

LESSON 10

Love in Relationships

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

— Colossians 3:12-14

We love for the long haul when we put on Christ's character toward one another every day, with love fastened over all the rest, because we have already been clothed with Him.

Introduction

WHAT DOES LOVE LOOK LIKE OVER THE LONG HAUL? Most of us can manage a kind week. The test comes in the fifth year with the same brother in the same pew, when his habits are no longer new and neither are yours.

Colossians 3 speaks to that. Lesson 9 closed with an assignment: read Colossians 3:1-17 and notice how often Paul talks about taking something off and putting something on. *Put to death* (3:5). *Put away* (3:8). *You have put off the old self* (3:9) *and have put on the new self* (3:10). *Put on compassion* (3:12). *Above all, put on love* (3:14).⁵⁴ In this chapter the Christian life is a change of clothes, and you wear the new ones around other people.

This lesson follows Paul through the identity beneath our new garments (3:1-11), the five garments (3:12), what they do when a brother gives offense (3:13-14), and what keeps us dressed (3:15-17). Then it goes to Golgotha, where soldiers divided the Lord's clothes while He prayed for them.

Colossians 3:1-11 – Raised, Then Dressed

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above. The if carries no doubt. The Colossians were buried with him in baptism, and in it they were also raised with him (2:12).

You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (3:3). Before a single command about how they treat one another, Paul settles who they are.

The old clothes come off first: five sins of desire in verse 5, and five sins of temper and tongue in verse 8, *anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language*. Then the whole outfit. *You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self* (3:9-10).

The new self is still being fitted: *You are being renewed in knowledge*, present tense, with God doing the renewing.

Verse 11 explains why any of this matters in a congregation. *In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all*. Every pair was a wall in that world. Race divided people, and so did religion, culture, and class. The Scythian was the Greek world's picture of the uncivilized man, and the slave had no standing at all.⁵⁵

Those are the people the Colossians are dressing for in verse 12. The people you're asked to be patient with are often people you'd never have picked.

Colossians 3:12 – What God's Chosen Wear

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved. Paul names the people before he names the clothes, and the names are borrowed. *Chosen, holy, and loved* were Israel's titles (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Now they rest on Gentiles in a small town in the Lycus Valley.

Each title belonged to Christ first. He is *the Son he loves* (1:13), and these believers are holy and dearly loved because they are in Him.⁵⁶ Here is the quarter's thread again. Love is given before it is commanded. Before Paul tells you to love, he reminds you that you're *dearly loved*.

Then come the five garments.⁵⁷

Compassion is literally *a heart of compassion*, the inward parts where one person feels another's pain. Philippians 2:1 uses the same pair of words, *affection and mercy*, and we saw them in Lesson 8 among the things God had already given.

Kindness is the word Paul used in Titus 3:4 for what appeared in Christ, *the kindness of God our Savior*.

Humility has an edge in this letter. Paul has used the word twice already, both times for a counterfeit. The false teachers at Colossae made a show of self-denial (2:18), and Paul called their rules a *false humility* (2:23). That kind of humility wants to be noticed. The humility of verse 12 is aimed at another person.

Gentleness is the word we saw in Lesson 6 at Galatians 6:1, the gentleness that restores a fallen brother.

Patience is long-temperedness, a slow fuse (compare 1:11). By the fifth year, you'll need it more than any of the others.

Every one of the five faces another person. Paul's own description of love opens with two of them: *Love is patient, love is kind* (1 Corinthians 13:4).

Colossians 3:13-14 – Bearing, Forgiving, and the Bond

Verse 13 shows what the garments do when someone gives offense. *Bearing with* means to hold up under, to put up with. Paul used it in the quarter's anchor chapter, *bearing with one another in love* (Ephesians 4:2). It covers the brother who has done nothing wrong and still wears on you. Bearing with him means choosing to stay in the family with him, year after year.

Forgiving covers the brother who has done something wrong. It's the verb we saw in Lesson 1 at Ephesians 4:32, built on *charis*, grace. To forgive is to give grace to someone who owes you.⁵⁸

If anyone has a grievance against another. Paul expects grievances, and real ones. The word means an actual cause for complaint, and he still says to forgive.

Then the measure. *Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.* Paul has already shown how the Lord did it. *He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross* (2:14). If you remember what was written on your own certificate, it's hard to keep a ledger on your brother.

