

“Bringing Virtue to Life”

Part 1

Colossians 3:12–17

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THE NATURE OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

Progressive Sanctification

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graph TD; A[Progressive Sanctification] --> B[Separation from sin]; A --> C[Consecration to God]; B --> D["Mortification  
(\"Put off\")  
Colossians 3:5-11"]; C --> E["Vivification  
(\"Put on\")  
Colossians 3:12-17"];
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Separation from sin

Mortification
("Put off")

Colossians 3:5-11

Consecration to God

Vivification
("Put on")

Colossians 3:12-17

COLOSSIANS 3:12–17

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS 3:12–17

- Having commanded us to mortify sin (3:5–11) in response to our union with Christ (3:1–4), Paul then describes the virtues that we must nurture in their place (3:12–17).

I. **The Christian's Practical Virtues (vv. 12–13)**

II. **The Christian's Comprehensive Virtue (v. 14)**

III. **The Christian's Internal Virtues (vv. 15–16)**

IV. **The Christian's Vertical Virtue (v. 17)**

**BRINGING
VIRTUE
TO LIFE**

I. The Christian's Practical Virtues (3:12–13)

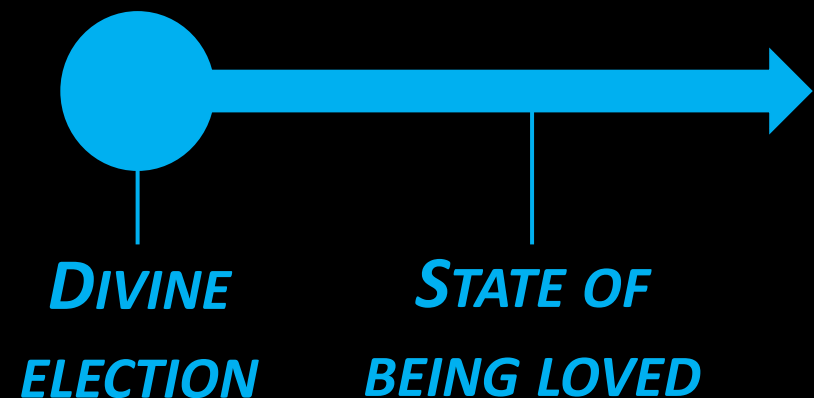
“So, **as those who have been chosen of God**, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

A. The Basis of the Command (v. 12a)

- “As those who have been chosen of God” – “as elect of God” – the phrase emphasizes two things: (1) the unique status of believers (they have been chosen *from* mankind); (2) the sovereign initiative of *God* (God—not believers—is responsible for this status).
- The instructions are only doable by those saved by sovereign grace.

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, **holy** and **beloved**, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

- “**Holy**” – “Holy ones,” “saints” (see 1:2, 4, 12, 26); refers to those whom God has consecrated to Himself (*positional sanctification*); this status is the *result* of being “chosen of God” (see Ephesians 1:4).
- “**Beloved**” – the term describes an ongoing state *of being loved* that resulted from a definitive act; God is the assumed subject; this act is His act of *choosing* (see 2 Thess 2:13).



“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on** a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

B. The Substance of the Command (v. 12b)

- “Put on” – literally, “clothe yourselves!”—here used figuratively.
- Paul already used the verb in v. 10 to refer to the “putting on” of “the new man” (new nature) that *happened decisively* at regeneration.
- Now he uses the same verb to describe the behaviors that *still need* to be put on that are consistent with that new nature.



“We are to become in experience what we have been declared to be in fact.”

—John Kitchen, *Colossians & Philemon*, 258

We are to become in practice what we are already in nature.



“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

C. The Focus of the Command (v. 12b)

- Paul lists five *Christian virtues* that must be “put on”; these contrast the sets of five *fleshly vices* listed in verses 5 and 8.
- These virtues are “the garments of the renewed soul” (Alexander McLaren), particularly with respect to our relationships with others.



“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

1) “A heart of compassion” – literally, “bowels of compassion.”

