

Main Idea: According to Colossians 3:12-14, if we’re going to be families that forgive, and in so doing put Christ on display in our families, we need to clothe ourselves with three God-centered essentials.

- I. We must clothe ourselves with God-centered attitudes (12).
 - A. We need to see ourselves as God sees us.
 1. We are the elect of God.
 2. We are holy ones.
 3. We are people loved by God.
 - B. We need to relate to others as God does.
 - II. We must clothe ourselves with God-centered actions (13).
 - A. We’re to bear with each other.
 - B. We’re to forgive each other.
 1. Here’s what forgiveness *isn’t*.
 - It’s not feeling something.
 - It’s not forgetting something.
 2. Here’s what forgiveness *is*.
 - It’s a declaration.
 - It’s a promise.
 - It’s a choice to do with others what God did with us.
 - III. We must clothe ourselves with a God-centered aim (14).
 - A. We should strive to be known as people who love.
 1. It’s a prerequisite for unity.
 2. It’s an evidence of maturity.
 - B. We should settle for nothing less.
- Make It Personal: Ask yourself two important questions...
1. Is there anyone I’m not treating as the Lord treated me?
 2. Is there anyone I’m failing to love as the Lord loved me?

We’re learning from Colossians 3 how to put Christ on display in our homes this month. We learned two weeks ago that we do it, first, by having right priorities (that’s verses 1-4). I gave you a little grid to help you assess your priorities biblically. The Bible calls us to seek to be God’s kind of person, partner, parent, parishioner, provider, and player.

Last week we learned that if we’re going to put Christ on display, we must communicate in ways that please Him. Specifically, we saw from verses 5-11 that if we want to create a climate for good communication in our families, we need to eliminate three types of sins—moral sins (5-7), interpersonal sins (8), and conversational sins (9-11).

Next week, we’ll address another essential, that of fulfilling biblical family roles. In verses 15-21, Paul gives practical counsel to help us portray our commitment to biblical authority in the way we relate to each other in the home.

But first, this morning we’ll find out there’s yet another essential, and that’s being a family that forgives. Dear friends, know this. When we refuse to forgive, Christ is not seen clearly. That’s true in our homes. It’s true in our church. It’s true in our friendships, and where we work. When we choose to forgive, we’re putting the splendor

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of Christ on display. When we don't, we're hiding Him, or worse, casting poor light on Him.

I need to give a disclaimer. This message is not for you *if* one of two things is true. One, if you are a perfect person and you live with perfect people, then you don't need this message, for perfect people never need to ask for or grant forgiveness. So if you're perfect, you can tune out what you're about to hear.

Secondly, this study is not for you if you happen to live on a deserted island by yourself, for it takes two people to produce interpersonal sin. So if you happen to live in total isolation from other people, this message probably isn't for you (I say *probably* because the reason you're isolated may be due to an unresolved sin issue).

But if you're living in a context where there are other people, and if you and the people around you are not perfect, then you will without question need what you're about to hear from Colossians 3, and so will I.

Let's be honest. We are sinners. Granted, if we've repented and believed in Jesus Christ we've been saved by God's grace from the penalty of our sins, but we're still sinners. So how can we, saved sinners that we are, have families that honor Christ? We can *if and only if* we are families that forgive.

How do we do that? That's what we're about to see from God's Word. Let me read today's text, Colossians 3:12-14, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

According to Colossians 3:12-14, if we're going to be families that forgive, and in so doing put Christ on display in our families, we need to clothe ourselves with three God-centered essentials.

I. We must clothe ourselves with God-centered attitudes (12).

Some wardrobes are simply not appropriate for certain people in certain situations, are they? On July 23, 1983, at around 1:00 in the afternoon, a wardrobe of a pair of cut off shorts and a pull over t-shirt would have been inappropriate for me. Why? Because I was standing at the altar in front of a church house with my bride, Sherry!

Guys, if you were going to change the oil in your car tomorrow, a suit and tie wouldn't be appropriate. You'd want to put on appropriate attire for the occasion, right? Young ladies, if you went to the prom this weekend, my guess is that you didn't wear your blue jeans and flip flops. Why not? For the same reason.

What wardrobe is appropriate for a Christian and for a Christian family? Well, in our text, Paul uses a clothing illustration. In verses 5-11 he tells us what's inappropriate, and in verses 12-14 what's appropriate. He tells us to "put off" certain vices, and then to "put on" certain virtues.

In today's study, we're in the "put on" section. What are we to put on first? According to verse 12, we need to put on certain God-centered heart attitudes. How do we do that? It involves two steps.

A. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. We need to develop a biblical view of ourselves and others if we're going to have proper attitudes.

