

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 6/2/2024
Colossians 3:12-14 “Forgiveness in the Christian Family”^{**1}
Series: The Christian Family

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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, we need to clothe ourselves with three God-centered essentials.

- I. Be clothed with God-centered attitudes (12).
 - A. We need to see ourselves as God sees us.
 1. We are chosen ones.
 2. We are holy ones.
 3. We are loved ones.
 - B. We need to relate to others as God does.
- II. Be clothed 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. Be clothed 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.

Take Inventory: Let’s ask ourselves 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?

What makes a family *Christian*? Is a family that goes to church weekly Christian? Perhaps. Is it a family that has a Bible on the coffee table, and a cross on the dining room wall? Perhaps. But those are not the indicators that the Scriptures give.

These are, as we’re seeing in Colossians 3. The first is *priorities*. Christian families are made up of people who first, know Christ, and then “seek” and “think about” the things above, not the things of the earth (verses 1-5). 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.

The second is *communication*. 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).

The third, as we’ll see today, is forgiveness. Forgiven people forgive other people. When we refuse to forgive, Christ is not seen clearly. That’s true in our homes, in our church, in our friendships, and where we work. But when we choose to forgive, we’re putting the splendor of Christ on display.

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:12-14

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in 2012.

As we begin, 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, for perfect people never need to ask for or grant forgiveness.

Secondly, this sermon is probably not for you if you are a hermit and live all by yourself, for it takes two people to produce interpersonal sin. I say *probably* because the reason you're living an isolated life may be due to what we're about to hear.

Let's be honest. We are all sinners. 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.

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 must clothe ourselves with three God-centered essentials.

I. Be clothed with God-centered attitudes (12).

Notice verse 12, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."

This is wardrobe language. Put away (verse 8). Put on (verse 10 and now verse 12). Some clothing is simply not appropriate in certain situations. On July 23, 1983, at around 1:00 in the afternoon, a pair of cut off shorts and a pull over t-shirt would have been unacceptable for me, standing as I was at the altar with my bride.

Guys, if you are going to change the oil in your car tomorrow, a suit and tie will not be appropriate. You'll want to put on appropriate attire for the occasion, right? Young ladies, if you went to the prom, 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 a Christian family? 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.

We are now 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 adopting two perspectives.

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

Quite frankly, if we are struggling to forgive someone, the problem likely begins right here, with a failure to see ourselves and the other person as God sees us. How does God see us? He tells us right here in verse 12. If we are Christians, three realities are true.

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

2. *We are holy ones.* Though translated "holy" in both the ESV, 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.

This is how God sees us. We are chosen, holy ones. Saints. What's the opposite of holy? You say, "Unholy." Yes, but what does that mean? In the Bible, the opposite of holy is "common". A Christian is a person whom God has set apart for sacred purposes. We're no longer *common*, that is, like we used to be and the rest of the world still is.

We've been "sanctified" (a related term meaning "set apart of God's holy purposes") and now belong to God.

3. *We are loved ones.* Beloved (ESV & KJV). Dearly loved (NIV). We are people who *are loved*, and the One who loves us is none other than God Himself! We used to be His enemies, following the prince of the power of the air, as Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us. But God loved us. We once were without strength and ungodly, as Romans 5:6-8 reveals. But "God demonstrated His own love for us" and "Christ died for us."

When you check into a nice hotel, what do they want to see? A credit card, sure. But what else? They ask for your ID. They want to know who you are.

This is who we are, brothers and sisters. This is our ID, all by grace. We are chosen ones, holy ones, and loved ones. In the Old Testament, these terms depicted Israel. Now the apostle Paul applies them to the church.

Let this sink in. Bask in the wonder of it all. God says that I am His chosen one, His holy one, His loved one. Amazing. This is how He sees me.

Now consider this question. Is this how you see the other people in your family and church family? 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, secondary matter 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, "You are now mine, the object of my sovereign and gracious love. And I'm going to bless you and your descendants." And God did.

