

# As The Lord Forgave • Colossians 3:12-14

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *New Suit*

1. In late May, my niece is getting married in Chicago and I've been asked to officiate at the wedding.
2. It's going to be a big affair and I had to get a new suit since the one I own wasn't the right color.
3. So I recently went out and did some shopping and got a really nice black suit, dress shoes, belt, and a couple nice dress shirts.
4. When I put the whole thing on – I look really good!
5. The suit's been tailored so it fits really well and the clothes are comfortable.
6. When I was younger, dressing up was a major ordeal.
  - a. most of you guys know what I mean.
  - b. remember when wearing a suit made you itch all over?
  - c. or even wearing a dress shirt and tie made your neck feel like someone was trying to throttle you?
  - d. I *hated* dressing up!
7. But as I've matured, I rather enjoying wearing nice clothes.
8. And besides, they can make you look so good.

### B. *Our New Clothes*

1. One of the Apostle Paul's favorite themes is the call to shed the old habits that marked our lives before we came to Christ;
  - a. the old attitudes, speech, and behavior that was a reflection of sin,
  - b. all of that we're to put away.
  - c. he calls it the *old man* and like a set of dirty, stained, and smelly rags, we're to strip them off and leave them in a heap at the foot of the Cross.
2. But we're not to remain unclothed – in the place of the old man, were to put on the *new man*.
  - a. Paul paints a word-picture of the new man being alike a new set of clothes,
  - b. with each of the Christian virtues being another part of the ensemble
  - c. but once the whole thing is put – oh does it look good!

### C. *Discomfort*

1. Part of the struggle of growing in Christ is that just like a child who's grown accustomed to wearing the same clothes every day – we've grown comfortable with certain habits and our lifestyle as it is
2. Putting it off and putting on the virtues of Christ seem itchy and feel restricting like that dress shirt and tie on a 6 year old boy – or that frilly, lace trimmed dress on that 5 year old girl
3. But the fact is, as that child *grows* and becomes more mature, and spends more time in those fine clothes the more used to them he or she become till eventually – it's those dress clothes he's comfortable in

4. And here's the thing – even while the clothes *feel* a bit awkward, they still *look* really good.

#### **D. Today**

1. In our passage this morning, Paul is telling the Colossians what specific things they're to put on
2. He's already told them what they are to shed, but now he tells them the pieces of the new suit they must install

## **II. TEXT**

### **A. Vs. 12-14**

- 12 **Therefore, as *the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;***
  - 13 **bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.***
  - 14 **But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.**
1. It's the garment of forgiveness that I want to focus on this morning but I think we need to do a short word study on each of the virtues Paul mentions so that we can understand the *context* forgiveness sits in here
  2. He says first of all, that we're to put on *tender mercies*
    - a. different translations render this as, *compassion, bowels of mercy, or tenderness*
    - b. whatever the word that's picked to translate this, the idea is the same
    - c. it's a mercy that moves a person to be tender and to *take action* to help someone in need
    - d. if you're driving down the road and come on a scene in which a vehicle has just now overturned and no one has stopped yet to provide help, *general mercy* means as you drive by, you *feel* concern and say a prayer that someone will stop soon and offer assistance
    - e. *tender* mercy means stopping and offering assistance yourself.
    - f. it's mercy that takes tender action
  3. The next heavenly garment we're to take is *kindness*
    - a. in its simplest meaning, kindness speaks of being *considerate*, of treating others *carefully*
    - b. in classical Greek, it was used of aged wine that had lost its *harshness*
    - c. Jesus used it to describe the *easiness* of His yoke
      - 1) in other words, His yoke doesn't chaff
      - 2) it isn't burdensome and depressing
    - d. to be kind means to be careful with those around us,
    - e. that we take thought for their comfort and endeavor not to discomfort them.
    - f. this is a virtue that is specially careful with speech – that we don't shoot pointed darts that are meant to sting
    - g. George Bernard Shaw once sent a pair of tickets to the opening night of his first play in London to Winston Churchill, with this message,