Quite frankly, if you are struggling to forgive someone, the problem likely begins right here, with a refusal to see yourself and the other person as God sees you. How does God see us? If we are Christians, there are three things true of us according to His Word.

1. *We are the elect of God.* We are "God's chosen people." The Greek word is *eklektoi*, hence, the elect of God. We are people God chose. We'll develop that more fully momentarily.

2. *We are holy ones.* Though translated by the singular "holy" in both the NIV and the KJV, the Greek term is actually plural (*hagioi*). The same word was used in 1:2 and translated "saints" (in the KJV). It means to be set apart.

The opposite of holy is "common." A believer is a person whom God has set apart for sacred purposes. We're no longer "common," that is, like the rest of the world. We've been "sanctified" (a related term) and now belong to God.

3. *We are people loved by God.* Dearly loved (NIV). Beloved (KJV). We are people who *are loved*, and the One who loves us is none other than God Himself! We used to be His enemies, Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us, but God loved us. We once were without strength and ungodly (Rom. 5:6-8), but "God demonstrated His own love for us" and "Christ died for us."

That's who we are. We are the elect of God, holy ones, people whom God loves. In the Old Testament, these terms depicted Israel. Now Paul applies them to the Church.

Let that sink in. Is that how you view your family and church family members? If we're going to have proper relationships with each other, we need to learn to see each other as God does. So if we're in Christ, then we are God's chosen people. That truth is powerful, and it's foundational to solid interpersonal relationships.

The doctrine of "election" is not some peripheral, take-it-or-leave-it notion in the Bible. According to Paul, it's at the heart of a biblical understanding of who we are. In fact, the entire flow of Scripture exalts God for His electing love.

In Genesis 12, God chose a pagan man named Abraham and said, "I'm going to bless you and your descendants." And God did.

Then in Genesis 25, God chose one of Abraham's grandson's, Jacob, not Esau, and promised to bless his family. And in spite of Jacob's deceit, God blessed him and turned his twelve sons into a nation, a chosen nation, Israel. The prophet Isaiah referred to Israel as God's "elect" (or "chosen ones," 45:4; 65:9, 22).¹

What's more, according to Genesis 49:10, God chose one tribe out of the twelve, the tribe of Judah. And eventually God chose one descendent of Judah, Jesus, to be the Messiah. In Isaiah 42:1, God refers to the Messiah as "mine elect in whom my soul delighteth" (KJV).

So in the Bible, election is a marvelous theme. God chose a man (Abraham), then He chose a family (Jacob's), which became His chosen nation (Israel), out of which He chose one tribe (Judah) to be ancestor of the ultimate chosen one, Jesus.

But there's more. The New Testament indicates that God has chosen a special people to be a love gift for His chosen Son. It's the Church. From eternity past, the Father

¹Deuteronomy 7:7-8 says, "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery..."

selected a bride for His Son. Jesus mentioned this in His prayer in John 17:1-2. On the night before Jesus gave His life to redeem the love gift that He prayed, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that He might give eternal life *to all those you have given Him.*"

The New Testament calls this chosen people "the elect" (KJV; often translated "chosen ones" in the NIV). Paul wrote in Romans 8:33, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen ["God's elect"]?" Jesus said in Luke 18:7, "Shall not God avenge His elect (KJV)." Peter began his letter in 1 Peter 1:1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to *God's elect.*" Paul began Titus with these words, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of *God's elect.*"

Election isn't meant to be some take it or leave it, abstract doctrine for us. Paul says it's the doctrine that motivated him to do evangelism in tough times, "I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:10)." And here Paul shows that this doctrine is foundational to good interpersonal relationships.

Let this sink in. We are people that *God chose*. Why did He choose us? We'll spend eternity pondering that question, "O Lord, why did you choose an undeserving sinner like me to be the object of Your favor?" There is no human explanation. The answer is *grace*, God's unmerited favor.

Now, what's the connection between being the chosen people of God (in verse 12) and forgiving each other (in verse 13)? It's this. If God views me as one who is elect, a holy one, and beloved, and if He views you the same way, then how should we view each other? The same way, right?

B. We need to relate to others as God does. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with..." and then he lists five virtues in verse 12. In contrast to the list of five vices in verse 5 and a second list of five vices in verse 8, all of which must be put off, we need to put on these five virtues.

Put on "compassion." "Bowels of mercies" is how the KJV puts it. Historian William Barclay remarks, "If there was one thing the ancient world needed it was mercy. The sufferings of animals were nothing to it. The maimed and the sickly went to the wall. There was no provision for the aged. The treatment of the...simple minded was unfeeling. Christianity brought mercy into this world."²

Are you a merciful, compassionate person? Is mercy a trait that's seen in your family? Do you jump all over each other when something irritates you, or do you show compassion to one another?

