

PREFACE

This week we continue the list of virtues we are to “put on” once we have “put off” the aforementioned sins. While it is true that the words Paul employs speak of putting off/on clothing, we must remember that these specifics are not individual articles of clothing, if we keep with that metaphor. That is, this is not like Ephesians 6, where the apostle itemizes the particulars of the “full armor of God” we are to strap on:

- breastplate = righteousness
- shoes = preparation of the gospel of peace
- shield = faith
- sword = word of God, etc.

In Colossians 3 we have but *one* article of clothing we are to put on once we have divested our persons of the itemized sins. Over the last few sessions we have made the case for that one article being Christ Himself. Time again throughout this letter Paul has emphasized not just the *centrality* of Christ, but the sufficiency of Christ. He is all we need, as he states in v11: “Christ is all and in all.”

So these virtues are not to be seen as individual articles of clothing we slip into. These individual virtues are part of the character of Christ; when we put on *Him*, we put on them—or perhaps more accurately, these are the virtues of Christ our Example which we should endeavor to emulate.

Read Colossians 3:12-14.**V13: FORBEARANCE AND FORGIVENESS**

The obvious question is, What is the difference between “patience” in v12, which is translated “longsuffering” in the KJVs—and “bearing with one another” in v13? Just this: patience is the attitude (**noun**), while forbearance and forgiveness are the behaviors reflecting that attitude (**verb**)—plus, they are two different Greek words.

For a passage that illustrates both words, beginning with *makrothymia* —patience, longsuffering—turn to the pastoral epistle of 2 Timothy. Here is Paul’s charge to the young pastor to “preach the word”—but note how Timothy must do this.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

Why is patience needed by the pastor—*any* pastor? Because not everyone “receives” the word at the same pace; not everyone “gets it” right away. The preacher may offer a perfectly reasonable, digestible explanation of the passage at hand, and some in the congregation understand it immediately. Others, however, may struggle with the understanding—perhaps even rejecting it before they eventually accept it. With these the pastor must exhibit patience as he helps them along toward the truth.

Just so we are to be patient with each other, waiting on and helping each other especially as we grow and mature in Christ at different speeds.

In v3, the word translated “endure” is the same Greek word that begins v13 in our Colossians passage—albeit in the negative.

Read 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

Here Paul describes those who cannot bear to hear the truth: they will not put up with anything uncomfortable; like whining, spoiled infants, they demand instead sweet-sounding Pablum that goes down easily.

The word translated “endure” in 2 Timothy and “bearing with” (one another) in Colossians 3 is

anechomai = middle from <G303> (ana) and <G2192> (echo); **to hold oneself up against, i.e. (figurative) put up with** : - bear with, **endure, forbear,** suffer.

So, in the context of 2 Timothy 4, if we were to switch it from the negative (“**will not endure**”) to the positive, those individuals *would* put up with sound doctrine, accepting that it is something necessary and, even if uncomfortable at times, profitable. [[Now back to Colossians.](#)]

The setting in Colossians is not preacher to congregant (as in 2 Timothy), but believer to believer: *anechomai allelon* (a-lay'-lone), bearing with one another. I love the way Robertson puts it in his word studies: “holding yourselves back from one another”—a picture of self-restraint in the face of a natural, instinctive desire to mix it up.

Douglas Moo points out that even though this is presented in a positive, affirming light, it still has the idea of “a somewhat grudging willingness to ‘put up with’ difficult circumstances or people.” In Matthew 17:17 Jesus said, “You unbelieving and perverted generation... How long shall I **put up** with you?” Then Moo goes on to say,

While not requiring the greatest display of Christian kindness and patience, “bearing with one another” is nevertheless a first and necessary step in establishing community. The demand acknowledges that every Christian fellowship is made up of all kinds of people and that we will accordingly sometimes find ourselves in close fellowship with people who are very different than we are. For the sake of maintaining community, we will sometimes have to “put up with” people with whom we would not normally choose to associate.

Speaking for myself, the best tool at my disposal for learning this virtue is to remind myself of all the people who likewise find it a challenge to “put up with” *me*.

The next phrase, however, makes it clear that grudgingly putting up with the others is not the end of it, but just the beginning. It would be a pretty sour congregation that stopped at just *enduring* each other. So immediately after the call to “bear with one another” is the call to “*forgive* each other.”

and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone:

ESV: and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other;

Read Matthew 18:21-22.