- 1) “Enclosed are two tickets to my play tomorrow night. Bring a friend (if you have one.)”
- 2) Churchill sent them back with this message,
- 3) “Dear Mr. Shaw, unfortunately I’ll be unable to attend the opening night of your play due to a prior engagement. Please send me tickets for a second night (if you have one.)”
- h. dig and counter dig – the world is full of this –
- i. maybe your workplace is full of this, or worse, maybe your dinner table is too.
- j. kindness – being careful not to harm
4. Next we put on *humility*
  - a. it comes as a bit of a shock to realize that *only Christianity* elevates humility to the place of virtue
  - b. the Greek & Roman world despised humility
  - c. in fact, classically, the world was equivalent to *febleness, contempt*, and being *base*.
  - d. far from being a virtue, a moral strength, humility was seen as weak and contemptible
  - e. but Christianity took this despised word and elevated it to a virtue
  - f. humility speaks of a frame of mind that resists the urge to promote self and instead to serve others
  - g. it means to find peace with one’s calling and place and to be faithful there.
5. The next piece of the heavenly wardrobe we’re to put on is *meekness*
  - a. which means to hold yourself in check – not overstepping the bounds of what is right in getting others to do something.
  - b. meekness is not *weakness*, far from it.
  - c. the word was used to picture power under tight control – like a well trained and powerful horse who’s responsive to the slightest movement of the reins in the rider’s hand
  - d. we have some wonderful examples of this virtue right here in our church
    - 1) there are some powerful people here, some are *physically* big and strong and others are *positionally* powerful, who refuse to use that power to accomplish their own ends
    - 2) they *resist* intimidation and threats just to get their own way
    - 3) because their size or position is automatically impressive to people, they make a conscious effort to give no impression of pushing their weight around
6. Then we come to a virtue whose very wording explains itself - *longsuffering*
  - a. all of us are able to endure *momentary* suffering
  - b. if the red light lasts a little longer than usual, or if the little old lady moves a bit slow in the aisle in the store, we’re pretty good at being inconvenienced for an extra 4 or 5 seconds
  - c. but how about being *LONG-suffering*?
  - d. this means that we determine no matter how long we have to endure discomfort at the hands of others, we will not retaliate and strike back

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7. Look back over that list of new clothes we’re to put on: tender mercies,

- kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering
- a. every one of them is *relational*
  - b. this heavenly suit, this spiritual outfit is made to be worn in community with others!
  - c. you don't put it on, alone in your house and then admire yourself in a mirror
  - d. all these things are relational and they remind us that being a Christian means being a member of the Community of Christ, the family of God
  - e. we have to be tender and merciful to one another because none of us are perfect yet.
  - f. kindness and humility, meekness and longsuffering are essential because there will be ample need for them in a community of the imperfect
8. That's made abundant clear in v. 13 . . .
- 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.**
9. "Bearing with one another" presumes that as individual men and women who are still in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ, our commitment to the Lord is lived out in a tough minded commitment to love and serve one another, not matter what.
    - a. I like the definition of bearing with one another which says that we adopt an attitude toward one another that resists being easily perturbed.
    - b. we don't let people get under our skin
    - c. instead, we learn to cherish the differences that make all of us unique
  10. How many times have you either said or heard someone say, "I just don't get along with so and so. We have a personality clash." ?
  11. Let's take that and set it along side what Paul writes here . . .
    - a. personality clash - bear with one another
    - b. you tell me, which ought to govern our behavior towards others?
  12. Maybe you *don't* get along so well with some other person
    - a. indeed, maybe your personalities are so different every time you're around each other sparks fly
    - b. what does this passage say to you?
    - c. put off the old man, and put on the new man who is like Christ
    - d. do you think Jesus would have a personality clash with that person?

