

One Another, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Bear with One Another in Patience

Colossians 3:12–14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson teaches forbearance, but what is doctrinally at stake is the gospel logic that makes forbearance possible. Paul does not begin with commands; he begins with identity: “as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved” (v. 12). The word “therefore” reaches back to the gospel he has just preached, that we have died and risen with Christ and our life is hidden with him in God (3:1–4). Help your students see that the entire passage flows downhill from grace. We put on compassion, patience, and forgiveness not to earn God’s favor but because we are already chosen, holy, and loved. Indicative before imperative. Who we are before what we do.

A second doctrinal point governs the heart of the passage: the measure of our forgiveness. Paul says, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (v. 13). The Christian’s forgiveness of others is not measured by the size of the offense but by the size of the mercy he has received. This is the same logic Jesus pressed in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21–35). Make sure your students leave understanding that an unforgiving Christian has, at that moment, forgotten the gospel. Forbearance and forgiveness within the body are not optional extras; they are the necessary overflow of having been forgiven so freely ourselves.

At the same time, aim past information toward formation. Paul wrote these words to a real congregation where real people had grievances against one another. Your students do not merely need to define forbearance correctly. They need to walk out and actually bear with the difficult person, actually release the grievance they have been nursing, actually put on patience tomorrow morning before the friction begins. Hold the doctrine and the heart together. The same love that binds the wardrobe together is the love that binds the body together in perfect harmony.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul grounds these commands in our identity as “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved” (v. 12). Why does Paul begin with who we already are in Christ before telling us what to do, and how does that order shape everything that follows?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with the order, because the order is the gospel. Paul could have opened with the command: “Be compassionate, be patient, forgive.” Instead he opens with three words of identity: chosen, holy, dearly loved. Only then does he say “clothe yourselves.” This is the

pattern of the whole New Testament. God tells us who we are before he tells us what to do, and what we do flows from who we are.

Unpack the three identity words. “Chosen” means we belong to God by his gracious initiative, not our achievement (Ephesians 1:4). “Holy” means set apart for him, made his own in Christ. “Dearly loved” means we are the objects of a love that did not wait for us to be lovely. Together they describe people who are completely secure in God’s grace. Help students feel how much rests on these words before a single command arrives.

Show how this order shapes everything. If we tried to put on patience and forgiveness in order to become accepted, we would do it anxiously, grudgingly, and never enough. But because we are already chosen, holy, and loved, we put these garments on freely, as the natural wardrobe of people who know whose they are. Grace is not the reward for the virtues; grace is the soil from which the virtues grow.

Apply it to the difficult work ahead. Bearing with an irritating brother and forgiving a real wound are hard. They become possible only when we are standing firmly on grace. The Christian who has forgotten that he is chosen, holy, and loved will have nothing left over to give a difficult brother. The one who is secure in God’s love has an overflowing supply. Ask students whether they are trying to produce these virtues from an insecure heart or from the settled ground of grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel order of identity before command, indicative before imperative (Colossians 3:1–4, 12)
- Election by God’s gracious initiative, that we are chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:4)
- Believers set apart as holy and made God’s own possession (1 Peter 2:9)
- God’s prior, undeserved love as the source of our love for others (1 John 4:19)
- Christlike virtues as the overflow of grace, not the means of earning it

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul tell us who we are before he tells us what to do?
- How does being secure in God’s love change the way we obey his commands?
- Are you trying to produce these virtues from an insecure heart or from settled grace?

Question 2

Student Question:

Look honestly at the five garments Paul lists: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Which one is most missing from your wardrobe lately, and where does its absence show?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question invites honest inventory. Paul lists five garments, and most of us are better dressed in some than in others. One person is naturally kind but impatient. Another is gentle but rarely takes the humble lower place. Help students slow down and consider each garment in turn rather than answering too quickly.

Briefly clarify the five so the inventory is accurate. Compassion is a heart moved by another's suffering. Kindness is active goodness toward others. Humility is taking the lower place, not thinking of ourselves first. Gentleness is strength under control, never harsh. Patience is the long fuse that bears with people and circumstances without exploding. Each one shows up, or fails to show up, in concrete daily moments.

