

The Book of Colossians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: Put On the New Self in Love

Colossians 3:12-17

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage is the positive counterpart to the previous one: having stripped off the old self, the believer now puts on the new. The teacher should keep the gospel order central. Paul commands Christlike character (compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and above all love) only after grounding it in identity: we are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. Christian obedience flows from a settled standing in Christ, not toward an uncertain one. Two doctrinally significant points stand out for careful handling. First, verse 16 teaches the place of congregational singing in worship: the word of Christ dwelling richly overflows in believers teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. This is the New Testament pattern of worship in song, congregational, mutual, word-filled, and from the heart. Second, verse 17 sets out the governing principle of doing all things in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord Jesus, which undergirds both daily conduct and our approach to worship.

On the singing of verse 16, the teacher should present the positive New Testament pattern with warmth and confidence. Singing in the church is congregational (we sing to one another, teaching and admonishing one another), it is filled with the word of Christ, and it flows from thankful hearts to God. The parallel in Ephesians 5:19 makes the same point. This is the form of worship in song that the New Testament authorizes and describes, and it connects directly to verse 17: we do all, including how we worship, in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus, content with what He has appointed. Handle this as a matter of joyful faithfulness to the New Testament pattern, not merely as a rule.

The formational aim is a community visibly clothed in Christ. Paul wants believers who put on Christlike virtues even before the feelings arrive, who forgive as they have been forgiven, who let love bind them and the peace of Christ rule them, who saturate themselves in the word and sing it to one another, and who do every ordinary thing in the name of Jesus. Aim the lesson there. Send students home dressed in the new self, quick to forgive, devoted to the word and to congregational song, and conscious that the name of Jesus is over all of life.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says, put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (v. 12). Why does Paul ground these commands in who we already are (chosen, holy, beloved), and how does that settled identity change the way we pursue Christlike character?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul grounds his commands in identity before he issues a single one: put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. Three identity words come first. Chosen: God has set His love on us and brought us into His people. Holy: we have been set apart as His. Beloved: we are dearly loved. Only after establishing this does Paul say, put on these virtues.

Help students feel why the order is everything. We do not put on compassion and kindness in order to become chosen, holy, and beloved; we put them on because we already are. This is the difference between the gospel and mere moralism. Moralism says, behave, and perhaps you will be accepted. The gospel says, you are accepted in Christ, now live like it.

Draw out the freedom this gives. Obedience rooted in a secure identity is glad and steady; obedience aimed at earning acceptance is anxious and brittle. The believer who knows they are already beloved can pursue holiness without the desperation of trying to prove their worth.

Then introduce the virtues themselves as the wardrobe of the new self: compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. These are the character traits of Christ Himself, the clothing that fits a person being renewed into His image (3:10).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identity (chosen, holy, beloved) grounding the commands
- The gospel order versus moralism: we obey because accepted, not to become accepted
- Secure identity producing glad, steady obedience rather than anxious striving
- The virtues as the character of Christ, the wardrobe of the renewed self

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul state our identity before giving any commands?
- How is gospel obedience different from moralism?
- How does knowing you are already beloved change the way you pursue holiness?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul lists specific garments of the new self. Looking honestly at your own life, which one of these (compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience) is most threadbare right now? What would deliberately putting it on look like in a specific relationship this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes the wardrobe image and asks which garment is most threadbare. Paul lists specific virtues, and most of us are stronger in some and weaker in others. The aim is honest self-assessment, not general aspiration.

Help students locate the specific weak spot: perhaps patience wears thin with a particular person, or humility is scarce in a certain setting, or compassion has gone cold toward a kind of person they find hard to love. Naming the specific threadbare virtue and the specific relationship makes growth possible.

Then talk about deliberately putting it on, which is Paul's own language. Putting on a virtue is an action, not a wait for the feeling. We can choose a patient response, a humble word, a kind deed before the corresponding emotion arrives, trusting that the new self grows by being exercised. Encourage one concrete act of putting on the chosen virtue in a specific relationship this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest assessment of which virtue is most threadbare
- Locating the specific relationship or setting where it is weak
- Putting on a virtue as an action that precedes the feeling
- A concrete act of clothing oneself in that virtue this week

Discussion Prompts

- Which virtue is most threadbare in your life right now?
- In what relationship does that weakness show up most?
- What is one deliberate act of putting it on this week, even before you feel it?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul commands us to bear with one another and forgive each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive (v. 13). What is the connection between the forgiveness we have received from Christ and the forgiveness we owe one another, and why does Paul leave us no room to withhold it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul commands believers to bear with one another and forgive each other, and he sets the standard breathtakingly high: as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive (v. 13). The pattern and the power of our forgiving is the forgiveness we have received from Christ.

