

## Article

# The Racial Significance of Paul's Clothing Metaphor (Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10)

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**Abstract:** This essay proposes a new interpretation of the Pauline expression to “clothe” (ἐνδύω) oneself in Christ (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). The phrase has been understood in terms of putting on virtues and godly characteristics. Other understandings of this phrase appear in terms of a new identity (Gal 3:27). There has been relatively limited study, however, on the significance of clothing and how different racial groups were known and characterized by their dress. Clothing was not just something that one “puts on” to protect the body from the elements or analogously understood in terms of adopting virtues. Clothing was a racial signifier, and the putting on or taking off of clothing signaled a racial transformation. The ability to “put on clothes” would have been understood in terms of the malleable nature of racial identity. By drawing on the insights of Herodotus, Aeschylus, Plutarch, and other Greek and Roman writers, this reading proposes a racial interpretation of Paul’s “clothing” phrases in Romans 13:14, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 4:24, and Colossians 3:10. This essay explores the interpretation of these Pauline passages in contemporary scholarship, describes how the changing of clothing also signified a change of racial identity, and lastly, demonstrates how these insights can impact our understanding of the Pauline expression to “clothe oneself in Christ”.

**Keywords:** race; clothing; putting on christ; jesus; racial malleability; alexander the great; marc antony; barbarian



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## 1. Introduction

What does it mean to clothe (ἐνδύω) oneself in Christ? The term ἐνδύω has close association with literal clothing articles (χιτών [garment], ἐσθής [clothing], στολή [robe], ὅπλον [weapons], and θώραξ [breastplate]) in Greek Literature (Homer *Il.* 2.42; 5.736; 10.21; Herodotus 1.24, 172; 2.42; 3.98; 7.218; Euripides *Bacc.* 853; Hippocrates *Insomm.* 91; Menander, 432; Sophocles *Trach.* 759) and metaphorically appears in several of Paul's letters (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). One can primarily understand these phrases—“put on Christ”, “put on a new nature”, or “put on a new humanity”—in terms of clothing one's life with the virtues or identity that reflect Christ's identity or nature. John Chrysostom, in fact, made the connection between living a morally virtuous life with the metaphor of clothing oneself in Christ. In his homily on Romans, Chrysostom states:

He gives us the Lord himself for a garment, the king himself: for he that is clad with him, has absolutely all virtue. But in saying, ‘put on’, he bids us [to be covered] about with him upon every side. As in another place he says, ‘but if Christ be in you’. And again, ‘that Christ may dwell in the inner man’. For he would have our soul to be a dwelling for himself, and himself to be laid round about us as a garment, that he may be unto us all things both from within and from without. (*Hom. rom.* 24.1–3)

Chrysostom understands the analogous relationship between clothing the body and being united with the Christ, who is “absolutely all virtue.” He likens the “putting on” of Christ to a virtuous identity that believers adorn in their inner and outer life. These

are reasonable interpretations, especially since the Septuagint term ἐνδύω also describes those characterized by the virtues or vices of shame, dishonor, drowsiness, righteousness, strength, salvation, honor, majesty, dignity, or justice (Job 8:22; 29:14; Ps 34:26; 91:2; 103:1; 108:29; 131:9, 16, 18; Prov 23:21; 31:26; Sir 27:8; Isa 52:1; 59:17; 61:10; Zech 3:3–4).

Furthermore, to “put on” Christ also points to the transition to a new way of life that begins at one’s baptism (Gal 3:27). The clothing metaphor in this passage signifies a new identity embraced through a water baptism ritual. Indeed, the relationship between baptism, clothing, and spiritual transformation has major significance in later Christian and gnostic teaching (Gos. Thom. 37; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 21; Gos. Phil, 101). Nonetheless, to “put on” Christ conveys the sense that one puts on a new identity of person. A similar expression is found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ *Roman Antiquities* where to “put on Tarquin” means to act in the same manner as Tarquin, the legendary tyrant king of Rome (11.5). Overall, the numerous exhortations and descriptions of “putting on” or “clothing oneself” (ἐνδύω) with moral virtues or a new identity leaves one certain that Paul uses this expression in a similar manner. As one is visibly known by the clothing one wears, one is also to be known by the virtuous way of life or identity reflective of Christ.

However, missing from various readings is how the exhortation to “clothe” oneself would have been racially understood. Putting on clothes also communicates another aspect seldomly discussed, especially in a Greek and Roman context where the act of clothing oneself also signified a total racial transformation and racial association. As I believe, this metaphoric expression in Paul’s letters makes sense because it also draws upon the recognized concept of racial identity as it relates to clothing in the Greek and Roman world. Thus, I want to offer another way of reading these Pauline passages by drawing on the racial implications of clothing. This essay therefore argues that Paul’s metaphorical expression, “clothing oneself in Christ” and its related forms draw upon the known implications that clothing has with racial identity. As the readers are urged to “put on of Christ”, they do so in terms of a racial logic that understands clothing as a significant and distinguishable component to one’s racial identity and group membership. Said another way, those who wear their Christ clothing are, in a sense, distinguished as a new people group racially transformed into a Christ identity.

