

The Core: Living with Jesus at the Center

Putting on the New

Colossians 3:12-14

Mark Vroegop

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 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. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Col 3:12-14

When Jeremiah was about five years old, one of his favorite family activities was playing hide-and-seek. He had grown out of the stage where he had to hide with Dad, and he loved to run around the house looking for those who were hiding, as long as the search wasn't too long. He would yell, "Dad, where are you?" And I would give him a slight clue like a quick whistle, a knock on the wall, or some garbled response to keep him interested and motivated.

The challenge for me was finding a hiding place that wasn't too difficult but which made the game fun. One time I decided to hide next to the refrigerator such that he would run right past me. I took my position against the wall, and as I was standing there I noticed that I could see into the bathroom by the reflection that was on the window.

Jeremiah proceeded with his usual, "Dad, where are you?" I made a noise, and he walked slowly through the bathroom. I watched him through the reflection. He came to the door of the bathroom, looked right at the window, saw my reflection, and stopped. He didn't know what to do. He could see me and recognize me, but he knew it wasn't me. He didn't know where I was. So there we were playing hide-and-seek, locked in a stare down through the reflection in a window.

Then he did something I'll never forget. He smiled and started waving at me. Well I started laughing so hard that he immediately found me. And as soon as I found me he said, "Dad, I saw you in the window." He was too little to know the word **reflection**.

A reflection is a representation of the original in the form of an image. It is not the original; however it looks very much the original, perhaps even identical to it. It means to show the image of something else.

Listen to Paul's words in Romans 13:14 – “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ...” What is he saying there? How does one put on Christ? Colossians 3:12-14 helps us understand what it means by telling followers of Jesus to put on certain things, traits, and fruits that reflect who Jesus is – like compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. In other words, by obeying Colossians 3:12 we obey Romans 13:14. The meaning (and the use of “put on”) in both verses is the same: **followers of Jesus reflect Jesus.**

Do you remember what we've look at so far? Previously we had two imperatives – put to death (v 5) and put away (v 8). Both statements are settled attitudes or mindsets based upon a spiritual reality that happened in the past. In other words, receiving Christ's finished work for me results in a settled disposition toward immorality and respectable sins (like anger, wrath, malice, etc.). The first two imperatives told us what we need to **not** do. The third imperative (put on) tells us what we ought **to do**.

So what we have here is a list of things that should characterize the followers of Jesus. We've heard what we shouldn't do. Now we are told what we must do.

Why reflect Jesus? Captivated by extravagant grace (v 12)

Reflecting the image of Jesus would be impossible without the sovereign and undeserved intervention of God in the lives of sinful human beings. So the starting point of a biblical motivation for reflecting Jesus is realizing the stunning beauty or extravagant grace of what God did for you through Christ. Understanding and celebrating your position in Christ leads to reflecting the image of Christ. Or another way to say it would be: When you understand the beauty of Jesus as the core, and you will long to live every day with him at the center.

Getting the motivational piece is very important and key to the book of Colossians. The book is written to combat a belief system that was drifting away from Christ and pointing people to matters that seemed and felt spiritual (see 2:16-23) but they weren't. Real obedience springs from a heart captivated by the extravagant grace of God. Worship precedes fruit.

Notice the three evidences of God's extravagant grace:

1. We were chosen. Verse 12 states this very clearly: “Put on then, as God's chosen ones...” The word “chosen” is first in order because the other two words (holy and beloved) are really derivatives of being chosen. Holy and beloved modify or explain what it means to be chosen. More on this later.

The word “chosen” is the Greek word *eklektos*. You can hear the word election in this word, and it comes from two words meaning “from” and “to gather.” The word is all over the Bible. It is used of men of God in salvation history (Num 11:28), the land of Palestine (Jer 3:19), Israel as the people of God (Is 43:20), of Christ (Luke 23:35), of individual believers (Rom

8:33), and of the Christian community (1 Pet 2:9). The term emphasizes the gracious and sovereign initiative by God where he draws men and women to himself for his own glory.