Above all, put on love. Paul's Greek has no verb here, only *over all these, love*. The picture is of a garment worn over everything else, or a sash that pulls the whole outfit together. Without it the other five hang loose. Compassion fades, and patience turns into a quiet grudge.

Which is the perfect bond of unity. *Bond* is the word Paul used a chapter earlier for the ligaments that hold a body together (2:19). It's the same picture as the quarter's anchor verse, Ephesians 4:16.⁵⁹ Any congregation that's lasted forty years has had plenty of grievances, and love is what held it together.

Colossians 3:15-17 – Peace, Word, and Thanks

And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. *Rule* comes from the games. It named the official who settled disputes at the contest, the umpire. In chapter 2 Paul warned, *Let no one condemn you* (2:18), using a compound of the same word.⁶⁰ The false teachers wanted to referee the Colossians. Paul gives that job to the peace of Christ.

You were called to that peace *in one body*. When you disagree with a brother, keeping Christ's peace between you matters far more than winning the point.

Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you. The word moves into the congregation and stays. It shows up in *teaching and admonishing one another*, the two verbs Paul used for his own ministry in 1:28. The apostle's work becomes the whole church's work. It shows up in singing too, *singing to God with gratitude in your hearts*. It's hard to stay bitter at a brother when you've just heard him singing the same hymn.

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. That covers every relationship you have, and all of it gets done in His name.

Now count the thanks. *Be thankful* (3:15). *With gratitude* (3:16). *Giving thanks* (3:17). Every one is built on *charis*, as we saw in Lesson 7.⁶¹

Then Paul turns straight to the home: wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters (3:18-4:1), with the same words again in the middle, *Whatever you do* (3:23). Paul expects you to wear the clothes of verse 12 at home too.

Looking to Christ

Luke 23 shows the Lord wearing the garments of Colossians 3:12 on the day He was stripped of His own clothes.

At the place called The Skull, Luke sets two things side by side in one verse. *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing."* *And they divided his clothes and cast lots* (23:34).⁶² The soldiers were gambling for His garments while He prayed for them. That's how the Lord forgave, and Paul says, *so you are also to forgive*.

The leaders scoffed: *He saved others; let him save himself if this is God's Messiah, the Chosen One!* (23:35). The title Paul handed the Colossians was first thrown at Jesus as an insult. He was the Chosen One, and He stayed on the cross anyway.

One criminal joined the mockery. The other asked, *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.* He had nothing to offer, and the Lord was kind to him: *Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise* (23:42-43).

4. *Chosen, holy, and dearly loved* were true of Christ before they were true of the church. How does knowing you're dearly loved change the way you love a difficult brother or sister?
5. Every garment in 3:12 faces another person. Which one comes hardest for you, and with whom?
6. Paul used the word for humility twice in chapter 2 for a counterfeit. How can you tell the difference between humility worn to be noticed and humility worn to serve?
7. What is the difference between bearing with someone and forgiving someone? Give an example of each from everyday church life.
8. Read Colossians 2:13-14. How does remembering your own *certificate of debt* affect the way you handle a grievance against someone else?
9. The peace of Christ is to act as umpire in a church *called in one body* (3:15). How would that change the way a disagreement in this congregation gets settled?

10. Read Luke 23:33-43 and John 19:25-27. Which garments of Colossians 3:12 do you see the Lord wearing at the cross? What would it look like for you to wear one of them this week?

Looking Ahead

Lesson 11 – Love That Endures, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Colossians 3 dressed God's chosen and dearly loved people for the ordinary week. The next lesson shows the same kind of people holding on when times get unsettling. Rumors had shaken the Thessalonians, and Paul answers with two of the words from Colossians 3:12, loved and chosen. *But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation*, 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Notice that thanksgiving comes first again. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 before class, and watch how much of the paragraph describes what God has already done before Paul tells the church to *stand firm* in verse 15.

⁵⁴ The verbs are *nekrōsate*, “put to death” (3:5); *apothesthe*, “put away” (3:8), BDAG, s.v. ἀποτίθημι, the verb of Ephesians 4:22 and 4:25; *apekdysamenoi*, “having put off” (3:9), BDAG, s.v. ἀπεκδύομαι, found elsewhere in the New Testament only at Colossians 2:15, where Christ disarmed the rulers and authorities; and *endysamenoi*, “having put on” (3:10), with *endysasthe*, “put on” (3:12), BDAG, s.v. ἐνδύω. Verse 14 has no verb of its own. Paul writes *epi pasin de toutois tēn agapēn*, “over all these, love,” and the CSB supplies *put on* from verse 12. The same verb *endyō* stands behind *clothed* at Galatians 3:27.