First, however, I briefly review the common interpretation of this verbal expression and analogy within the various occasions where it appears in Pauline passages. Second, I review Greek and Latin Literature to demonstrate points related to clothing, since clothing was a distinguishable aspect of one’s racial identity, and the act of changing one’s clothing also conveyed the transformation of one’s racial identity. My focus here, however, is not simply to address every instance when the term ἐνδύω appears and thus make a linguistic argument on the use of ἐνδύω within Greek Literature, which by the way, can also be translated as “to wear”, “dress” or “put something on someone” (BDAG p. 264). For this reason, I cover the act of changing clothes, even when the term ἐνδύω does not appear. Lastly, I conclude this essay by revisiting these Pauline passages and proposing a new interpretation that underscores the racial rhetoric of these texts.

## 2. Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10 in Contemporary Scholarship

The phrase, or more specifically, the term ἐνδύω first appears in Romans 13:14 as an exhortation to “clothe oneself” with Jesus Christ. The same term is mentioned a few verses earlier when Paul tells the Romans to “put on” the armor of light (13:12). Literarily, Paul describes within these passages certain immoral practices that are incongruent with a new life of faith. The deeds of “darkness” and the “flesh”, as he explains, include drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarreling, and jealousy (13:12–14). As such, it seems valid to interpret Paul’s exhortation to “put on the Lord Christ” as a verbal expression exhorting readers to embrace certain qualities and characteristics reflective of Christ. In fact, C. E. B. Cranfield describes this in a liturgical sense of already “putting on Christ” through one’s baptism, but he also adds that this exhortation also includes a moral sense of embracing

a life of discipleship and striving “to let our lives be molded according to the pattern of the humility of his earthly life” [Cranfield \(1979, pp. 688–89\)](#). Ernst Käsemann, likewise, interprets the exhortation in terms of baptism. That is, “every Christian represents his Lord on earth as a member of his body, and his whole life is a constant return to baptism” [Käsemann \(1980, p. 363\)](#). Robert Mounce also finds the expression “clothe oneself in Christ” as a call for decisive action; since readers are to put on Christ as they put on armor in these passages, [Mounce \(1995\)](#) supposes that followers of Jesus are to clothe themselves with “weapons of light” or more specifically, to “take off and dispose of the old clothing of sin” [Mounce \(1995, pp. 247–49\)](#). F. F. Bruce similarly describes the expression, “put on Christ”, as a catchword given for easy memorization; he explains that “they were urged to ‘put on’ Christian virtues as they would put on new clothes” [Bruce \(1985, p. 243\)](#). As the above interpretations demonstrate, the verbal expression ἐνδύω is metaphorically understood in the following manner: just as one would put on articles of clothing, so too is one to visibly demonstrate a life of Christ-like deeds.

It is thus no surprise that contemporary commentators also read Galatians 3:27 in a similar manner. In fact, the exhortation to clothe oneself in Christ in Romans 13:14 is read in light of Galatians 3:27 ([Cranfield 1979, p. 688](#); [Käsemann 1980, p. 363](#); [Bruce 1985, p. 243](#); [Thompson 1991, p. 157](#)), especially since Galatians would have been chronologically one of Paul’s earliest letters. Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:27 indeed does make the connection between clothing and baptism. He states, “as many as you have been baptized in Christ, you have clothed yourself in Christ” (3:27). However, what is the relationship between a water ritual and the putting on of Christ as if an article of clothing? It is recognized that this water ritual is one of incorporation, conversion, or a sense of becoming one with Christ ([George 1994, p. 276](#); [Fung 1988, p. 174](#); [Cole 1989, p. 154](#); [Keener 2018, p. 163](#)). [Betz \(1979, pp. 188–89\)](#) notices how this figurative language of “putting on Christ” has parallels in mystery religions and Gnosticism, but he argues that the concept implies the new creation of the person who comes to faith in Christ. Ronald Fung, however, claims that the garment of Christ covers up the “racial, social and sexual distinctions” of people [Fung \(1988, p. 175\)](#). He makes the connection between one’s racial identity and the new identity of Christ. He has a striking point that requires exploring. However, his brief comment does not disclose how clothing related to racial identity in the Greek or Roman context. Others continue the common interpretation, “putting on Christ”, as an ethical transformation. As Timothy George states, “The language of ‘putting off’ and ‘putting on’ is frequently found in Paul where it often connotes the ethical transformation” [George \(1994, p. 298](#); [Cole 1989, p. 154](#)). [Harrill \(2002, p. 253\)](#), however, does make the connection between Paul’s exhortation to put on Christ with the Roman’s wearing of the toga. He argues that instead of looking for the origins of the expression “to put on Christ”, it is best to read this in terms of a paraenetic speech modeled after the paraenesis of the Roman toga virilis ceremony. As he argues, just as a Roman would have understood the significance of wearing the toga, for Paul—writing to a Gentile audience—the phrase, “put on Christ”, would have also signified a new way of thinking about the responsible way of using one’s freedom [Harrill \(2002, pp. 276–77\)](#).

