



COLOSSIANS

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Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; Colossians 3:12

Paul has just given a list of categories where one in any category is no longer lifted above another in any other category. All are on an equal basis before God because of Christ. For this reason, Paul says, "Therefore." As all are on this same equal level in Christ, there should be a resulting understanding of this, which is followed through with an equal respect for all.

In confirmation of this, he says, "as the elect of God." In other words, any who have received Christ – whether Greek, Jew, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free – any such category, each person is one of the "elect of God." The idea of being elect signifies privilege. All have the same rights and benefits, and each is "holy and beloved." Charles Ellicott states, "The elect are 'holy,' consecrated to God in thought and life; and 'beloved,' accepted and sustained in their consecration by His love." As every person in Christ bears these traits, we are not to look down on any other who is in Christ.

Rather, we are to "put on tender mercies." Vincent's Word Studies call this "a heart of compassion." We are to be compassionate towards our fellow believers, not ignoring their needs because of some supposed difference which would otherwise lessen them in our eyes.

Likewise we are to put on "kindness." This is "the Spirit-produced goodness which meets the need and avoids human harshness" (HELPS Word-Studies).

Paul follows next with "humility." The believer is to be humble in spirit, not raising himself above others, but instead giving preference to others, submitting to them and their needs and desires.

After that he notes "meekness." It is the gentle and mild attitude where a person receives another with an open heart and an easy-going disposition.

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He finishes the verse with “longsuffering.” This is a trait which displays the willingness to put up with another despite their faults. It is patience without exasperation, and it is even allowing one to overlook the wrongs committed towards oneself by another.

Life application: Bearing the traits Paul notes in this verse takes time and effort, but it is right that we work on them because those who are in Christ are also the elect. We are not raised above them, and they are not raised above us. Rather we are equal as we stand in relation to one another. And so let us do our best to act in the manner we have been exhorted to act in these words.

...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. Colossians 3:13

This verse, which is a continuation of the thought from the previous verse, begins with, “bearing with one another.” The word indicates a purposeful endeavoring in our attitude. We should have an earnest desire to exert ourselves in love in order to “secure a thing not lightly obtained” (Albert Barnes). People can wear us out with their own pet peeves, insecurities, jealousies, and the like. In our walk, we should be willing to bear such things in love rather than breaking down and shooting forth darts of anger.

He then says, “forgiving one another.” Forgiveness is something we are exhorted to do because without forgiveness there is no harmony. And without harmony, a wall of division is built up which normally will affect more than just the two who are in disagreement. Small divisions which are left to fester can divide entire churches. Therefore, when someone offends another, and when the offender requests forgiveness for their offense, the offended is to grant that forgiveness. This will be built upon with the rest of the words of the verse.

Next Paul says, “...if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” God forgave us in Christ – completely and wholly – having canceled our debt through His sacrifices. There were no strings attached. The forgiveness is complete, it is eternal, and it was based upon a simple request for forgiveness of having offended God. This then is the standard. Our forgiveness is to resemble that which God has provided to us. It is to be complete and completely forgiven. When we are asked to provide it, we are to give it.

Having said that, this needs to be explained further. Far too often, this verse, among several others, are taken to unintended extremes because people do not think through what is being said. Eventually, someone will offend someone else, and then those around him will say, “You must forgive that person.” This is true, but only if the offender requests it. Forgiveness is not unconditional in Christ, and it would, therefore, be a greater standard than God expects of Himself to say that we must forgive everyone all the time.

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To say that forgiveness in Christ is unconditional would lead to the theology of universalism – everyone goes to heaven, and nobody goes to hell. This is absurd, and the Bible never teaches it. God’s condition for forgiveness is faith in the cross of Christ, receiving that for the lost soul – “Lord God, I am sorry for my sins. I ask that I be forgiven through the shed blood of Christ.” Whether those words are specifically stated or not, they are implied in what the cross of Christ signifies. All people, and all sins, are potentially forgiven in Christ. When we ask for that forgiveness, it is actually granted.