⁵⁵ *Skythēs*, “Scythian,” BDAG, s.v. Σκύθης, a people from the steppes north of the Black Sea whom Greek writers treated as the extreme of barbarism. Colossians 3:11 is the only place the New Testament names them. Compare the shorter list at Galatians 3:28.

⁵⁶ *Eklektoi*, “chosen,” BDAG, s.v. ἐκλεκτός; *hēgapēmenoi*, “loved,” the perfect passive participle of *agapaō*. The same participle describes the Thessalonians at 2 Thessalonians 2:13, *brothers and sisters loved by the Lord*, the text of Lesson 11. At Luke 23:35 the leaders mock Jesus as *ho eklektos*, *the Chosen One*. Colossians 1:13 reads literally “the Son of his love.” Deuteronomy 7:6-8 gives Israel all three: a holy people, chosen, and loved.

⁵⁷ *Compassion* is *splanchna oiktirmou*, literally “inward parts of compassion,” BDAG, s.v. σπλάγχνον and οἰκτιρμός; the same two nouns stand together at Philippians 2:1, *affection and mercy*. *Kindness* is *chrēstotēs*, BDAG, s.v. χρηστότης, the word of Titus 3:4. *Humility* is *tapeinophrosynē*, BDAG, s.v. ταπεινοφροσύνη, which Colossians uses three times: at 2:18, where the CSB renders it *ascetic practices*; at 2:23, *false humility*; and at 3:12. *Gentleness* is *prautēs*, BDAG, s.v. πραΰτης, the word of Galatians 6:1; its adjective *praus* is Jesus's word for Himself at Matthew 11:29. *Patience* is *makrothymia*, BDAG, s.v. μακροθυμία, also at Colossians 1:11. At 1 Corinthians 13:4 the first two verbs, *makrothymeī* and *chrēsteuetai*, are the verb forms of *makrothymia* and *chrēstotēs*.

⁵⁸ *Bearing with* is *anechomenoi*, from *anechō*, “to bear with, endure, put up with,” BDAG, s.v. ἀνέχω, the verb of Ephesians 4:2. *Forgiving* is *charizomenoi*, from *charizomai*, BDAG, s.v. χαρίζομαι, the verb of Ephesians 4:32 and of Colossians 2:13, where

God forgave us all our trespasses. Grievance is momphē, “blame, cause for complaint,” BDAG, s.v. μομφή, found in the New Testament only at Colossians 3:13. Some manuscripts read *Christ* in place of *the Lord* in 3:13.

⁵⁹ *Syndesmos*, “that which binds together, bond, ligament,” BDAG, s.v. σύνδεσμος. It occurs four times in the New Testament: Acts 8:23; Ephesians 4:3 (*the bond of peace*); Colossians 2:19 (*ligaments*); and Colossians 3:14. Ephesians 4:16 uses a different word for ligament, *haphē*. *Perfect* translates *teleiōtēs*, “perfection, completeness,” BDAG, s.v. τελειότης, found elsewhere in the New Testament only at Hebrews 6:1.

⁶⁰ *Brabeuō*, “to be in control, rule,” originally of the judge who awarded the prize at the games, BDAG, s.v. βραβεύω. Colossians 3:15 is its only New Testament occurrence. The compound *katabrabeuō*, “to decide against, rob of a prize,” BDAG, s.v. καταβραβεύω, occurs only at 2:18, where the CSB margin offers *disqualify*. Paul uses the noun *brabeion*, “prize,” at 1 Corinthians 9:24 and Philippians 3:14.

⁶¹ *Eucharistoi*, “thankful” (3:15), BDAG, s.v. εὐχάριστος, its only New Testament occurrence; *en tē chariti*, “with gratitude,” literally “in grace” (3:16); and *eucharistountes*, “giving thanks” (3:17). See Lesson 7, endnote 35. *Teaching and admonishing* (*didaskontes kai nouthetountes*) repeats the two verbs of 1:28, *warning and teaching*, in reverse order.

⁶² Some early manuscripts omit Jesus’s prayer in Luke 23:34, and the CSB notes this in its margin while printing the prayer in the text. Luke’s verb is *aphiēmi*, his ordinary word for forgiveness, a different word from *charizomai* in Colossians 3:13.