In Ephesians 4:24, Paul informs the readers that they were taught to “put on a new humanity” (ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον), which is created in God’s image and includes righteousness and holiness. The entire discourse is set within the context of contrasting a former way of life of vices with the new humanity they have “put on.” He instructs believers to lay aside their former way of life and to be mentally renewed (4:22–23). However, what is this new humanity? Bruce interprets the “new man” the Ephesians are to “put on” in reference to Christ. He explains that the Ephesians have been incorporated into that new humanity of which Jesus is the head [Bruce \(1984, p. 359\)](#). [Foulkes \(1989, p. 137\)](#) focuses on the aorist use of the term (ἐνδύσασθαι), which, as he suggests, “implies a decisive act, putting on this God-created, God-given life, as it has already implied the decisive putting off of the old”. In other words, this is something God does to the individual. Similarly, Darrell Bock also notices that the aim is to “walk in Christ, putting him on as one puts on clothes, by staying focused on what he represents and provides” [Bock \(2019, p. 139\)](#).

He also adds that Romans 13:14 makes a similar point and that the discussion about the “new man” also parallels Colossians 3:10–11. Noticeably, [Bock \(2019, p. 139\)](#) remarks that the advice to “put on a new nature” focuses on a corporate identity, not an individual or people group identity. However, Markus Barth suggests that this discussion on “putting on the new man” is an “allusion to the creation story, or to his hope of new creation, or to both” [Barth \(1974, p. 509\)](#). While not all may agree with this allusion ([Fowl 2012, p. 153](#)), Barth asserts that the clothing metaphor indicates a radical change [Barth \(1974, p. 539\)](#). Garments themselves, as he finds, “whether in relation to a deity or to the human community, they signify man’s second, or rather his real, self” (1974, p. 541). Is Paul talking about putting on a renewed nature that echoes the creation story of Genesis, or is this in reference to the putting on of Christ through baptism? Interpretations of this passage differ in terms of the referent.

Colossians likewise continues a similar reading, which interprets ἐνδύω in terms of a change of a new person through the ethical transformation ([Barth and Blanke 1994, p. 410](#); [Bruce 1984, p. 146](#); [Melick 1991, p. 298](#)). As Douglas Moo states, “a change of clothes is a rather natural symbol for a change in life or situation; and a kind of ‘ritual’ changing of clothes therefore featured in a number of ancient religions” [Moo \(2008, p. 266\)](#). Still, the use of ἐνδύω in Colossians 3:10 leads scholars to suggest a baptismal echo to Galatians 3:27 ([Bird 2011, p. 101](#); [Sumney 2008, pp. 201–4](#); [Moo 2008, p. 266](#)). However, there is a sense, as Barth and Blanke state, that “to put on Christ and to take off (the old) Adam means then to allow the redeemed humanity to become visible in the deeds of the community whose representative is Christ” ([Barth and Blanke 1994, p. 412](#)). Jerry Sumney, however, does make mention that clothing itself had social and economic significance. He surmises that the use of this metaphor would have reminded the readers of this tradition by placing these identities secondary to being in Christ [Sumney \(2008, p. 204\)](#). [Canavan \(2012, pp. 191–92\)](#), however, explicitly connects clothing and Roman identity. She draws insights from the visual material culture of Colossae in her reading of Colossians 3:1–17 to argue that this clothing metaphor “parallels to the mechanics of building identity” and critiques a “systematic visual construction of identity” that would have been known to the cities in the Lycus Valley. Specifically, Canavan mentions that the believer’s identity in Christ is juxtaposed here with the identity of the Roman emperor, expressing power over people [Canavan \(2012, pp. 182–86\)](#). As she states, “the transforming action of clothing in Colossians transcended the social and ethnic boundaries opening the way for all to belong irrespective of status” [Canavan \(2012, p. 186\)](#). Canavan aptly identifies the racial and social implications that the clothing metaphor has in Paul’s letter to the Colossians. My reading intends to expand upon these insights by highlighting examples of when the change of clothing was akin to the change of one’s racial identity. Before exploring the racial implications of clothing, however, I want to briefly review our findings.

Overall, what can we notice? Primarily, Paul uses the verb “put on” (ἐνδύω) to metaphorically express the act of clothing oneself with the person of Christ. Indeed, this transformational act is understood in reference to a new moral way of life (Rom 13:14), a past action such as the baptismal rite when Christ was “put on” (Gal 3:27), or the transformation of one’s nature from an old Adamic sinful state to a newly created humanity or likeness that resembles Christ (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). This vivid language compels the reader to think of a visible act of covering one’s own body in such a manner that it alters one’s identity and how one is perceived. In fact, Jung Hoon Kim suggests that these passages seem to “stress a change in the believer’s nature” [Kim \(2004, p. 224\)](#). That is, as clothing reveals the character of the person, influences the wearer’s behavior, and manifests the wearer’s status, so too are we to think of Paul’s metaphor in this manner ([Kim 2004, p. 232](#)). Overall, one can notice that the ideas of these passages as well as these readings are not mutually exclusive; however, a moral sense is the primary interpretation.