Help students feel the logic. We have been forgiven an unpayable debt, all our trespasses canceled and nailed to the cross (2:13–14). In light of that, the offenses we are asked to forgive in others, though real and sometimes deep, are small by comparison. Jesus taught this directly in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21–35): the one forgiven much who will not forgive little stands under severe warning.

Stress that Paul leaves no room to withhold forgiveness. So you also must forgive. This is not optional or reserved for when the other person apologizes or earns it. The forgiven are commanded to forgive.

Be pastorally careful to distinguish forgiveness from its counterfeits and complications. Forgiveness is releasing the debt, refusing to nurse the grudge or seek revenge; it does not always mean instant restored trust, the absence of consequences, or remaining in harm's way. But the heart's release of the offender is commanded, and it is the path to freedom for the one who forgives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's forgiveness of us as both the pattern and the power for forgiving others
- The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35)
- Forgiveness commanded, not optional or contingent on the offender earning it
- Distinguishing true forgiveness (releasing the debt) from instant trust or the absence of consequences

Discussion Prompts

- What is the connection between being forgiven and forgiving?
- Why does Paul leave no room to withhold forgiveness?
- What is the difference between forgiving someone and immediately trusting them again?

Question 4

Student Question:

Forgiveness is rarely easy and rarely a single act. Is there someone you have been refusing to forgive, or a wound you keep picking back up? In light of how the Lord has forgiven you, what would taking a real step toward forgiveness look like, even if the feelings have not yet caught up?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question makes forgiveness personal. Most people are carrying at least one unforgiven wound, a relationship they have written off, a grievance they keep rehearsing, an offense they pick back up whenever it threatens to heal.

Help students name one honestly, without minimizing the hurt. Forgiveness is not pretending the wound did not happen or did not matter; it is choosing, in light of our own forgiveness, to release the offender rather than hold the debt over them.

Then talk about a real step, acknowledging that feelings often lag behind obedience. Forgiveness frequently begins as a decision and a prayer (Lord, I release this person to You) long before the emotions settle. Encourage one concrete step this week: praying for the person by name,

refusing to rehearse the offense again, or, where wise, taking a step toward reconciliation. Be sensitive to deep wounds, which may require time, support, and wisdom, while still pointing toward the freedom forgiveness brings.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming one unforgiven wound honestly, without minimizing it
- Forgiveness as releasing the offender, not pretending the hurt did not matter
- Obedience preceding feelings: forgiveness often begins as decision and prayer
- A concrete step toward forgiveness, with sensitivity to deep wounds

Discussion Prompts

- Is there someone you have been refusing to forgive?
- What would a real step toward forgiveness look like this week?
- How can forgiving begin even before the feelings catch up?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says above all put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body (vv. 14–15). Why does Paul call love the garment that holds all the others together, and what does it mean to let the peace of Christ rule, or act as umpire, in the life of the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul crowns the list of virtues with love: above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (v. 14). Love is pictured as the outer garment, or the belt, that holds the whole outfit together. Without it, the other virtues come apart; with it, they form a unified whole. Compassion, kindness, humility, patience, all of them are expressions of love and are held together by it.

Then Paul adds the peace of Christ: let it rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body (v. 15). The word rule carries the idea of an umpire or referee making the decisive call. The peace of Christ is to govern our hearts and our life together, settling disputes and guiding decisions toward unity rather than division.

Note that this peace is corporate: we were called in one body. Paul is not mainly describing private inner calm but the peace that should reign among believers who belong to one another. The peace of Christ ruling means a congregation that handles its disagreements and frictions under Christ's lordship, choosing unity and refusing to let conflict tear the body.