Then in Genesis 25, God chose one of Abraham's grandsons. Not Esau, but Jacob. And in spite of Jacob's deceit, God chose him, forgave him, blessed him, and eventually gave him a family, with twelve sons. In time, He turned that chosen family into a chosen nation called Israel. The prophet Isaiah referred to Israel as God's "elect" (or "chosen ones," 45:4; 65:9, 22).²

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 that one tribe to be the Messiah of the world. 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 the Messiah.

Yet there's more. The New Testament indicates that God has chosen a special people to be a love gift for His chosen Son. He calls it the *ekklesia*, from *kaleo* meaning "to call", with the prefix *ek* meaning "out", hence, "the called out ones", better known to us as *the church*.

But it's even more personal than that. In eternity past, the Father selected a bride for His Son. Jesus mentioned this in His wonderful prayer in John 17:1-2. On the night

²Deuteronomy 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..."

before our Savior gave His life to redeem the love gift, He prayed these words, “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.*”

Jesus had the elect on His heart, His bride, as He prepared Himself to go to the cross. He was going to give eternal life to the love gift the Father had given Him.

Friends, the world says we are narrow-minded bigots. God says we are His gift to His dear Son. If we are going to stand in a hostile world, indeed, if we are going to respond to the hostility with love and forgiveness, we must cherish God’s assessment rather than the world’s.

It’s no wonder that when we read the New Testament epistles, we see this doctrine all over the place. The NT letters were written to Christians facing scorn and rejection by the world. But Paul and Peter and John and the others set the record straight. This is who you are.

You are God’s chosen people, God’s elect. 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.*”

In Romans 8:31–33, Paul asks an important question, then answers it, and then asks another bottom line question. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?”³

Election isn't meant to be some abstract doctrine for seminarians to debate. It’s a biblical teaching that should motivate us to do evangelism in tough times. It did for Paul who said in 2 Timothy 2:10, “I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.”

And here, in this letter to the church at Colosse, Paul shows that this beautiful 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 the question. I love the answer Isaac Watts gives in verses 3 & 4 of this heart-stirring song.

*How sweet and awful is the place
with Christ within the doors,
while everlasting love displays
the choicest of her stores.*

*While all our hearts and all our songs
join to admire the feast,
each of us cries, with thankful tongue,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"*

*"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
and enter while there's room,
when thousands make a wretched choice
and rather starve than come?"*

³ Jesus Himself asked this question in Luke 18:7, “And will not God give justice to His elect?”

*'Twas the same love that spread the feast
that sweetly drew us in;
else we had still refused to taste,
and perished in our sin.*

*Pity the nations, O our God,
constrain the earth to come;
send Thy victorious Word abroad,
and bring the strangers home.*

*We long to see Thy churches full,
that all the chosen race
may, with one voice and heart and soul,
sing Thy redeeming grace.*

Again, let's not miss the connection between being the chosen people of God (in verse 12) and forgiving each other (in verse 13). If God views me as a chosen one, a holy one, and a loved one, and if He views you the same way, then it's only fitting that we should look at each other the same way.

B. We need to relate to others as God does. The NIV says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with," and then 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, these five virtues are what we are to put on.

Put on "compassionate hearts". "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."⁴

Are you a compassionate person? Is mercy a trait that describes how you treat each other in your family? When something irritates you, do you snap at the cause, or do you show compassion?

You say, "I can't help myself. It just comes out."

Actually, if we are a Christian, that's not true. The Holy Spirit lives in us, and He is intent on producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and the rest of the fruit of the Spirit in us (Gal. 5:22-23). But we must cooperate with Him. We must begin our day by putting on this wardrobe, starting with a compassionate heart.

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. Put it on, says Paul. In other words, be as intentional as you are about putting on your clothes in the morning. Don't leave your prayer closet in the morning with putting on kindness.

Next, put on "humility," the opposite of proud. This is a trait that causes one to see himself as the object of divine grace. We must reject the notion that our family exists for us, for it doesn't. This is not my world, but His. Hence, I must put on humility.

⁴ William Barclay, p. 157.

And “meekness” (NIV “gentleness”). Meekness is not timidity. This is power under control. An ox in its yoke is meek. It's full of power, but it's under the control of the master. This is the mindset we need as prepare for the tasks of the day.

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. This too is a fruit of the Spirit. He provides the power, but we must put on the clothing.

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 Jesus exemplified when on the earth.