As I have hinted, something else has been missing in our discussion about clothing. My main issue is this: if Paul were simply thinking about clothing in terms of adopting a virtuous way of life or having a new nature in Christ, why then does he also write about

race alongside this clothing metaphor? The mention of “clothing oneself” in Christ is followed by discussions about racial identity in two of the four uses of this expression. Notice, for example, that after Paul reminds the Galatians that at their baptism they have been “clothed in Christ” (3:27), he also follows this statement by saying that racial categories had lost their significance. He states, “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). Likewise, after reminding the people of Colossae that they have been “clothed” in a new nature (3:10), he continues by stating that “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all and in all” (3:11). What is the relationship between being clothed in Christ and one’s racial identity? As I have mentioned in the opening of this essay, I believe that Paul is using this clothing metaphor in light of its racial implications. Changing one’s clothes can also convey a change of one’s racial identity. Thus, when the readers of Paul’s letters are reminded that they have put on Christ, they too are to think of their new identities in racial terms. Certainly, I agree that Paul is writing about one’s identity in light of dressing oneself with moral virtues, but moral virtues also make sense when they are centered within the distinctive way of life characteristic of racial groups. Racial groups are known for their customs, habits, way of life, worship, and dress!

### 3. The Racial Rhetoric of Clothing

In this section, I bolster the discussion that Fung and Canavan mention in their readings of these passages, by demonstrating how the act of putting on clothes would have racial implications. First, however, what do I mean by “race?” Some readers may be uncomfortable with my use of “race” in this essay. However, I purposefully use this term in order to disrupt our modern sensibilities that obscure how the ancients thought about people groups, their differences, and how they were categorized. If we think that the idea of “race” did not exist in the ancient world, then we will fail to observe how the ancients made value statements and judgments about various people groups. One may also prefer the term “ethnicity” instead of “race.” However, it is difficult to define and distinguish “race” and “ethnicity” given their overlapping use and interchangeability (Sechrest 2009, pp. 54–60; Estrada 2023, pp. 12–17). Even Eric Gruen admits that the term “race” may be a misleading and erroneous category given its modern usage (2012, pp. 197–98). However, as Buell (2005, p. 2) remarks, “it frequently demarcates groups whose members apparently share certain characteristics”. It is thus helpful to think about “race” as classification language that organizes human difference (McCoskey 2012, p. 2). It appears whenever the ancients attempt to define group differences and group boundaries (Estrada 2023, p. 17).

Truly, clothing is a vital racial marker and part of the social construction of race (McCoskey 2021, p. 4; Derbew 2021, pp. 25–26; Buell 2021, p. 61). It visibly identifies an individual with a particular racial group. It is not the only component to racial identity. It is one among many components, including language, lineage, laws, religion and so forth (Herodotus 8.144; Tacitus *Agr.* 21.1). We cannot, however, discount clothing’s importance and its visual communication of belonging to a racial group. We find in Greek and Roman Literature various perceptions made about racial groups based upon their clothing. When the ancients described different racial groups, they tended to highlight their clothing—what they wore and how it differed from the dress of other people. Our study will also reveal how racial fluidity and judgments of inferiority or superiority were based on clothing. Clothing certainly made it easy to observe and racially classify various people groups. Most notably, it also demonstrated the malleable nature of one’s racial identity. Just as one could change one’s clothes daily, so could people change racial identities as though garments, too.

#### 3.1. Barbarian Clothing

It is Thucydides who makes a connection between clothing and the barbarian identity. He remarks that the early Greek athletes wore loincloths during the Olympic games, a



practice no longer employed by the Greeks during his time. Only barbarians, however, would cover themselves during the athletic games of boxing and wrestling (1.6.5–6). This was no minor point of comparison. In discussing the clothing of Athenians, Ionians, and Spartans, Thucydides points out that the ancient Hellenic manner of life was similar to the barbarian way of life. He also finds that the Spartans were the first to wear a moderate and modern style of dress but trained openly while naked. Clothing reflected a barbarian identity—one the Greeks had eschewed and progressed from.

Aeschylus also reflects a similar sentiment. In his *Suppliants*, he describes Pelasgus, the king of Argos, encountering fifty daughters of Danaus who were forced to marry Egyptian husbands. The king was able to identify the women by their clothing. He describes them as having “un-Greek garb, wearing luxurious barbarian robes and headbands” (*Suppl.* 239). He makes mention that none of the women in all the Greek lands wear such clothes. These women, however, claim to be Argives by race. The king refuses to believe their claim. Instead, he asserts that they “... bear more resemblance to the women of Libya—certainly not to those of this country. The Nile, too, might nurture such a crop” (*Suppl.* 280–85). We must notice, though, that not just their physical appearance confused the king but also their clothing. Clothing, in other words, was a racial signifier. Their clothing was not “Greek” and could not convince the king. This is not the only time Aeschylus makes this association. In Aeschylus’ *Persians*, he associates Persian clothing with a barbarian identity. In one episode, Aeschylus describes a dream by the mother of Xerxes. The mother saw two well-dressed women, one in Persian clothing and the other in Dorian clothing. What was the difference between these two women? Nothing at all. They are described as “sisters of the same stock” (*Pers.* 180). Indeed, Gruen finds that this dream makes the point that both Greeks and Persians “belong to the same lineage” Gruen (2012, p. 20). However, what distinguished the women was their clothing. That is, to wear barbarians clothing provides a visual marker of one’s non-Greek identity, despite one’s ancestral roots. The woman in Dorian clothing came from Greece, whereas the other woman, as Aeschylus describes, came from a vague “barbarian land” (*Pers.* 185). Clothing not only distinguished the two women in the dream, but the woman of Persian clothing is associated with “barbarian” land, which also reflects the tendency to conform and be subservient to despots (*Pers.* 190–95). Even though Greeks and Persians may have a common ancestor, clothing itself provides a visual mechanism to distinguish barbarians from Greeks.