For the Greeks, the innermost body parts (“bowels”) were considered the seat of emotions, especially love; we render this as **“heart.”**

“Compassion” – “a display of concern over another’s misfortune”; the disposition of showing mercy to those who suffer, and bringing relief.

God is a God of *mercy/compassion* (e.g., 2 Cor 1:3); Jesus epitomized *compassion* (e.g., Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34; Luke 7:13).

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

2) “Kindness” – “the quality of being helpful or beneficial.”

“It is the proper Christian temper in our relation to others, that goodness of heart that makes us act rightly in dealings with each other”
(A. T. Robertson, *Paul and the Intellectuals*, 107).

God is a God of *kindness* (e.g., Luke 6:35; Rom 2:4; Eph 2:7); Jesus epitomized *kindness* (e.g., Titus 3:4); and the Holy Spirit produces *kindness* (Gal 5:22).

“Kindness is a readiness to do good, to help, to relieve burdens, to be useful, to serve, to be tender, and to be sympathetic to others. It has been said, ‘Kindness is love in work clothes.’”

—Alexander Strauch, *Leading with Love*, 44



“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, **humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”**

3) “Humility” – “one’s low estimate of oneself”; the practice of regarding another as more important than yourself (Phil 2:3); the art of self-forgetfulness.

The same word is used to describe “self-abasement” in Colossians 2:18, 23—a *fake* humility that does things *to self for show* (the humble-brag).

Jesus epitomized *humility* (e.g., Matt 11:29; Phil 2:8).



“When the corn is nearly ripe it bows the head and stoops lower than when it was green. When the people of God are near ripe for heaven, they grow more humble and self-denying.”

—John Flavel

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, **gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”**

4) “Gentleness” –“the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance”; a difficult term to translate, since it describes so much (see Gal 6:1; Eph 4:1–2; 2 Tim 2:24–25; Titus 3:1–2; James 3:13).

“It may be best understood by its contrast to its opposites: roughness, bad temper, sudden anger, brusqueness” (George Knight).

Jesus epitomized *gentleness* (e.g., Matt 11:29; 2 Cor 10:1); the Holy Spirit produces *gentleness* (e.g., Gal 5:23).

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and **patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”**

5) “Patience” – “the state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome.”

This virtue relates specifically to remaining “tranquil” while awaiting repentance and change in others (see 1 Cor 13:4; Eph 4:1–2; 1 Thess 5:14).

God is a God of *patience* (e.g., Rom 2:4; 1 Tim 1:16); the Holy Spirit produces *patience* (Gal 5:22).

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

D. The Application of the Command (v. 13)

- Verse 13 provides a practical look at how these five virtues (v. 12a) are exercised in everyday life.
- In particular, Paul applies them to two common scenarios:
 - (a) dealing with others *who have differences with us*; and
 - (b) dealing with others *who have sinned against us*.

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

- 1) “Bearing with one another”** – translated as “showing tolerance for one another” in Ephesians 4:2; Chrysostom describes it as “passing things over”; an essential ingredient for Christian community (see Col 3:11).

“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” (Douglas Moo, *Colossians*, 279).

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and **forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

2) “Forgiving each other” – root idea: *grace* (χάρις, *charis*); “to show oneself *gracious* by forgiving wrongdoing.”

“Forgiveness” – a decision to stop counting the sin against the offending person and to cease from feeling offended (even if the sin is remembered).



The verb “conveys the idea that forgiving others is an act of grace, freely offered, often not ‘deserved’” (Moo, *Colossians*, 279).

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

“Whoever has a complaint against anyone” – notice the unqualified nature of the instruction: “whoever” and “anyone.”

“Complaint” = “a fault found,” “an offense taken,” “a payment demanded.”

Proverbs 19:11 – “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.”