Press toward where the absence shows. A missing garment is always visible somewhere: a snapped reply, a cold shoulder, a refusal to stoop, an irritation that leaks out at home or at church. Encourage students to name the one garment most missing lately and the specific relationship or situation where its absence is on display, then to ask the Lord to help them put it on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Compassion and kindness as active mercy toward others (Colossians 3:12; Ephesians 4:32)
- Humility as taking the lower place after the pattern of Christ (Philippians 2:3–5)
- Gentleness as strength under control, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23)
- Patience as long-suffering forbearance with people and circumstances

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the five garments is most missing from your life lately?
- In what specific relationship or moment does its absence show?
- What would putting that garment on look like in that exact situation?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says to “clothe yourselves” with these virtues (v. 12), picturing something we actively put on. What does this image of getting dressed teach us about how Christlike character is formed in us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Dwell on the verb. Paul does not say these virtues will descend on us automatically while we wait passively. He says “clothe yourselves,” an active command, a daily decision. The image of getting dressed teaches that Christlike character is something we deliberately put on, again and again, the way we choose our clothes each morning. There is real human effort involved.

Hold this together with grace so students do not swing to a works mentality. The clothing is possible only because we are already chosen, holy, and loved, and because the same passage says we have died and been raised with Christ and have put on the new self (3:9–10). God supplies the wardrobe; we do the putting on. This is the healthy partnership of grace and effort: “work out your own salvation, for it is God who works in you” (Philippians 2:12–13).

Draw out the daily, repeated nature of it. We do not put on clothes once and wear them forever; we dress every morning. Likewise patience and gentleness are not acquired once and kept automatically. They are put on freshly each day, often each hour, in the moment friction arises. Character is formed by ten thousand small choices to reach for the right garment instead of the old one.

Apply it concretely. Ask students how they might “get dressed” spiritually before entering a hard situation, a tense meeting, a difficult relative, a trying day at work. Christlike character does not form by accident or by good intentions; it forms as we deliberately, prayerfully, repeatedly put on what Christ has given us to wear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The believer’s active responsibility to put on the new self (Colossians 3:9–10, 12)
- The partnership of God’s work and our effort in sanctification (Philippians 2:12–13)
- Christlike character formed by repeated, deliberate choices, not passive waiting
- Putting off the old self and putting on the new as the daily shape of growth (Ephesians 4:22–24)
- The Spirit as the one who produces this fruit as we walk in him (Galatians 5:25)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the image of “getting dressed” teach about how character is formed?
- How do grace and effort work together in putting on these virtues?
- How could you “get dressed” spiritually before a hard situation tomorrow?

Question 4

Student Question:

Think about your typical morning. What would it look like to deliberately “put on” patience and gentleness before you ever encounter the people who test them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the metaphor into a plan. Most of our failures of patience happen because we walk into the day undressed, reacting in the moment rather than having prepared our hearts. Help students picture their actual morning and the actual people who will test them: a spouse, a child, a coworker, a fellow member, the driver in traffic.

Make the preparation concrete. Putting on patience before the friction might mean a few minutes of prayer naming the person who tests us and asking God for gentleness toward them. It might mean rehearsing the truth that we are chosen, holy, and loved, so we have something to give. It might mean deciding in advance how we will respond when the familiar irritation comes. Forewarned and dressed, we are far less likely to be ambushed.

Keep it hopeful and doable. The point is not a perfect morning routine but one small, repeatable habit of putting on the right garment before the day undresses us. Encourage students to name the person most likely to test their patience tomorrow and one specific way they will prepare their heart before they meet them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Deliberate preparation of the heart before temptation (Colossians 3:12)
- Prayer as the means by which we receive grace for the day (Hebrews 4:16)
- Patience and gentleness as fruit cultivated, not summoned in panic (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Renewing the mind as the path to transformed behavior (Romans 12:2)

Discussion Prompts

- Who is most likely to test your patience tomorrow?
- What is one way you could prepare your heart before you meet them?
- How might rehearsing your identity in Christ give you something to give them?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul commands, "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone" (v. 13). What does it tell us about the nature of the church that Paul assumes there will be grievances among us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice Paul's realism and let it surprise the students. He does not say "in the rare event that someone wrongs you." He says "if any of you has a grievance," assuming it will happen. Paul writes to a real church, not an imaginary perfect one. The very command to "bear with" and "forgive" presupposes that Christians will sometimes irritate, disappoint, and wound one another. This is built into Paul's expectations.

Help students see why this is actually freeing. Many believers carry a false picture of the church as a place where mature Christians never clash. When friction comes, they are disillusioned, as though something has gone terribly wrong. But Paul tells us friction is normal among forgiven sinners still being sanctified. The church is not a museum of finished saints but a hospital of

people being healed. Knowing this releases us from disillusionment and frees us to do the real work of love.

Define the two responses Paul commands. To “bear with” one another is to put up with the ongoing frictions, the personality differences, the annoying habits, the slow growth, with patience. To “forgive” is to release the actual wrongs, the grievances that have a real moral weight. Both are needed. Some things in the body we simply bear; other things we must forgive. The mature Christian learns which is which.