We also notice in Plutarch’s *Life of Alexander* a similar association between clothing and a barbarian identity. Alexander the Great is described as putting on “barbarian” clothing when he ventured to the region of Parthia (*Alex.* 45.1). Plutarch does not know how to interpret this action and proposes two possible motivations. Either this was due to a desire to adapt himself to the local customs, thinking that this sharing of customs and culture would lead to “softening the hearts of men” (*Alex.* 45.2), or second, Alexander wanted to observe if this would lead to the custom of prostration before him. Nonetheless, Plutarch announces that Alexander did not put on Median clothes. It was too “barbaric and strange”, given that they wear pants, cloaks, or a tiara (*Alex.* 45.2). Instead, Alexander utilized a blend of Persian and Median clothes, which communicated a style that was more “modest than the one and more stately than the other” (*Alex.* 45.3). Plutarch continues to recount that this clothing was utilized when Alexander was entertaining the “barbarians”, as he describes (*Alex.* 45.3), but Plutarch admits that Alexander became too comfortable with this clothing and offended his Macedonian companions. Alexander’s decision to wear barbarian clothing was tolerated for some time by his Macedonian companions, given that they still admired his character. Eventually, though, as Plutarch describes Alexander:

he adapted his own mode of life still more to the customs of the country and tried to bring these into closer agreement with Macedonian customs, thinking that by a mixture and community of practice which produced good will, rather than by force, his authority would be kept secure while he was far away. (*Alex.* 47.3)

What would these customs that Alexander tried to impart to his conquered subjects include? Plutarch mentions that Alexander encouraged people to learn the Greek language,

Macedonian weaponry, and instruction. However, it cannot be lost that while Alexander tried to influence non-Greeks of Greek culture, he himself was becoming similar to the “barbarians” in the eyes of his Macedonian companions. Alexander’s clothing was indeed a hybrid mixture of various styles, which also reflects his own hybrid identity—an identity that offended his Macedonian companions. In fact, one of his military officials, Cleitus, debated with Alexander and called to his attention that he was surrounding himself with barbarians and slaves who would bow down to Alexander while he wears his “white tunic and Persian girdle” (*Alex.* 51.3). Cleitus even remarks that happy are the Macedonians who have died and were not present to see Alexander betray his Macedonian father, Philip, and associate himself with Ammon, a deity from Libya who had associations with Egypt (*Alex.* 50.6). In other words, Alexander’s Macedonian army started to notice that he was becoming a barbarian through his gradual incorporation of non-Macedonian clothing. While I describe in the next section the relationship between clothing and racial transformation, I want to point out here that Plutarch’s narration of Alexander the Great provides a striking example on how the embrace of non-Macedonian clothing caused his army alarm. According to these loyal Macedonians, to dress in the style of a barbarian is to lose one’s Macedonian identity.

Other Greek and Roman writers also described racial groups according to their clothing. When it comes to describing the various people from Africa—Libya and Ethiopia in particular—there is a general tendency to differentiate or generalize various tribes by their clothing, or even making mention that they wear no clothes. For example, Herodotus distinguishes various Libyan people groups by their clothing. He remarks that the Adurmachidae Libyans practice Egyptian customs but wear clothes similar to other Libyans, noting that the women wear bronze anklets around their legs (*His.* 4.168). Strabo describes the people who live in Libya as “cloth[ing] themselves with the skins of lions, leopards, and bears” and the Pharusians and Nigretes, certain people west of the Ethiopians, as barbarians who use serpent and fish skins for clothing and bed covers (*Geo.* 17.3.7). When Diodorus describes the Ethiopian tribes, he remarks that they are “entirely savage and display the nature of a wild beast, not so much, however, in their temper as in their ways of living” (*Bibl. hist.* 3.8.2). He notices that they are “a striking contrast” in light of Greek customs, noting that some do not wear clothing while others wear the skin of animals (*Bibl. hist.* 3.8.3–6). Pliny finds that the far reaches of the world produce strange humans and animals with monstrous shapes. He states, “It is by no means surprising that the outermost districts of this region produce animal and human monstrosities, considering the capacity of the mobile element of fire to mold their bodies and carve their outlines” (*Hist.* 6.187). In particular, when describing the territory of Ethiopia, he notes that the Gymnetae people never wear clothes (*Hist.* 6.190).

What implications can we observe, then, about clothing and racial identity? As we notice with the early Greeks, Thucydides demonstrates that the Greeks used to dress in the manner of the barbarians when they wore loin cloths but moved away from that practice and, by implication, evolved in their racial identity and civility. What is barbarian clothing? This is no specific garment, but various clothing styles associated with a non-Greek style. Barbarian clothing is Libyan, Persian, and Median clothing. It is the clothing of the ‘other’. As we can observe in this short review, this clothing was also associated with those considered inferior and with a servitude nature. In addition, racial groups and tribes differentiated themselves by their clothing. Clothing not only seems to distinguish one’s racial identity, but it can also reflect a process of change with the change of clothing. One’s clothing, in other words, impacted how one was perceived by others, as we notice within Plutarch’s description of the Macedonian reaction of Alexander’s dress and the various comments made by Greek and Roman writers about people from Africa. Another element must be further explored, however—how the change of clothing also communicates a change in racial identity.