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; **just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.**”

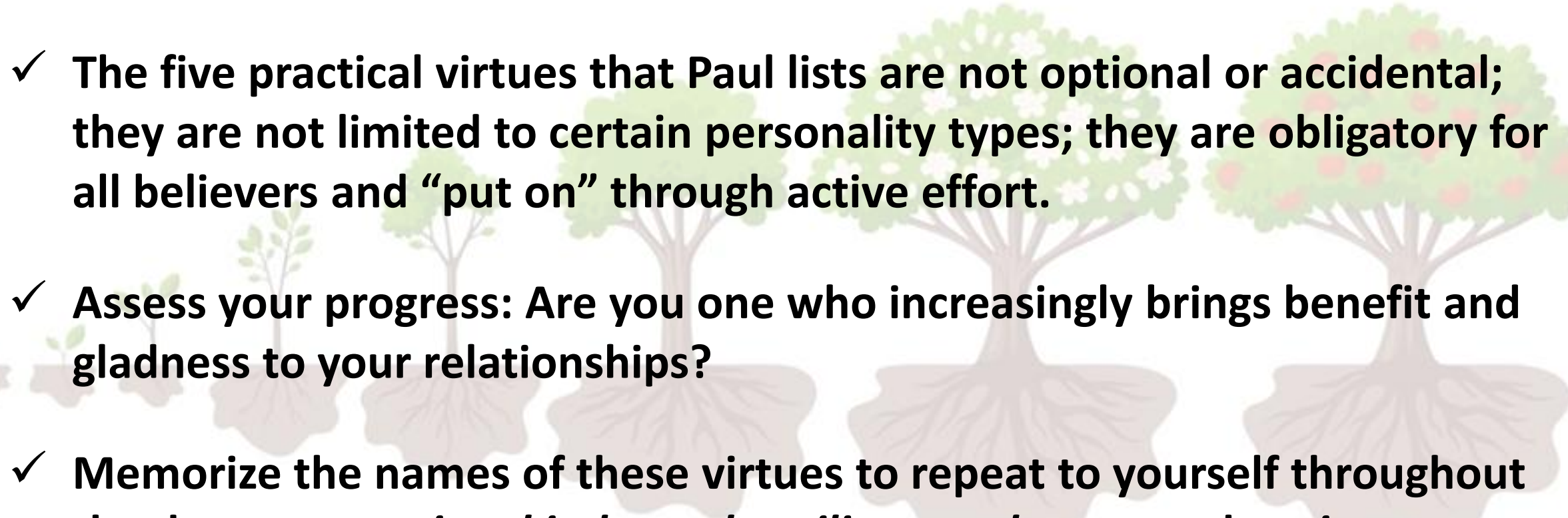
“**Just as the Lord forgave you**” – knowing the extreme difficulty of this instruction, Paul introduces a *standard for comparison*.