And Paul adds, be thankful. Gratitude is woven through this whole section (it appears three times in these verses). A thankful heart is a peaceable heart; grumbling breeds division, while thanksgiving knits a body together.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love as the garment that binds all the virtues into harmony
- The peace of Christ ruling, like an umpire, in our hearts and our life together
- The corporate dimension: peace among believers called in one body
- Thankfulness as the companion of peace and the enemy of division

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul call love the garment that holds all the others together?
- What does it mean to let the peace of Christ act as umpire in your decisions?
- How does thankfulness contribute to peace in the body?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul links the peace of Christ to our life together in one body. Are you, in practice, a peacemaker in your congregation and your home, or do you sometimes feed conflict? Where is the peace of Christ being asked to rule in one of your relationships right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes the peace of Christ into the student's actual relationships. Paul envisions believers as peacemakers within one body, yet all of us are capable of feeding conflict rather than calming it, through a sharp word, a taken offense, a refusal to let something go, a habit of taking sides.

Help students examine their role honestly. In their congregation and especially in their home, are they, on balance, a calming or an inflaming presence? Peace does not mean avoiding all hard conversations; it means pursuing resolution and unity under Christ rather than stoking division or nursing grievances.

Then identify one relationship where the peace of Christ is being asked to rule right now, and one concrete step toward it: initiating a hard but loving conversation, letting an offense go, refusing to draw others into a conflict, choosing words that build rather than wound. Encourage students to let Christ's peace make the call there this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining whether we calm or inflame conflict
- Peacemaking as pursuing resolution under Christ, not avoiding all hard conversations

- Identifying one relationship where Christ's peace needs to rule now
- A concrete peacemaking step this week

Discussion Prompts

- Are you generally a peacemaker or do you sometimes feed conflict?
- Where is the peace of Christ being asked to rule in your relationships right now?
- What is one concrete step toward peace you could take this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (v. 17). What does it mean to do everything in the name of, or by the authority of, the Lord Jesus, and how does this single principle shape both our daily conduct and the way we worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives a sweeping summary in verse 17: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. This single principle governs the whole Christian life, and it deserves careful teaching.

Explain the phrase in the name of the Lord Jesus. To do something in someone's name is to do it by their authority and as their representative, in a manner consistent with who they are. To do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus is to live and act under His authority, as those who belong to Him and represent Him, doing what He approves and avoiding what He does not.

Draw out the breadth: whatever you do, in word or deed. Nothing is exempt. Our speech and our actions, our work and our leisure, our public and private lives, all of it is to be brought under the authority of Christ. There is no neutral zone where His name does not apply. This is a powerful guard against compartmentalized faith.

Then connect it to worship, which sets up the next question. If we do everything by the authority of Christ, then how we worship Him is no exception. We seek to worship as He has authorized, content with what He has appointed, rather than acting on our own preferences. The name of Jesus governs our conduct and our worship alike. And all of it is wrapped in thanksgiving to God the Father through Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doing all things in the name of Jesus as acting under His authority and as His representatives
- The breadth of whatever you do: no neutral zone exempt from Christ's lordship
- A guard against compartmentalized faith
- The authority principle applied to worship as well as conduct, all wrapped in thanksgiving

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to do something in the name of, or by the authority of, the Lord Jesus?
- What parts of life do we tend to treat as exempt from Christ's authority?
- How does this principle shape not only how we live but how we worship?

Question 8

Student Question:

If everything we do is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, then no part of life is off the clock. Where is there an area of your life, maybe your work, your entertainment, your private habits, that you have not consciously brought under the name and authority of Jesus? What would change if you did?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses verse 17 into the corners of life we keep off the clock. The principle whatever you do covers everything, yet most of us have quietly fenced off some area as our own, not consciously submitted to Christ.

Help students locate the fenced-off area: how they conduct themselves at work, what they watch and consume for entertainment, how they speak when no one important is listening, their private habits, the way they spend money or leisure. The question is whether these are being done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then invite a concrete change. Bringing an area under Christ's name might mean changing what we consume, how we work, or how we speak, asking of each thing, can I do this in the name of the Lord Jesus, with thanks to the Father? Encourage students to name one off-the-clock area and one specific change that would bring it consciously under the lordship of Christ this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying the area of life kept off the clock
- Common fenced-off zones: work conduct, entertainment, private speech, money, habits
- Testing each thing by whether it can be done in the name of the Lord Jesus
- A concrete step to bring one area under Christ's lordship

Discussion Prompts

- What area of your life have you not consciously brought under the name of Jesus?
- Could you do that activity in the name of the Lord, with thanks to the Father?
- What specific change would bring it under His lordship this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (v. 16). What does it mean for the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, and what does this verse teach about the place of congregational singing, where we teach and encourage one another in song, in the worship of the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question carries the heaviest doctrinal weight in the lesson, and it should be taught with warmth and confidence. Paul says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (v. 16). Two great themes meet here: the indwelling word and congregational singing.