### 3.2. Change of Clothing, Change of Race

In our review of Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, we have already noticed the connection between a change in one's racial identity with the wearing of clothing. This is not a new idea but found throughout Greek and Roman Literature. It was Herodotus who recounted a startling story of a Scythian named Scyles who was the son of Ariapethes, a Scythian king. He was born from an Istrain woman who taught him how to speak and read Greek (*His.* 4.78). When Scyles became king, he did not appreciate the Scythian way of life and was more inclined to a Greek way of life. During a military venture against the city of the Borysthenites, he left his army outside the gate and entered the city. While in the city, he removed his Scythian clothing, put on Greek clothing, and followed the Greek manner of life. Herodotus writes that no one saw him do this. This happened frequently to the point that he would spend many months there. He had built a lavish house and married a woman from the city. When Scyles would leave the city, he would resume his Scythian clothing (*His.* 4.78). During a time when he was participating in a Dionysus initiation rite, however, Scyles' double life was exposed. A fellow Borysthenite exposed Scyles' identity by informing the Scythians that their king had been initiated into this Greek rite. This Borysthenite brought some Scythians into the city to show them their king who was with Dionysian worshippers (*His.* 4.79). The Scythians saw their king and reported to their army about their king's double life. Scyles was eventually deposed and fled to Thracia but was eventually captured and executed (*His.* 4.80). A Greek reader of this account would find it startling that the Scythians would execute Scyles for participating in a Greek way of life, culture, clothing, and religion. Hartog (1988, p. 62) explains that the Greeks in this story are being interpreted through the perspective of the "other". He finds that this story also communicates to the reader that both traveling to distant lands and being bilingual in different cultural groups are dangerous activities that lead to neglecting the boundaries between groups Hartog (1988, pp. 64–84).

This story about Scyles not only explains why the Scythians protect their own customs and avoid Greek rites, but it also demonstrates how racial identity was fluid and could visibly be expressed and associated with clothing. One could "put on" a Greek identity by wearing Greek clothing and likewise "put on" a Scythian identity with Scythian clothing. Clothing provided a boundary marker that differentiated racial groups—boundaries that were not to be crossed. Certainly, racial identity includes much more than clothes. Scyles also had a Greek education and practiced Greek rituals, aspects that are also a part of one's racial identity. We cannot exclude the fact, however, that his change of identity and his blending into the community was facilitated with a change of clothing. Strikingly, a similar example is found with Decimus Brutus, a Roman who participated in the assassination of Julius Caesar. When Marc Antony was pursuing all those involved in the conspiracy against Caesar, it was Decimus who was able to evade capture by dressing up in the style of a Gaul. Appian writes, "he changed into Celtic clothing, and, as he was already fluent in the language, he made his escape with these ten men, passing himself off as a Gaul" (*Bell. civ.* 3.97). Decimus knew the language and culture and had access to Celtic clothing—possibly because he had served as a commander and former governor of the region alongside Caesar. His access to both the language and the clothing enabled him to escape capture for some time. As we can observe, clothing was not just something one "puts on" but something that demonstrates a visual transformation and association with a racial group.

Within Roman Literature, clothing continues to distinguish racial identity, including the Roman one. Vergil describes the diversity of the human race based upon the diversity of their clothing, weaponry, and language (*Aen.* 8.720). Additionally, in Virgil's *Aeneid*, there is a remarkable correlation between the toga and the Roman racial identity. The Roman people are described as having an "empire without end", "lords of the world", and a "nation of the toga" (*Aen.* 1.280). Virgil also describes a situation when Juno makes a startling request for the emergence of a new Latin race. Juno asks that the Latin race should not change their names, become Trojans, lose their language, or change their clothes (*Aen.* 12.820–830). Strikingly, clothing—along with language and a self-identifying name—is



considered a vital aspect to Latin racial identity. Clothing, in other words, is not just something that is put on. It signaled a racial identity, a particular association with a people group.

This sentiment is also found when the Britons became Romans by embracing a Roman way of life, including the wearing of Roman clothing. Tacitus describes the military success and social reforms of Agricola, his father-in-law, during his campaign in Briton. He allured many Britons and convinced them to give up their hostility toward Rome by parading the benefits of submission. For those who were won over, Tacitus states that Agricola began to educate the people. Then, as a result:

the nation which used to reject the Latin language began to aspire to rhetoric: further, the wearing of our dress became a distinction, and the toga came into fashion, and little by little the Britons went astray into alluring vices: to the promenade, the bath, the well-appointed dinner table. The simple natives gave the name of ‘culture’ to this factor of their slavery. (*Agr.* 21.1.)

Agricola was able to convince the Britons to adopt the Roman way of life, which they did. As the Britons lost their indigenous identity and became Roman, they started to speak Latin, think as Romans thought, participate in Roman luxuries, and dress as Romans dressed with the toga. As one can notice, one transforms into a new racial identity with the embrace of cultural aspects that include clothing.