We're also to clothe ourselves with "kindness," a word that means goodness which is kind. It's grace in action. It's part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. Next, put on "humility," a trait that causes one to see himself as the object of divine grace. And "gentleness" (or "meekness," KJV). This isn't timidity. This is power under control. An ox in its yoke is meek. It's full of power that's under the control of the master.

Finally, we're to be clothed with "patience." *Makrothumia*, literally "wrath that is put far away." A person clothed with patience can put up with people who try his patience.

² William Barclay, p. 157.

Please notice that all five virtues have to do with interpersonal relationships. And what's more, all five virtues are characteristics of God Himself, namely characteristics that Christ exemplified.

God is compassionate (Lam. 3:22). God exhibits kindness to sinners (Rom. 2:4). Christ exhibited humility (Phil. 2:5) and gentleness (Matt. 11:29). God demonstrates patience (2 Pet. 3:9). When we put on these five virtues, we are choosing to relate to others as God does with them and us.

Let's be practical. How do you "put on" these virtues? They're not abstract traits. They are evidences of *Christlikeness*. Christ was compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient, right? So to have them, you must be connected to Him. And to be connected to Him, you must be *in Him*.

But the truth is, you can be "in Christ" and be cranky instead of kind, can't you? What's the problem? Christ is *in* you, but you're not allowing Him to live *through* you.

By the way, the aorist tense of the verb "clothe yourself" indicates this is a wardrobe that's *not* supposed to change. "Well, I'm pleasant most of the time. I've got a right to be grouchy once in awhile, don't I?" No, I don't. We're to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, and do so all the time!

If we're going to be families that forgive, we must clothe ourselves with God-centered attitudes. Secondly...

II. We must clothe ourselves with God-centered actions (13).

Namely, two actions indicated by two Greek participles in verse 13. Here's the first...

A. We're to bear with each other. Paul uses an interesting word that means "to endure" or "to put up with." It can be translated "to hold up" or "to hold back." That's what God does. He "forbears" towards sinners in that He "holds back" the judgment they deserve.

But what do we often do? The moment someone crosses us, we let them have it! Teens, what do you do when your sibling wears your favorite shirt without asking? Dad, how do you respond when your son "borrows" your favorite tool, but fails to put it back?

Quite honestly, a key to healthy family relationships is learning to bear with each other. That goes for church families, too. Instead of jumping down a brother's throat, there are times when Proverbs 19:11 is in order, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is his glory to overlook an offense."

When it comes to interpersonal problems in the family, we need to start here. If the problem is due to a personal irritation, if you can overlook it, then overlook it. Be gracious. Bear with each other.

But what if the problem is due to sin, and not just a personal irritation? That's where the second activity enters the picture.

B. We're to forgive each other. "Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." The word translated "grievances" ("quarrel," KJV) is *momphane* in the Greek. It comes from the verb "to blame" and thus means a blameworthy cause.³

³ Gromacki, p. 141.

We're not talking about personal preferences now, like "I've got a grievance with you. You squeeze the toothpaste from the middle, but I like the end." We're to bear with each other when it comes to these matters. The issue here involves legitimate blame. I've been sinned against.

When that happens, and it inevitably does when you put two sinners under the same roof!, what am I supposed to do? I must do exactly as the Lord did with me. He loved me too much to allow me to stay in my sin. He didn't ignore my sin. He dealt with it. How? By forgiving me.

But what does that mean? What is biblical forgiveness? We've talked about this before, so some of you know this, but for others this will be new. First...

1. *Here's what forgiveness isn't.* Two common misconceptions...

- It's not feeling something. Several years ago a couple came to see me, ready to call it quits. Their story? They said they didn't feel anything for each other any more and didn't feel at all like forgiving each other for past hurts. It was my privilege to help them see that feeling is not a prerequisite to forgiving. Nowhere in the Bible does it say you have to feel like forgiving in order to forgive. If you wait for a feeling, you'll wait in vain.

- It's not forgetting something. Have you heard someone say, "How can I forgive him when I can't forget what he did to me?"? Friends, the Bible doesn't teach that we must forget in order to forgive. That too is a paralyzing myth. When God forgives, He doesn't forget, does He? Can an omniscient person not know something? Did God forget that David committed adultery with Bathsheba? No, in fact, He recorded the event in the Bible. No, you need not forget in order to forgive.

2. *Here's what forgiveness is.* According to the Bible, there are three components to forgiveness.

- It's a declaration. It's not feeling something. It's choosing to say something from the heart, a declaration: "I will not use the sin you have committed against me as a basis for how I will treat you."

- It's a promise. If you've sinned against me, and you come to me and say, "I was wrong for what I did. Will you forgive me?," when I say, "Yes, I forgive you," I am promising you three things.