## **B. Forgive One Another**

1. There we have the context for what Paul writes next
  2. You and I are called to *community* – to love one another and serve one another in consistent, considerate tenderness
  3. But what do we do when offenses occur?
  4. What do we do when one of us blows it and we fail, hurting and offending one another?
  5. Paul spells that out next . . .
- . . . **forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.**

6. Friends, forgiveness is another of the virtues we're to put on.
  - a. but Paul elaborates on this one a bit more than he does the other virtues
  - b. like humility and meekness, forgiveness was not a common or valued trait in the ancient world – just as it isn't in our modern times
7. A line from a movie several years ago well summarizes the world's attitude toward how we are to respond to those who hurt us – “Don't get mad – get even!”
8. This attitude has been a part of the human race since the beginning
  - a. in Genesis 4 we read about Lamech
  - b. he strutted back and forth before his wives and gave this chest-thumping speech<sup>[1]</sup>
  - c. “Listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.”
  - d. Lamech was proud of the fact that he was going to let no one get the better of him
  - e. in his relational record keeping, he had to always come out on top!
9. We see the spirit of Lamech live on when someone honks their horn and the one honked at pulls out a gun and fires off a round
10. We see it whenever someone takes offence and lashes out in word of deed to make sure they get in the last shot
11. Paul says that this is not to be the way it is among the followers of Christ
  - a. we're to forgive one another
  - b. that phrase “one another” refers specifically to other believers
  - c. the community of Christ is not to be a seething cauldron of resentment and bitterness where each of us keeps close records of all the offenses we've experienced over the years
  - d. on the contrary – forgiveness should reign!
12. Notice who is to forgive – anyone who has a complaint
  - a. that word complaint means any grudge, any quarrel
  - b. it speaks of anything that brings *blame* between people
13. And notice the character and extent of the forgiveness we're to extend – “even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”
14. Consider for a moment *how* Christ forgave . . .
  - a. He was falsely arrested
  - b. was given an illegal trial that was the consummate travesty of justice
  - c. was condemned on false charges
  - d. He was beaten, abused and tortured
  - e. then a lynch mob hauled Him out to be executed in one of the most diabolical and cruel forms of death ever devised by the human heart
  - f. for hours he hung in torment
15. When the human race ought to have lifted Him up and set Him on a golden throne and bowed down to worship Him as our Creator-God, we instead lifted Him up and hung Him on a Roman cross; we drove iron spikes through His wrists and feet and thrust an iron spear into His side and instead of praise, we gave Him insults and profanity
16. Make no mistake – at any moment during His ordeal, Jesus could have switch

- places with mankind
- a. at a word, He could have come down off the cross
  - b. and instead put every person on a cross
17. But He didn't – He endured it all, and said, "Father forgive them."
  18. That's how you and I are to forgive others
  19. Do you have a complaint against another brother or sister?
    - a. maybe that brother or sister is your own husband or wife?
    - b. do you have an on-going quarrel with another believer?
    - c. maybe you aren't actually fighting verbally any more
    - d. you did at one time – words were exchanged, hot anger was thrown about
    - e. you realized such behavior was wrong, so you stopped, but the fact is, now the two of you are in a Cold War
  20. Let me ask a simple question – do these words speak to you?
    - a. is the Spirit who inspired Paul to pen these words to the Colossians –
    - b. speaking them to you this morning?
  21. Do you have a quarrel with someone?
  22. Then what does this verse tell you to do?
  23. It tells you to *forgive* –
    - a. which means you let go of the right to exact revenge.
    - b. forgiveness means that you, from the heart, drop the lawsuit and leave the court.
  24. Often when we talk about forgiveness, some people will respond by saying, "I can't forgive! The hurts I have, the pain I've been made to endure is too great."
    - a. what they're implying is that they have an exemption from God and it's okay for them not to forgive.
    - b. forgiveness is for *other* people to extend to those who have harmed them in *smaller* ways
  25. But what a person means when they say, "I can't forgive," is "I WON'T forgive!"
    - a. I have a right to want my pound of flesh out of that other person
    - b. I have a right to bring this lawsuit before the court of universal justice and demand that the other person be made to feel the pain and hurt I've felt at their hands, plus some punitive damages too!
  26. Listen friend, if you demand to bring *your* past hurts into the universal court of justice and demand that others pay for the way they've hurt you, then understand full well that others have the right to come and demand the same from YOU!
  27. Not only that – the Judge who presides over that Court has His own list of charges against you.
  28. And may I say, your crimes against God so far outweigh any hurt you've endured at the hands of others; you don't want justice – you want and need MERCY!
  29. Friend if you find it hard to forgive, let me encourage you to stop and think for a moment about how your sin, your cosmic treason against God, measures up to the sins committed against you.
  30. If the forgiveness that God offers you doesn't so overwhelm you that it

*overflows* in waves of forgiveness to others, then I would venture to say you haven't really been shown just how wretched a sinner you are and how desperately you need God's mercy!