Begin with the word of Christ dwelling in us richly. The word is to be a settled, abundant resident, not an occasional visitor. It is to fill us so fully that it overflows into how we teach, encourage, and even sing to one another. Help students see that a word-filled life is the soil from which everything else in this passage grows; the virtues, the forgiveness, the peace, and the song all flow from hearts saturated with the word of Christ.

Now teach the singing. Notice what Paul says singing is and does. It is congregational: we sing to and for one another, teaching and admonishing one another in song. It is word-filled: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that carry the word of Christ into the heart. And it is heartfelt and directed to God: with thankfulness in your hearts to God. The parallel in Ephesians 5:19 says the same, that we address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with the heart to the Lord. This is the New Testament pattern of worship in song: the whole congregation lifting its voice together, teaching one another the truth, and praising God from the heart.

Draw out the implications carefully and positively. First, singing is not a performance by a few for the rest; it is the work of the whole body. Every member is a singer, because every member is to be teaching and admonishing the others through the song. This is why congregational singing matters so much: it is one of the chief ways the word of Christ is taught and the body is built up. Second, singing in worship is to be filled with the word and offered from the heart, not mere entertainment or empty ritual. Help students take seriously the words they sing, since those words teach and admonish.

Finally, connect this to the authority principle of verse 17. We do all things, including how we worship in song, in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus, content to follow the pattern the New Testament gives. The New Testament's appointed form of worship in song is this congregational singing, the saints making melody in their hearts to the Lord and teaching one another. Present this not as a cold rule but as a glad faithfulness: we sing the way the Lord

has appointed, every voice joined, every heart engaged, the word of Christ dwelling richly and rising in song. Encourage students to be full participants in the singing of the church, to listen to and mean the words, and to see it as genuine worship and mutual teaching, not a warm-up to the sermon.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The word of Christ dwelling in us richly as a settled resident, the soil for the whole Christian life
- Congregational singing as the New Testament pattern of worship in song (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19)
- Singing as mutual teaching and admonishing: every member a participant, not a spectator
- Singing as word-filled and heartfelt, directed to God, not performance or empty ritual
- The authority principle of verse 17 applied to worship: glad faithfulness to the appointed New Testament pattern of vocal congregational praise
- Taking seriously the words we sing, since they teach and admonish

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for the word of Christ to dwell in you richly?
- According to this verse, what is congregational singing supposed to accomplish among us?
- How does seeing singing as mutual teaching change the way you participate in it?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this passage. Paul clothes us in the character of Christ, binds us together in love and peace, fills us with His word and song, and sets the name of Jesus over everything we do. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Colossians 3:12–17 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the passage: clothed in the character of Christ, bound together in love and peace, filled with the word and song, and living all of life under the name of Jesus. The student's task is to name one specific way Christ is forming them through it.

Walk back through the movement as a prompt. Some students most need to rest in being chosen, holy, and beloved. Some need to put on a specific threadbare virtue. Some need to forgive. Some need to let the peace of Christ rule a relationship. Some need to let the word dwell in them more richly and to worship in song with their whole heart. Some need to bring an off-the-clock area under the name of Jesus. Let each name what meets them.

Close by reminding students that the goal is formation, not information. Paul wrote so that the church would actually be clothed in Christ, visibly different, knit together, and worshipful. Invite each to carry one truth into the week and to put on, a little more fully, the new self that is being renewed into the image of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The new self clothed in Christ, bound in love, filled with word and song, under His name, as the lesson's arc
- Formation, not mere information, as the goal
- Carrying one concrete truth into the week
- Putting on the new self that is being renewed into the image of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage most needs to take root in you this week?
- Which garment of the new self do you most need to put on, and where?
- How can this group help you live clothed in Christ in the days ahead?