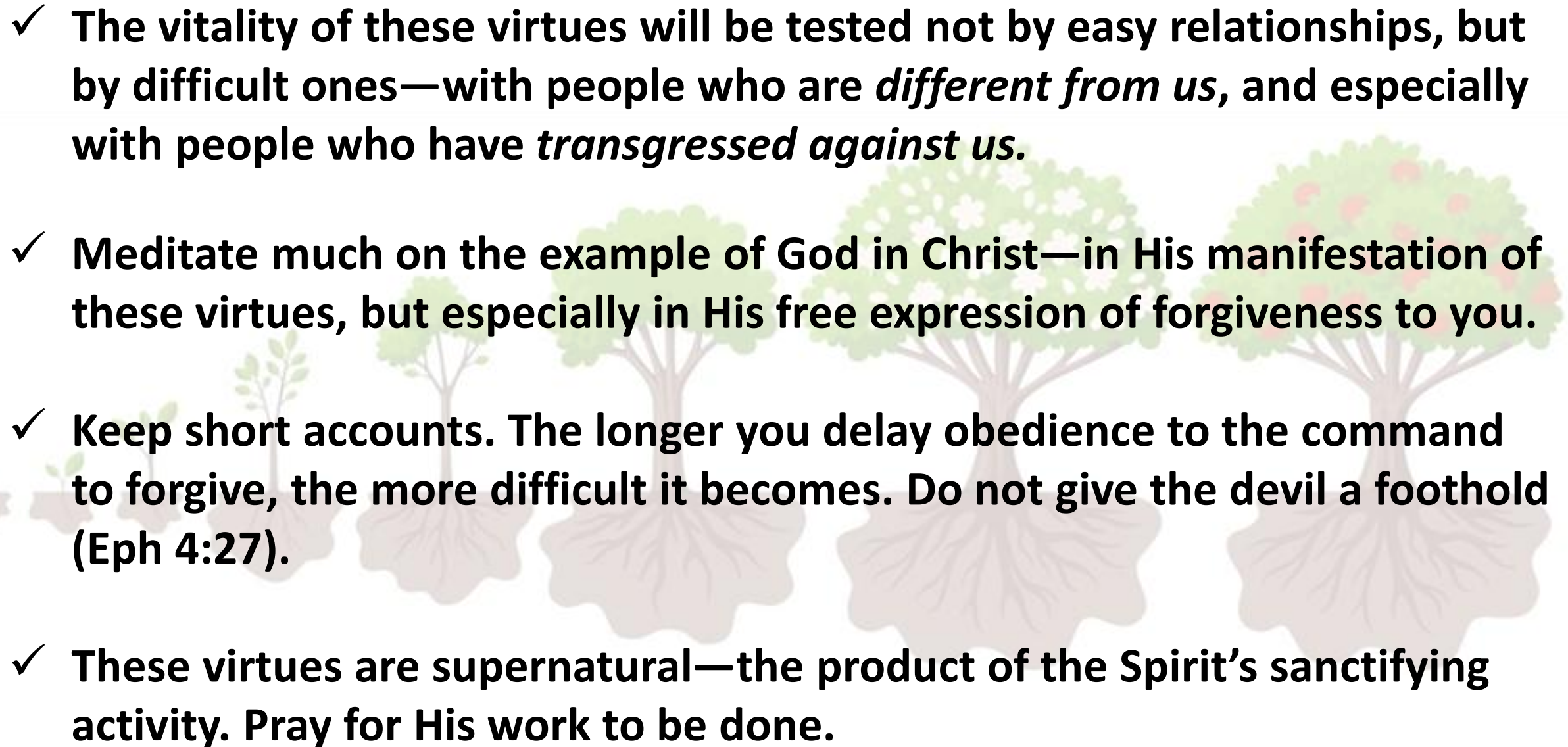
Paul’s logic? You have received the far greater expression of forgiveness than you possibly need to extend to others.

- **Colossians 2:13** – “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.”

“**So also should you**” – therefore, imitate the standard (also Eph 4:32).

THE CHRISTIAN'S STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

- ✓ Remember who you who you now are, and that by God's doing.
 - ✓ The five practical virtues that Paul lists are not optional or accidental; they are not limited to certain personality types; they are obligatory for all believers and "put on" through active effort.
 - ✓ Assess your progress: Are you one who increasingly brings benefit and gladness to your relationships?
 - ✓ Memorize the names of these virtues to repeat to yourself throughout the day: *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*
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- The background features a row of five stylized trees. Each tree has a thick, brown trunk and a dense canopy of green leaves. The roots of each tree are exposed and spread out on the ground, which is depicted as a light brown, textured surface. The trees increase in size from left to right. The overall style is soft and illustrative.
- ✓ **The vitality of these virtues will be tested not by easy relationships, but by difficult ones—with people who are *different from us*, and especially with people who have *transgressed against us*.**
 - ✓ **Meditate much on the example of God in Christ—in His manifestation of these virtues, but especially in His free expression of forgiveness to you.**
 - ✓ **Keep short accounts. The longer you delay obedience to the command to forgive, the more difficult it becomes. Do not give the devil a foothold (Eph 4:27).**
 - ✓ **These virtues are supernatural—the product of the Spirit’s sanctifying activity. Pray for His work to be done.**