Now I realize that the idea of being chosen or the doctrine of election immediately creates some challenging emotions, because it is an idea that creates a lot of good questions and pushes the boundaries of our understanding of the mind of God. But I'd like you to put aside all of the questions, challenges, controversy, and emotion for moment, and consider with me the real beauty of what the word chosen means.

It means that a sovereign God, fully of holiness, beauty, and awe saw fit to be personally gracious to you even when you didn't deserve it. It means that all the events leading up to the moment you received Jesus were not by mistake or chance – God orchestrated every one of them. It means that God bestows his love on undeserving and sinful creatures. And it means that act of God was meant to generate great love in our hearts for God even if we don't fully understand it all – yes, even if there are questions.

I proposed to Sarah underneath the Bell Tower in Dayton, Ohio. I put the engagement ring inside a journal. When she got to the page with the ring embedded in the pages, I drop to my knee and said, "Sarah, will you marry me?" I was choosing her. She did not say, "Well, what about the other girls at Cedarville? I mean it really isn't fair that you are choosing me over them, is it? What went into your decision?" No. She responded with great joy! And that my friends, is why this is here. To motivate you to say with Paul, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen"

2. We are holy. This is where the choice leads – holiness. It means that God declares his people to be righteous because of the work of Christ. It means that God makes a legal pronouncement over his people that they are no longer guilty. All of this is because of Jesus. Listen to three verses that back this up:

- "... even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be **holy** and blameless before him" (Eph 1:4).
- "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who **justifies**" (Rom 8:33).
- "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Do you hear the motivation implicit in these verses? God motivates by the overflow of his extravagant grace as evidence in his choice to make us holy through Christ.

3. We are loved. It seems obvious, doesn't it? The choosing and the justifying make us the recipients of God amazing love. Sometimes people talk about God's love in a way that seems to imply that they are supremely worthy (i.e., "You are valuable because God loves you."). And while there is an element of truth to that, the real point here is about God not us!

"...In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:4b-6)

God sets his love on us not because we are so special, but because of how special He is! He sets his love on undeserving sinners not to make much of them but to make much of Himself. He calls us beloved not to affirm our worth but to accentuate his glory!

Chosen. Holy. Beloved. This captivation with extravagant grace serves as the motivation for what follows. Worship precedes obedience. We sing this truth this way:

And Can it Be?

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

What reflects Jesus? Embracing the actions that fit with Jesus (v 12b-14)

Followers of Jesus reflect Jesus. They are captivated by the amazing and extravagant grace of God and that leads to obedience. In other words people who know Jesus put on the attitudes and actions that fit Jesus. We put on spiritual clothing that belongs to Jesus. We are putting on Jesus.

Compassion – this is heartfelt graciousness; it is a deep concern for others. There are actually two words here that ESV combines into one. The first word means inside your body, intestine, or (KJV) bowels. The second word is mercy. So when you put them together it means a heart of graciousness. The bent of the heart, the tendency of his or her life is a tender sympathy for others.

Kindness – the word means an abundance of goodness. You could translate the word as goodness or generosity, and it is often used to describe the way that God deals with sinners

(see Luke 6:35 and Rom 2:4). It means to treat people with graciousness irrespective of what they deserve.

A follower of Jesus who has been captivated by so much grace will have a disposition toward compassion and kindness. They will see life through this Jesus-centered lens. People who have experienced extravagant grace pour out extravagant grace on others. This is so important to us at College Park that we included it in our Core Values. Our Elders recently approved a set of Core Values which includes: the pre-eminence of Jesus, authority of the Word, redemptive community, Biblical unity in diversity, extravagant grace, the call to go!

Along with that statement we wrote a paragraph that explains what we mean by extravagant grace: We desire to be a community of believers, who treat others with the same extravagant grace that God has lavished upon us. We yearn to demonstrate this grace through our church culture and our lives in a way that is transparent, real and helpful. We are blessed to be a blessing to each other, the city of Indianapolis, and the world.

