

One Another

Lesson 7: Bear with One Another in Patience -- Colossians 3:12-14

Every morning you stand in front of a closet and decide what to put on. You reach for clothes that fit the day ahead: work clothes, rain gear, something warm if it is cold outside. Paul borrows that everyday picture and gives it to the church. He says there is a wardrobe the Christian is to put on every single day, and it is not made of cloth. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Before you ever step out the door into the friction of life together, you are to dress your soul in these garments. And like real clothes, they do not appear on us by accident. We have to reach for them and put them on.

But notice where Paul starts. He does not begin with the command; he begins with our identity. "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved." Before he tells us a single thing to do, he tells us who we already are. Chosen. Holy, set apart for God. Dearly loved. This is the order the gospel always follows. We do not put on compassion and patience in order to become accepted by God; we put them on because we already are accepted, already chosen, already loved in Christ. The clothing of the new self is the natural wardrobe of people who know whose they are.

Then Paul gets specific and personal: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone." There it is, the realism of it. "If any of you has a grievance." Paul does not pretend the church is a place where no one ever annoys, disappoints, or wounds anyone. He assumes the opposite. He knows that when imperfect people are bound together in one body, there will be grievances. And his counsel is not to leave, not to keep score, but to bear with one another and to forgive, with one measure governing it all: "Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

And over the whole outfit Paul throws one final garment, like a coat that holds everything else in place. "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Love is the belt, the overcoat, the sash that keeps the other garments from falling off. Patience without love grows brittle. Forbearance without love becomes mere tolerance. But love ties the whole wardrobe together and binds the whole body together in perfect harmony. This lesson is about learning to wear that wardrobe, and especially the patience that lets us bear with one another as people who have first been borne with by God.

Group Discussion: Paul tells us to "bear with each other," assuming that Christians will sometimes irritate, disappoint, and wound one another. Why do we so often expect the church to be free of friction, and how does Paul's realism actually set us free to love?

Personal Reflection: Who in your church family are you finding hardest to "bear with" right now? As you begin, what would it mean to see that person, and yourself, through the lens of being chosen, holy, and dearly loved?

Read Colossians 3:12–14

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?

7. 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?

8. 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?

9. 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?

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Ephesians 4:1-3, where we are to walk with all humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love and keeping the unity of the Spirit; Matthew 18:21-35, where the unforgiving servant is condemned for refusing the mercy he himself received; Colossians 3:1-4, where we have died and our life is hidden with Christ in God, the ground of putting on the new self; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, where love is patient and kind and bears all things; Romans 15:7, where we are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us.