One final example is most notable with the life of Marc Antony, a Roman military general who fought and governed alongside Octavian after the assassination of Julius Caesar. Although Marc Antony and Octavian were fellow Romans, they eventually had a falling out and became enemies. While most “barbarians” desired to become Roman and embrace the Roman toga to signify their change of racial identity, Marc Antony’s racial transition went the opposite direction. He is often described by Greek historians as becoming Egyptianized and for having the tendency to wear Greek clothing.

When Appian describes Marc Antony, he writes that Antony would spend much time in Egypt without displaying “the insignia of command” and would wear the “square-cut Greek cloak instead of his native one and the white attic sandals also worn by the Athenian and Alexandrian priest” (*Bell. civ.* 5.11). Plutarch also records this similar tendency. He mentions that when Antony left Italy and was in Athens, he celebrated the Roman military victory of Ventidius by leaving at home his Roman “insignia of command” and carried the “wands of a gymnasiarch in a Greek robe and white shoes” (*Ant.* 33.4). Dio Cassius also does not fail to mention Marc Antony’s dress. On one occasion when Octavian and Marc Antony were meeting face to face to discuss the situation with Pompilius, the son of Pompey, he writes that “they entertained each other at banquets, Caesar [Octavian] in military and Roman fashion and Antony in Asiatic and Egyptian style” (*Rom. his.* 48.30). The contrast between Octavian and Marc Antony would have been striking.

Cassius, however, explains that Antony was “enslaved” by Cleopatra and was compelled to act as a “gymnasiarch for the Alexandrians” (*Rom. his.* 50.5). He also notes that Antony would carry an “oriental dagger in his belt”, wear “clothes which were completely alien to Roman custom”, and appear in public “seated upon a gilded couch or chair” (*Rom. his.* 50.5). This description of Antony, as Cassius narrates, portrays him not as a Roman military general or leader but as a complete foreigner who had lost his Roman identity.

Later when Octavian and Marc Antony do engage in war with each other, the conflict is also understood with racial rhetoric. Octavian justifies the war against Antony by convincing his soldiers that Antony had lost his Roman identity by dressing in the manner of the foreigners Rome had conquered. He states,

Who would not weep when he both hears and sees Antony himself, the man twice consul, often imperator, to whom was committed in common with me the management of the public business, who was entrusted with so many cities, so many legions—when he sees that this man has now abandoned all his ancestors’ habits of life, has emulated all alien and barbaric customs, that he pays no honor to us or to the laws or to his fathers’ gods. (*Rom. his.* 50.25.1–3)

Weeping, in this case, is the Roman response to both “hearing” and “seeing” Marc Antony. What specifically would they see? Most startling, they would no longer see Marc Antony wear his Roman clothes, military garb, and insignia—those visual aspects that communicated Roman identity. Octavian continues:

Therefore let no one count him a Roman, but rather an Egyptian, nor call him Antony, but rather Serapion; let no one think he was ever consul or imperator, but only gymnasiarch. For he has himself, of his own free will, chosen the latter names instead of the former, and casting aside all the august titles of his own land, has become one of the cymbal players from Canopus”. (*Rom. his.* 50.27.1–2)

Notice in these speeches that Roman identity is found in maintaining a way of life which includes laws, customs, honor for the Roman people, and the Roman religion. Losing these identity markers indicates to Octavian and other Roman soldiers that Antony had indeed lost his Roman identity—most visible in his Greek clothing and Egyptian way of life. How then does Octavian justify his war against Marc Antony? Simply put, by convincing his soldiers that Marc Antony had lost his Roman identity and that they, they alone, are fighting for Rome.

This version of the Roman story between Octavian and Marc Antony was embedded within Virgil’s *Aeneid*. When Aeneas receives a shield from Vulcan, embedded is a portrait of Augustus “standing on the lofty stern” and leading the people of Italy with all the might of the gods into war (*Aen.* 8.675–680). This portrayal is in contrast to Marc Antony who is with his “barbaric might”, Egyptian wife, and “monstrous gods” (*Aen.* 8.695–700). Marc Antony does not appear as a Roman in a civil conflict with Octavian. In fact, Octavian and his Roman soldiers are the ones who are truly defending the Roman way of life and ancestral traditions. Marc Antony is cast alongside the barbarians and those who do not wear Roman clothing.

#### 4. Rereading Paul’s Clothing Metaphor

Clothing was indeed a racial signifier that communicated identity, otherness, and group membership. It was not just something one “put on” to protect the body from the elements, nor was it simply a fashionable statement of class or social status. It was a visual external marker that identified a person’s membership in a particular racial group. Additionally, just as one can change clothes, one could change one’s racial identity and association to a racial group. We see this with Alexander the Great, the Scythian King Scyles, and Marc Antony. Clothing signified association with a particular group’s way of life, laws, customs, and even religion. Since clothing was changeable, though, it also demonstrated the fluid nature of racial identity, racial membership, and the individual’s negotiation and transition into and between racial groups. Again, clothes served as the visible expression of how one wants to be racially perceived and of one’s racial group membership; on some occasions, clothes also served as evidence of either becoming civilized or barbarianized.