What follows is a parable about a king who forgives the huge debt of one of his slaves (10,000 talents—the equivalent of 150,000 years' wages for a slave), and how that forgiven slave then turns around and refuses to forgive a fellow slave for his debt to him of a relative pittance (100 denarii—the equivalent of 100 days' wages for a slave).

Here is how Jesus concludes the parable:

Read Matthew 18:32-35.

That passage, along with the way Jesus follows up his model prayer in Matthew 6—
"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matthew 6:14-15)

—these have always sent a chill down my spine. Is it really true I am not forgiven by God just because I may have failed to forgive someone else at some point in my life? But I was encouraged by this perspective from F. F. Bruce:

In His teaching, [Jesus] made it clear that those who seek the forgiveness of God must be ready to forgive others. *Not that human forgiveness is a work that earns the divine forgiveness—the initiative in forgiveness lies with God—but an unforgiving spirit is an effective barrier to the reception of His forgiveness.* (emphasis added)

Remember how Jesus closed that parable in Matthew 18:

...if each of you does not forgive his brother **from your heart.**" (emphasis added)

Here's the picture: At all times we are encompassed by the mercy of God; His grace and forgiveness never cease. But when we have a cold, unforgiving heart toward a brother or sister, we effectively block the Lord's forgiveness. It is still there, but we do not experience it because of the hardness of our own heart. [[back to Colossians](#)]

just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Paul then expands on this forgiveness of others that should be a part of our lives. Let's focus on the adverb *kathos* (kath-ocē), translated "just as," or "even as." We can interpret this two ways: How and Why.

How

The strongest interpretation is that we should forgive others *in the same manner* or way that the Lord forgives. The word for forgiveness in this verse is *charizomai*, which "conveys the idea that forgiving others is an act of grace, freely offered, and often not deserved" (Moo). So *how* does Christ forgive?

- He does so completely, without caveats;
- He does so immediately, without hesitation;
- He does so eternally, without taking it back.

Why

Along with *how* we are to forgive, we could also include *why* we are to forgive. Think back to that parable: Why should that slave have forgiven his fellow slave? If for no other reason, because *he* had been forgiven by his master for a far worse offense. Remember the comparison: the first slave owed an amount equal to the wages of 150,000 years; the second slave owed an amount equal to the wages of 100 *days*.

No complaint or quarrel we might have against someone else, no offense they might have committed against us, can come anywhere close to our offense against holy God. What we deserve—even now, today—is His eternal wrath. What we got instead was His only Son nailed to a cross. We have been graciously forgiven by our Master for despicable sin; because of that, how dare we ever fail to forgive the minuscule slights of a brother or sister?

v14: LOVE

Here is a rhetorical brain-teaser: Would there have been true atonement for the sins of mankind if Jesus had gone through His crucifixion absent any feeling for mankind—just going through the motions or mechanics of it? That is,

Would Christ's sacrificial death have been effective without love?

Read v14.

Even though vv12-13 speak of person-to-person relationships in the body of Christ, the perfection or unity or harmony spoken of in v14 does not refer to the people of the church, but to the virtues listed above (vv12-13).

If we revert back to the clothing metaphor—i.e., put on as a garment, a heart of compassion; put on as a garment, kindness; etc.—then what v14 is saying is, after all those have been put on, “over all these virtues put on love,” as the NIV translates it.

beyond^{nasb}, **above**^{kjvs}, **over**^{niv, esv} = *epi* (ep-ee') = a primary preposition properly meaning **superimposition** (of time, place, order, etc.), as a relation of distribution [with the genitive], i.e. **over, upon**, etc.; of rest (with the dative) at, **on**, etc.; ...

[**epidermis = the topmost layer of skin, over everything else**]

The picture is one of love being the essential completing layer to the ensemble of virtues—“perfection” = completeness.

But if we remain with the concept we've been running with for this passage—that these are all virtues of Christ; *He* is the one we have put on, so when we put Him on, we are also putting on these virtues—then it is *Christ's* love that completes this package of virtues. When we put on Christ, we put on His love—more than that, we *abide in* His love:

“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.” (John 15:9)

My earlier brain-teaser is moot, for Ephesians 5:2 tells us that Jesus indeed went to the cross out of love.

Read Ephesians 5:1-2.