Some other examples of verses which are misused concerning forgiveness are -

1. Jesus on the cross said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). People will say, Jesus forgave them so you must too. First, Jesus didn’t forgive them, He asked the Father to. Secondly, the sin was unintentional (they know not what they do). Third, after Jesus’ ascension, Peter explained what occurred and said to these same people that they must repent or be destroyed and cut off – he even called them a “wicked generation.” Their destruction occurred 40 years later when Israel was destroyed and the Jews were dispersed, just as Jesus predicted. Forgiveness didn't come for the nation who rejected Christ.
2. “But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Matthew 6:15. This is taken entirely out of context as a stand-alone verse. The surrounding verses are about asking for forgiveness first. When we do, He does. And we are to do likewise when someone repents toward us.
3. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him” (Luke 17:3,4). In this verse, forgiveness clearly is based on repentance.
4. In a comparable passage in Matthew 18:35 people tend to only quote the forgiveness part – “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” However, the entire parable is based on one getting on one’s knees and first asking forgiveness.
5. “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:23). Pretty clear here. Though speaking to the apostles, Jesus’ apostolic followers could retain the sins of others and they were not forgiven.
6. When we say the Lord’s Prayer – “...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” we are acknowledging God as our forgiver and we are asking for that forgiveness. It therefore would logically be the same with those who “trespass against us.”

Life application: Context matters for proper doctrine, and doctrine matters for proper theology. Keep things in context.

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But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. Colossians 3:14

In the previous two verses, Paul has given a list of things which the believer is exhorted to do in order to be sound, well rounded Christians who accurately reflect the characteristics and traits of Christ. Now he places those things under one larger umbrella by stating, “But above all.” The words here give the idea of a garment which covers everything else and encloses it. Over all of the things he has said, we are to “put on love.” Love is the external, covering garment of all of the other things we are to wear (or “put on” as he said in verse 12).

The reason for covering all of the other exhortations with love is because it is, as he says, “the bond of perfection.” Love is what ties together all of the other virtues he has mentioned. The word translated as “perfection” carries the idea of a collective which results from a combination of other things. When kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, and the other virtues which Paul exhorts us to possess are tied together with love, then a perfection of the whole is the result.

Life application: If someone is kind to another person, but is kind in an unloving way, the kindness of the deed is lost. The same is true with any such otherwise noble trait. When love is lacking, there is a deficiency in it. Let us remember to be loving in all we do, letting it surround us as a garment of perfection.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Colossians 3:15

Paul had just implored his reader to “put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” Now, in addition to that, he says, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts.” In Philippians 4:7, he told the congregation that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” In order to have the peace of God, it is necessary to have a knowledge of what Christ has done, and of what He promises for us because of what He has done. When we possess that knowledge, we can then let it rule in our hearts.

The word Paul uses for “rule” is used just this once in Scripture. It means “to be an umpire,” or “to arbitrate.” We are to let the peace of God be the umpire of our actions. But again, we can only do this if we have a knowledge of what God has done, is doing, and will do for us.

Through reading and understanding Scripture, we can see the ultimate end which is promised to us. In this, if we can just keep our eyes on what we know lies ahead because of Christ, we should be able to obtain and live in this peace. The saints at Paul’s time only had the Old Testament Scriptures. Today we have the whole counsel of God. In reading the words of the Bible, and in holding fast to what is recorded there about what lies ahead for the redeemed,

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we truly can possess the peace of God, even in times of the greatest trials and struggles imaginable.

With this knowledge, and the peace that comes along with it, we can comfort one another. We can reassure those who are downtrodden, and we can remind them of the glory which lies ahead. It is to this peace of God, ruling in our hearts, that Paul says we “were called in one body.” We are called to possess a knowledge of the word, and then to share it with others. Paul’s noting of the “one body” is reminding us of the words of verse 11 where he cast aside all external distinctions and said that we are all of Christ equally. There should be no division in this one body because of these supposed differences.

In this state of knowledge and harmony with other believers, we are to “be thankful.” Knowing the good end which is promised for us, and knowing that we are not below any other believers, but that we possess the same promised blessings as they do, we are to rejoice and give thanks to God. Paul will next expand on this as he shares the means of accomplishing these things.

Life application: Christ has overcome the world. He has also promised that we who are in Him will also overcome the world. Truly then, why should we be overly despondent about what happens in this life. It is natural to mourn when sadness comes, but in our times of sadness, or other negative emotions, we should not let them get the best of us. Instead, we should be uplifted in Christ at all times because of the surety we possess.