Apply it to congregational life. A church where people expect perfection will be a church of constant offense and frequent exits. A church that expects to bear with and forgive one another will be a church that endures and grows. Ask students whether their expectations of fellow members leave room for the patience and forgiveness Paul assumes will be needed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as forgiven sinners still being sanctified, not finished saints (Philippians 1:6)
- Forbearance with one another’s faults as a command, not a suggestion (Ephesians 4:2)
- Forgiveness of real grievances as essential to body life (Colossians 3:13)
- The difference between bearing with frictions and forgiving genuine wrongs
- Realistic expectations of the body as a safeguard against disillusionment

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it freeing rather than discouraging that Paul expects grievances among us?
- What is the difference between “bearing with” someone and “forgiving” them?
- How do unrealistic expectations of the church set us up for constant offense?

Question 6

Student Question:

Is there a grievance you are currently holding against a brother or sister, perhaps quietly keeping score? What is making it hard to bear with them and let it go?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks for honesty about a present grievance. Many of us carry low-grade resentments that we have never named as such: a slight we have not forgotten, a wound we keep warm, a quiet ledger of someone’s failures. Help students bring one of these into the light, gently and without shame, because a grievance unnamed is a grievance unhealed.

Probe what makes it hard to let go. Sometimes it is the size of the wound; the hurt was real and deep. Sometimes it is pride; forgiving feels like losing. Sometimes it is a sense of justice; we want the person to acknowledge what they did first. Sometimes holding the grievance gives us a

strange comfort, a feeling of moral superiority. Naming the obstacle is the first step toward releasing it.

Point gently toward the way out, which the next verses supply: forgive as the Lord forgave you. The aim here is not to minimize the wrong but to loosen its grip on the student's heart. Encourage students to name the person, name the grievance, and name the obstacle, and to begin asking God for the grace to bear with and forgive, even if the full release is a journey.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of nursing grievances and keeping score (1 Corinthians 13:5)
- Bitterness as a root that defiles if left unaddressed (Hebrews 12:15)
- Forgiveness as release rather than the minimizing of a real wrong
- The heart's need to be honest before God about hidden resentment (Psalm 139:23–24)

Discussion Prompts

- What grievance are you currently holding, perhaps without naming it?
- What specifically is making it hard to let it go?
- What would be the first step toward bearing with and forgiving that person?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul sets the measure: "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (v. 13). How does the way the Lord has forgiven us define how we must forgive one another, and what happens when we forget how much we have been forgiven?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Fix the students' attention on the measure: "as the Lord forgave you." Our forgiveness of others is not measured against the offense but against the mercy we have received. This changes everything. The question is no longer "does this person deserve forgiveness," but "how has the Lord forgiven me?" And the answer is: freely, fully, while we were still sinners, at the cost of his Son's blood.

Unpack the qualities of the Lord's forgiveness that become our pattern. He forgave us before we asked, taking the initiative in Christ (Romans 5:8). He forgave completely, removing our sins as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). He forgave at great cost to himself. He forgave and then welcomed us back into fellowship as sons, not as second-class servants. Each of these becomes the shape of the forgiveness we owe one another.

Press the second half of the question: what happens when we forget. This is precisely the sin of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21–35), who was forgiven an unpayable debt and then seized a fellow servant over a trifle. The moment we forget how much we have been forgiven,

we become harsh, calculating, and unforgiving toward others. An unforgiving Christian is, at that moment, a Christian who has lost sight of the cross.

Apply it with both warning and comfort. The warning is real: Jesus says the one who refuses to forgive endangers his own standing in God's mercy (Matthew 6:14–15). But the comfort is greater: when we keep the cross in view, forgiveness toward others flows naturally, because we are simply passing on what we have received. Ask students to set the grievance they are holding next to the mountain of their own forgiven debt.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Lord's forgiveness of us as the measure of our forgiveness of others (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32)
- God's forgiveness as free, full, and costly, given while we were sinners (Romans 5:8; Psalm 103:12)
- The peril of the unforgiving heart that forgets its own forgiven debt (Matthew 18:21–35)
- The link Jesus draws between forgiving others and receiving forgiveness (Matthew 6:14–15)
- Forgiveness of others as the overflow of the gospel received, not a separate achievement

Discussion Prompts

- What qualities of the Lord's forgiveness become the pattern for ours?
- What happens in your heart when you forget how much you have been forgiven?
- How does setting a grievance next to your own forgiven debt change things?

Question 8

Student Question:

Honestly compare the mercy you have received from God with the mercy you extend to others. Where are you holding someone to a standard God has graciously refused to hold you to?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question is the personal edge of the unforgiving servant parable. Most of us maintain, without realizing it, a double standard: vast mercy for ourselves, strict accounting for others. We want our own failures understood and excused, while we hold others to a standard of perfection. Help students bring this hidden double standard into the open.