31. Jesus told a parable about this.
  - a. there was a servant in a wealthy house who had squandered his master's property
  - b. the master found out and demanded an audit
  - c. it was discovered the servant owed \$50 million!
  - d. there was no way he could pay it-he was a slave!
  - e. but he threw himself on the master's mercy and asked to be forgiven
  - f. the master was moved, and forgave the man the entire debt.
  - g. a couple days later, the servant came upon a man who owed him 25 cents
    - 1) he demanded the man pay up, and when he wasn't able
    - 2) he had him arrested
  - h. another man who owed him a dime, he beat up when he couldn't pay
  - i. this went on with a couple other people who owed him
  - j. word eventually got back to his master who summoned the servant with these words,
  - k. "I forgave you a debt you could never repay, but instead of showing the same kind of mercy to others, you have acted shamefully and disgraced this house. You're fired!"
  - l. then he turned him over to a collection agency who made him pay the \$50 million
  - m. at the end of the parable, Jesus then said this,

**"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."**

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. Getting It**

1. This isn't the only place Jesus links our forgiveness by God to our forgiveness of others
2. Jesus taught the disciples to pray like this . . .

**Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**

3. Now, He knew this would prove to be troubling to the disciples so he went on to explain . . .

**"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."**

4. Jesus is *not* conditioning our salvation on whether or not we forgive others, if that were the case, then salvation would be a thing of works
5. What Jesus is giving in all these passages on forgiveness is a *heart test*
  - a. if we've genuinely *been* forgiven by God
  - b. the evidence of it will be that we forgive others
  - c. the freedom from guilt and shame we've come to enjoy in God's mercy and

- grace will deliver us from bitterness and resentment toward those who have hurt us
- d. if when we look inward we find bitterness and resentment toward another, then it is the sure sign the flow of God's mercy and grace into us has been stopped up and become stagnant
  6. Jesus came to set us free – free from sin, from the guilt and shame for the sins we've committed and from the chains of hatred and revenge for those sins committed *against* us
  7. Unforgiveness is a self-made prison that we alone hold the key to

### **B. What To Do**

1. So, what do you do if the Holy Spirit speaks to you about unforgiveness?
2. First, you repent to the Lord for failing to forgive – for that is sin!
3. Second, you ask Him to send the refreshing streams of His forgiveness and cleansing into your heart once more
4. Third, you renounce your right to exact justice and get your pound of flesh from the other person.
5. Fourth, ask the Lord to bless them and shower His mercy and grace on them.
6. Fifth, as much as it is in your power, approach that person and seek reconciliation; they may not want to be reconciled, but you at least must demonstrate a willingness to normalize the relationship.
7. As Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue peace with all."

### **C. Powerful Witness**

1. As I mentioned earlier, forgiveness is not a virtue highly esteemed by the world
2. In fact, it's not much thought of at all, it is so rare
3. But when forgiveness is granted, it challenges the shallowness of the world to it's very core
4. Recently the press has highlighted the stories of people who have forgiven the attackers and murderers of family members
5. Parents who've lost children and children who've lost parents to the seemingly pointless violence of some stranger
6. That forgiveness extended to the one who took their loved one's life has been so remarkable, so noteworthy, the world has indeed taken note!
7. There's a common thread among those who extend forgiveness in these stories – they're believers; Christians who have come to take Jesus words seriously
8. Forgiving the man who has taken your daughters life is not possible apart from the power of God
9. And the world knows it!
10. In this passage, the Spirit of God calls us to be a community of tender, compassionate mercy
  - a. and when we fail one another, instead of hauling off and drawing lines in the sand
  - b. we forgive one another with the same kind of readiness and completeness Jesus forgave us
11. May I say that when we do what Paul writes here – when we really **DO** it –



people who walk in the door will immediately sense they have entered a place where love is, where God is  
12. And that's the best kind of evangelism there is!

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[\[1\]](#) Hughes, R. Kent, *Colossians* pg. 105