fellow's situation. Jesus had compassion on the multitude because they had gone three days without food; on two blind beggars; on a demon-possessed young man and his father and on a widow whose only son had died (Matt. 15:32; 20:34; Mk. 9:22; Lk. 7:13). A Samaritan had compassion for a Jew who had been beaten and left for death (Lk. 10:33). Bearing fruit in good deeds begins with a compassionate heart.

Kindness. The worthy woman has "the law of kindness" on her tongue (Prov. 31:25). The people of the island upon which Paul and his fellow shipmates were cast showed them much kindness (Acts 28:2) Salvation is offered to us through God's kindness (Titus 2:11). Kindness is demonstrated in the words we speak and the way we treat others.

Lowliness and Meekness. These reflect humble hearts as it is expressed by humble action. Jesus said "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29).

Longsuffering. Longsuffering is enduring troubling and trying matters. God endured "with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction" (Rom. 8:22). Where would we be if God immediately destroyed those who sinned against him? "the longsuffering of God waited in the day of Noah" (1 Pet. 3:20). God is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Men give up on others often much more quickly than God gives up on us. We dare not "write others off" so quickly. We must be longsuffering with each other.

Forbearance. Sometimes God's children do not develop as they ought and we become impatient with them. With forbearance we endure their immaturity and pray for their growth.

Forgiving each other. We cannot expect forgiveness from Christ if we do not forgive those who wrong us. We should always forgive when we are asked to forgive, although should one sin against us "seventy times seven" in one day and ask forgiveness, we would be wary and doubtful of his sincerity. Nevertheless, we must always forgive although faith and trust may be a long while coming for "forgiveness" and "faith and trust" are not the same!

Jim McDonald