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*.

Are you in Christ? Is He in you? Repent and put your trust in Him, and the answer to both questions will be yes, this very day.

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

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,” you say. “But surely, after the way my spouse is behaving, I've got a right to be grouchy once in awhile, don't I?” No, you don't. We're to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, and that wardrobe is never to come off.

If we are to be families that forgive, we must clothe ourselves with these God-centered attitudes. There's a second essential.

II. Be clothed with God-centered actions (13).

Namely, two actions indicated by two Greek participles in verse 13, “...**Bearing** with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, **forgiving** each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

A. We're to bear with each other. Paul uses an interesting word. *Bearing with* 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? Kids, 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 vital commitment in a home that experiences joy is the choice to bear with each other. That goes for church families, too. Instead of quickly pointing out the fault of a brother or sister, there are times when Proverbs 19:11 is the best course of action, “A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is his glory to overlook an offense.”

When it comes to interpersonal problems, 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. The NIV says, "Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." The word translated "grievances" (ESV says "a complaint"; "quarrel" in the KJV) is *momphane* in the Greek. It comes from the verb "to blame" and thus means a blameworthy cause.⁵

We're not talking about personal preferences now. This is not, "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 toothpaste 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.

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.

One, 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.

⁵ Gromacki, p. 141.

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.

Two, 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...

Three, 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.

But isn't this hard to do? Indeed. But what part of living the Christian life *isn't*? Jesus said, "Without Me you can do *nothing*." So no, I cannot forgive on my own strength, but I can with God's. Indeed, I *must*. Which means this.

•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. It's forgive in order to forget, for if we choose to forgive, what you will discover is this. As time passes, we *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 this.

III. Be clothed with a God-centered aim (14).

What God-centered aim? The one Paul mentions in verse 14, "And above [NIV 'over all'] all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

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, puts it simply, and gives us 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. God is love, and we've asked Him to take up residence in our hearts. So this now becomes our aim in life. To be like Him. 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 gives us two insights into true love in verse 14.

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

2. *It's an evidence of maturity.* Love binds them together in *perfect harmony* (ESV). *Teleiotos* is the Greek word. It means "completeness, maturity, perfection." The state of being complete and without defect.

"The aim of our charge is love," says Paul in 1 Timothy 1:5. This is what God is after, and so are we. Beloved, we must settle for nothing less than this aim in our

relationships. Love is the bond of completeness. When we fail to love we are showing our immaturity.

B. We should settle for nothing less. “And *above all* these put on love.” Love is not one aim, but *the* aim. We who have received God’s love now want to display His kind of love in every relationship, in every situation.

Is this your aim in your family? If it is, it will affect the way you go to bed. If love is your aim, then you will not let the sun go down on your wrath. You will not let that harsh word at supper remain in the home, but will own it, and seek forgiveness for it. Or if that word was spoken to you, you will take the necessary steps to grant forgiveness.

This is what love does, and the One who is love lives in us. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:13).”

Every day we have the opportunity to put on love, to put on God, in our relationships. And we are never more God-like than when we choose to forgive.

Take Inventory: Let’s ask ourselves two important questions...

1. *Is there anyone I'm not treating as the Lord treated me?* Dear friend, at the cross, God treated Jesus the way we deserved to be treated so that He might treat us as joint heirs with Jesus. This is grace. Have you experienced the grace of God? You can become a child of God today by accepting His offer of forgiveness for you.

And if you have received it, He now desires for you to show His grace in the way you treat others.

Sometimes we refuse 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 used 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 Christ-like forgiveness.

2. *Is there anyone I'm failing to love as the Lord loved me?* It’s so easy to say the words, “Yes, I am a loving person, and I don’t have a problem with anybody.” But forgiveness is the litmus test.

Beloved, is there someone in your life, maybe a family member, maybe a church family member, that you intentionally avoid, or refuse to spend time with? Then there’s a problem, *and* a wonderful opportunity. It’s time to go to the closet and put on some new clothes.

Testimony of salvation (after sermon): Lacey Goncalves

Closing Song: #364 “*My Jesus, I Love Thee*” (all four verses)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Church fellowship meal (with the Scioto Hills summer staff; prayer cards distributed)