- 1) I will not bring it up so as to hurt you. I will not use the event as leverage against you the next time we face a problem, "Well, you owe me one." No you don't. I forgave you. May I speak candidly? Right here's the reason why many families don't have peace. They don't forgive. They hold grudges. They give the silent treatment. What's tragic is that God's way is so much better! When we forgive, the slate is wiped clean and we can move on. There's more. When I forgive you (or you forgive me) it involves a second promise.

- 2) I will not talk about it with others so as to hurt you. Which, sad to say, is what we often do. Instead of dealing with the problem God's way, we talk to people who are not a part of the solution. What does the Bible call that? Gossip. When I say "I forgive you" I am promising I will not do that. And thirdly...

- 3) I will not dwell on it myself. I will not brood, sulk, or have a pity party over the transgression. When I say "I forgive you," it's settled, done, case closed.

Perhaps you're wondering, "Isn't that hard to do?" Sure, but what part of living the Christian life *isn't*? Didn't Jesus say, "Without Me you can do *nothing*."? No, I cannot forgive based on my own strength, but I can with God's. Indeed, I *must*, for thirdly...

•It's a choice to do with others what God did with us. And just think what He did with us. We were under His wrath and heading for the just sentence of eternal hell. But what did He do? He declared us to be *forgiven*. Why? Because we deserved it? No. Because Christ took the offence upon Himself and paid its penalty in full in our place. God said, "I will no longer condemn you and hold your sin against you. I pardon you fully and completely for Jesus' sake."

That's what He did with us, and that's what He calls us to do with each other. It's not forgive and forget, but more accurately, it's forgive in order to forget, for if you choose to forgive, what you will discover is this. As time passes, you *will* think less and less of the offense. Forgiveness is like a shape knife that cuts away the tentacles of the offense and sets us free to serve God and love our brother.

If we're going to put Christ on display in our families, we need to clothe ourselves with three things, God-centered attitudes (12), God-centered actions (13), and thirdly...

III. We must clothe ourselves with a God-centered aim (14).

What God-centered aim? The one Paul mentions in verse 14, "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

A. We should strive to be known as people who love. Jesus said, "By this will all men know you are my disciples if you love one another (John 13:35)."

Here Paul goes back to basics, and puts it simply. Here's the bottom line. How can we clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience? How can we forbear and forgive difficult people? It boils down to this. *Love*. We're to be known as people who love God and love each other.

That's it. That's to be our aim in life. Jesus said that loving God and loving neighbor is the fulfillment of the law of God (Matt. 22:37, 39). Above all else, put on love. Paul mentions two things that are true of love in verse 14.

1. *It's a prerequisite for unity.* Love "binds them together in unity." Unless we love each other, there will be no unity in our family nor in our church family. Furthermore...

2. *It's an evidence of maturity.* Love binds them together in *perfect* unity. *Teleiotos* is the Greek word. It means "completeness." Beloved, we must settle for nothing less than this aim in our relationships. Why not? Because love is the bond of completeness. When we fail to love we're showing our immaturity. So when it comes to love...

B. We should settle for nothing less. "Above all these virtues put on love." Is that your aim? If it is, you'll want to take care of the unresolved sin issues at home. "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:13)."

Every day in our families we have the opportunity to put on love. That's what choosing to forgive is, a display of love. It's the choice to deal with something that's happened in the past God's way. Choose to forgive.

To help, let's ask ourselves two personal questions.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself two important questions...

1. *Is there anyone I'm not treating as the Lord treated me?* Dear friend, God didn't treat us as we deserve. At the Cross, God treated Jesus the way we deserved to be treated so that He might treat us as joint heirs with Jesus. That's grace.

Have you experienced the grace of God? You can become a child of God today by accepting God's provision of Jesus for you.

And if you've received God's grace, you're responsible to show God's grace in the way you treat others.

But some of us have simply refused to do that. We won't let go of the past. In some cases, it wasn't even a sin issue. Perhaps someone did something we didn't appreciate and we've held it against them ever since. We need today to choose to bear with one another.

In some cases, a legitimate sin was committed against us. But we've responded in a sinful way. Instead of granting forgiveness and letting go, we've to use the offense as leverage to get back at the person.

We need to change clothes today. We need to strip off the rags of an unforgiving spirit and put on the garment of forgiveness. Simply put, we need to cut down the tree.

2. *Is there anyone I'm failing to love as the Lord loved me?* Let's not deceive ourselves. It's so easy to say, "Yes, I love everybody. I don't have a problem with anybody." Beloved, if there's someone in your life, maybe a family member, maybe a church family members, that you intentionally avoid, or refuse to spend time with, there's a problem, *and* an opportunity for Christ-honoring change.

So is there anyone that you haven't been loving as the Lord has loved you? The Lord wants to change you. Will you let Him?