Make it concrete. We forgive ourselves a sharp word as a hard day but hold a brother's sharp word against him for months. We expect grace for our own slow growth but grow impatient with someone else's. We assume the best about our own motives and the worst about another's. In each case we are holding someone to a standard from which God has graciously released us.

Move toward the gospel cure with hope. The remedy is not to lower the standard but to remember the mercy. When we truly see how much God has forgiven us, the small debts others owe us shrink into their proper size. Encourage students to name one person they are holding to such a standard and to deliberately extend the very mercy they themselves have received.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The double standard of much mercy for self and little for others (Matthew 18:28–30)
- Mercy received as the measure of mercy given (James 2:13)
- The call to be merciful as our Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)
- Remembering grace as the cure for a harsh and exacting spirit

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you excuse in yourself what you condemn in others?
- Whom are you holding to a standard God has graciously released you from?
- What would it look like to extend to them the mercy you have received?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says, “over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (v. 14). Why does Paul call love the garment that holds all the others together, and what happens to patience and forbearance when love is missing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so give it room. Paul has listed the wardrobe, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and now he throws one final garment over the whole outfit: love. He calls it the thing that “binds them all together in perfect unity.” Love is not merely one virtue among the others; it is the belt or sash that holds the entire wardrobe in place and gives it coherence.

Show why love is the binding garment. Each of the other virtues, separated from love, decays into a counterfeit. Patience without love becomes mere endurance, gritting our teeth at people we secretly resent. Forbearance without love becomes cold tolerance, putting up with people while keeping them at arm’s length. Forgiveness without love becomes a transaction, words said without a heart restored. Love is what makes all the others genuine. It supplies the warmth and the aim that the rest would lack on their own.

Connect love to the unity of the body. Paul says love binds everything together “in perfect unity,” and he is thinking not only of the virtues but of the church. The same love that holds the wardrobe together holds the body together. A congregation may have many fine qualities, but

without love among its members it falls apart at the seams. Love is the connective tissue of the body of Christ, the bond that keeps diverse and imperfect people knit together as one.

Anchor this love in its source so it does not become a vague ideal. This is the love Christ has shown us, the love that chose us, set us apart, and gave itself for us. We can put on this love only because we have first been clothed in it. Paul's order holds to the end: we love because we are chosen, holy, and dearly loved. Ask students where their patience and forbearance have grown brittle, and whether the missing garment is love.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love as the supreme garment that binds all the virtues together (Colossians 3:14)
- Love as the bond of unity within the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:2-3)
- The counterfeits that virtues become when love is absent (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)
- Love as patient, kind, and bearing all things, the heart of all the virtues (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)
- Christ's love for us as the source and pattern of the love we put on (1 John 4:19)
- The danger of right behavior without love, which falls short of the gospel's goal

Discussion Prompts

- Why is love the garment that holds all the others in place?
- What does patience become when love is missing? What does forgiveness become?
- Where has your forbearance grown brittle for lack of love?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Colossians 3:12-14 as a whole: our identity as chosen and loved, the wardrobe of Christlike virtues, forbearance and forgiveness, and love over all. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to grow through this passage, and what you will do about it.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole lesson into one concrete commitment. Resist letting it stay general. "I want to be more patient" is a wish, not a step. Help students name a specific person, a specific arena, and a specific action that flows from what struck them most in the passage.

Encourage them to connect the application to the part of the text that pressed on them. For one student it may be resting more deeply in being chosen, holy, and dearly loved. For another it may be deliberately putting on a missing garment, patience or gentleness, before a daily friction. For another it may be releasing a grievance they have been nursing, forgiving as the Lord

forgave them. For another it may be letting love bind the brittle places back together. The text itself should drive the response.

Close by lifting their eyes back to Christ. The goal of this study is not behavior modification but becoming like Jesus, who bore with us patiently and forgave us fully at the cross. Remind students that the same Lord who commands this wardrobe is the one who first clothed us in his grace and who supplies, by his Spirit, the love he calls for. Send them out not with a heavy burden but with a clear next step and confident hope that Christ is forming them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of the Christian life as growing conformity to Christ, who bore with and forgave us (Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:13)
- The Holy Spirit's work in producing these virtues in the believer (Galatians 5:22–23)
- Personal, specific obedience as the proper response to God's word (James 1:22)
- Christ as both the pattern and the power of the forbearance and love he commands

Discussion Prompts

- What part of this passage pressed on your heart most, and why?
- What is the one specific step you will take, and when?
- How will you depend on Christ's Spirit, rather than your own willpower, as you take it?