Humility – this word was used negatively in 2:18 and 2:23 to denote the shallow humility of the false teachers. The difference here is that this humility is a call to emulate the life of Jesus. It is to put on Christ-like humility. It is the frame of mind that understands who God is and who we are – that is where real humility begins. But it demonstrates itself in real actions: a dependence upon Christ (Matt 11:29), considering others as more important (Phil 2:4), a willingness to submit to others (1 Pet 5:5), and commitment to obedience to God (Phil 2:8). Humility is both attitude and action.

Followers of Jesus don't have to get the credit. They don't have to be honored or thanked. They are free from the need to be somebody because everything they are is wrapped up in Jesus. So celebrate your inadequacy!

Meekness – my favorite definition is “power under control.” Meekness doesn't mean weakness. Rather, it means a choice to be gentle when you don't really have to. In Numbers 12:3 we get a good example of this in Moses. Even when facing undeserved and back-stabbing criticism, he chooses to be gentle or meek. Implicit in this word is a willingness to give up the right to be right, to defend yourself, or to win. Meekness is tested when you are you are wronged, and it needs to be applied when you are defensive or offended.

Patience – this is closely linked to meekness, but the meaning relates to putting up with and bearing the exasperating conduct of others without flying into a rage or desiring to get even.¹ That is why the King James and New King James render it longsuffering. We don't use that word any more but it really is a great way to capture the meaning.

¹ Peter O'Brien. Colossians and Philemon – Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, Texas: Word Publishing, 1982. p. 200.

Pride, a lack of self-control, and impatience trap us when we get our eyes off of Jesus. So when you are tempted to say, "I don't deserve this!" Remember what you really deserved before you met Jesus.

Forbearance and forgiving one another – I've combined these two not because they are not the same, but they go together. Forbearance or bearing with one another is to put up with each other, to endure each other, or to embrace the suffering that comes with dealing with people. The word is used in 2 Thessalonians 1:4 for our response to tribulations and trials. We all know that dealing with other people involves tension and conflict at many levels, and Paul calls believers to the kind of life that is not easily annoyed, quickly put out, easily offended, quick to draw conclusions, or someone who everyone has to walk on egg-shells around. Do you know what the problem with forbearance is? People who struggle with it generally do not know it because people around them are afraid to tell them. Do you know why? Because they are easily offended, quickly put out, easily annoyed, and you have to walk on egg shells around them. So here's an assignment for you: Go home and ask your family to be honest with you about this one.

The word for forgiveness is not the usual one that is used in the New Testament.² This word means to treat with graciousness, and in this context ("if one has a complaint against another...") it means that people are ready to forgive when complaints and problems arise. So the Bible is decidedly against internal grudges and grudges.

Just think of how many marriages, relationships, and ministries could be radically different today if people consistently practiced forbearance and forgiveness.

Love – here we have what is often called the crowning grace³ that believers are to put on. Love is the first part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), the summary of law (Gal 5:14), the greatest of all Christian virtues (1 Cor 13:13). "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends" (1 Cor 13:7-8a). Love is the ultimate mark of the disciple of Jesus. John 13:35 says, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another."

The text in Colossians 3 carries this even further saying that love "binds everything together in perfect harmony." Now you might think that he is referring to the list of virtues that we just covered, but it seems that Paul's statement is more about how love has the power to pull everything together – as in all the parts of the body, creating a beautiful unity.

This is quite a list isn't it? There is no one in this room who doesn't need to work on something that we just talked about. In fact this list could be pretty depressing, couldn't it? Compassion,

² The normal word is *aphiemi* which means to remit or pardon as in Matthew 6:12

³ O'Brien, p. 203.

kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love – by ourselves these would be impossible. Reflecting Jesus doesn't happen in our own strength.

Reflecting Jesus springs from a heart so captivated by what Jesus has done for us that we are driven to be like Him. So can I just remind you today of the extravagant love of God that he applied to your heart?

He changed you! But why?

Here's the answer: So you could reflect Jesus, giving Him maximum glory!

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