Thus, when Paul utilizes the expression to “clothe oneself” with Christ, it would have provided a vivid expression that draws upon the logic of racial transformation and association. Readers would have been aware of the implications clothing has for one’s racial identity and racial group membership. In this next section, I want to provide a possible way in which the racial dynamics of clothing impact and can possibly shape our interpretation of Paul’s admonitions. I divide the passages into two groups: the virtue passages (Rom 13:14; Eph 4:24) and the unity passages (Gal 3:27; Col 3:10). These passages are grouped together because they thematically resemble one another. In the first group (Rom 13:14; Eph 4:24), Paul instructs the recipients of the letter to clothe themselves in Christ with moral virtues. In the second group (Gal 3:27; Col 3:10), Paul discusses the clothing of Christ in terms of unifying diverse racial groups. My exploration of these passages seeks to draw out the racial tones of these texts.

#### 4.1. *The Virtue Passages: Romans 13:14 and Ephesians 4:24*

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he exhorts the readers "to clothe" themselves in the Lord Jesus Christ and not make provisions for the deeds of the flesh (Rom 13:14). Similarly, Paul also reminds the Ephesian readers that they too have been taught to "clothe" themselves with a new self that is created in the likeness of God, holiness, and righteousness (Eph 4:24). Clothing, in these passages, is used as a metaphor to visibly distinguish a moral way of life. This exhortation to "put on" Christ, or a new humanity, compels the readers to embrace their moral responsibilities akin to visibly manifesting their racial identity through their choice of clothes. Paul laces this ethical exhortation to "clothe oneself in Christ" by drawing upon the day-to-day realities of clothing, the Roman toga or the Greek garb for example. It compels the readers to metaphorically disassociate themselves from the visible moralities that defined and exhibited their racial identity and racial belonging. In its place, they are urged to change their moral framework, as if they were changing into a new garment that visibly expresses a new racial identity, especially since articles of clothing communicate membership and racial belonging. Just as one can racially become a Roman, Greek, Egyptian, or Scythian by changing their clothes, so too can they change their moral framework by putting on the clothes of Christ.

Paul wants them, in a sense, to distinguish and associate themselves as a member of a people group belonging to Jesus with new "clothes" that visibly distinguish their moral identity and group belonging. We can read these passages as Paul's reminder to the readers that they need to exhibit their moral way of life in such a manner that it mirrors the clothing that reflects not just a racialized identity and belonging, but a virtuous one.

#### 4.2. *The Unity Passages: Galatians 3:27 and Colossians 3:10*

When Paul asserts to the Galatians that they were baptized into Christ, he also explains baptism in terms of being "clothed" with Christ (Gal 3:27). However, his discussion does not end there. He explains the implication of their new garments in relation to their racial, social, and gender identity. He pairs the identities, "Jew/Greek", "slave/free", and "male/female", to assert a common unity in Christ Jesus and inclusion into the lineage of Abraham (vv. 28–29). Likewise, Paul also uses racial rhetoric with the clothing metaphor found in his letter to the Colossians. Notice that when Paul states that they should "clothe" themselves with a new self (Col 3:10), he also pairs various racial, religious, and social identities to emphasize that Christ is "all and in all" (v. 11). As in Galatians, he uses similar parings of "Greek/Jew" and "slave/free" but adds "circumcised/uncircumcised", "barbarian", and "Scythian." Here, Paul draws upon racial language and imagery to include those who are considered uncivilized or nomads who live in the far extremes of the known world.

The reader should also observe that the racial imagery within these passages is not simply associated with terms that explicitly mention racial groups. Paul's "clothing" metaphor is also racialized language and part of the racial logic of these passages. Clothing, in this sense, explains how disparate racial groups are brought into a common identity in Christ. They are all "one", in the Galatian sense, because they all share the same racial garment that was received at their baptism. The mention of "clothing" becomes part of Paul's larger racial rhetoric that aims to bring together people groups who have no racial similarities with one another. This also suggests that Paul's argument for racial unity compels the readers to notice that they all share the same article of clothing—Jesus's body. However, this clothing, again, is not a race-neutral item. It, too, conveys racial meaning for the readers in this ancient setting. Now, Paul wants them to recognize that they all share the same racial garment of Christ, a garment that must be constantly put on and daily renewed, as Colossians mentions.

### 5. Conclusions

In this essay, I have sought to highlight a neglected aspect of racial identity: clothing. While today the topic of racial identity is associated with skin color or cultural traits, the

world of the New Testament had a wide variety of clues to help identify and categorize racial groups. One of the manners of identifying and distinguishing racial groups or individuals was by observing their clothing. The letters of Paul, as I argue, draw upon this assumed racial way of defining people groups with his clothing metaphor found in his letters to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians. In the most fundamental sense, Paul draws upon the racial implications of clothing to metaphorically expresses the transformation of one's belonging to Christ. One's former way of life becomes distinguished from the new one that is embraced with the clothes of Christ. As one changes one's clothes to take on a new racial identity, so too are believers clothing themselves with a new Christ identity, which includes a new group association, way of life, morality, and racial membership. As such, the transformation one undergoes by "putting on Christ" suggests that one's old customs, habits, and worshipped gods are no longer recognizable with the new life in Christ.

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