

## Colossians 3 pt. 2 v12-13

In the preceding verses Paul began to instruct the Colossians on the practical application of a life in Christ. Since Christ is the center of our faith then the results will be evident among His people by how we live.

Generally speaking Col 3:1-11 deals with those things that we are to **put off**, or remove, from ourselves, since we are changed by Jesus, because we have set our minds on things above, having participated in His death and resurrection (Col 3:1-4).

Paul's language is quite strong when it comes to dealing with the ugliness of sin that we so readily cling to, and that were marks of our pre-converted selves:

“[Col 3:5, 8-9 NKJV] 5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ... 8 But now you yourselves are to **put off** all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,”

Moving forward Paul encourages the church to adopt, or ***“put on”*** the attributes of Christ as a result of that same spiritual change that causes Christians to let go of our ugliness.

So then, the result of communing with Jesus is a changed life - divesting ourselves of wickedness and clothing ourselves with Christ’s righteousness.

V.12 - Paul continues to lay out this message of sanctification, growing in holiness, by employing a term that indicates a logical inference, “Therefore.”

Paul is saying that based on all that has already been set forth with regards to dying to ourselves, putting to death our own sin, and sharing in Christ’s likeness we are bound to take the next step in the process of being made holy, being made into the image of Christ.

But, before we tackle the practicalities of holiness carried through Col 3 into Col 4 we must tarry for a bit at Paul’s language in v.12 since it bears significantly on one of the most divisive of Christian doctrines -- the Doctrine of Election, sometimes referred to as Predestination.

Whether one agrees with this doctrine or not, well respected theologian, Wayne Grudem, provides a succinct definition of the Doctrine of Election that serves as a good baseline for beginning a brief analysis of the subject:

“Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure.”<sup>1</sup>

In our text Paul prescribes to the Colossians several imperatives for their continuation in holiness, but first he describes them “as the elect of God.”

So then, if we are committed to interpreting the Bible consistently and faithfully then we must admit that we can discern from the text at minimum that Paul believed, and recorded for all time, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, the fact that God chose/elected this congregation and its members by His grace. They are chosen.<sup>2</sup> That much is certain.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 670.

<sup>2</sup> “ἐκλεκτός...pert[aining] to being selected, chosen gener[ally] of those whom God has chosen fr[om] the generality of mankind and drawn to himself...” William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 306.

Now, does the NT support this view of election in a more general sense outside of the Colossians? While this is not about the finer points of Calvinism or Election the short answer is, Yes.

For example:

[1Pe 1:1-2 NKJV] 1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 ***elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father***, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

[Mat 24:24, 31 NKJV] 24 "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, ***even the elect***. ... 31 "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

[Rom 8:33 NKJV] 33 Who shall bring a charge against ***God's elect***? [It is] God who justifies.

[2Th 2:13 NKJV] 13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, **because God from the beginning chose you for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,

[2Ti 2:10 NKJV] 10 Therefore I endure all things **for the sake of the elect**, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

More substantially, Paul writes to the Ephesians, [Eph 1:4-5, 11 NKJV] 4 just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 **having predestined us to adoption** as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ... 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, **being predestined** according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,”

So, does the Bible teach the Doctrine of Election? Yes. Is that hard for some people to grasp? Absolutely!

But, are we more convinced by our own presuppositions and pre-understandings than by the very Word of God? Sometimes

we are and that's what makes it difficult for straight-line Calvinists and straight-line Arminianists to come to a ***balanced theology*** - acknowledging that the Scriptures teach both: election by God and the responsibility of the saints to respond to God's grace.

J.I. Packer includes a record of an exchange between two historic Christians, Charles Simeon interacting with John Wesley in 1784, at opposite ends of this debate. Charles Simeon records the account:

“Sir, I understand that you are called an Arminian; and I have been sometimes called a Calvinist; and therefore I suppose we are to draw daggers. But before I consent to begin combat, with your permission I will ask you a few questions...do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God, if God had not first put it into your heart?” “Yes,” says [John Wesley], “I do indeed.” “And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything you can do; and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?” “Yes, solely through Christ.” “But, sir, supposing you were at first saved by Christ, are you not somehow or other to save yourself afterwards by your own works?” “No, I must be saved by Christ from first to last.” “Allowing then that you

were first turned by the grace of God, are you not in some way or other to keep yourself by your own power?” “No.” “What then, are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God, as much as an infant in its mother’s arms?” “Yes, altogether.” “And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God to preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom?” “Yes, I have no hope but in him.” “Then sir, with your leave I will put up my dagger again; for this is all my Calvinism; this is my election, my justification by faith, my final perseverance...and therefore, if you please, instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things wherein we agree.”<sup>3</sup>

Now just think, contextually, as Paul is explaining the result of participating in Christ’s personhood to the Colossians and he’s telling them to die to themselves, and mortify the deeds of the flesh, and live holy lives before God, that he is presenting to them both ***correction*** and ***instruction***.

The inference then, at least partially, is that they didn’t have all of their goodness perfectly nailed down; they were flawed believers still growing in holiness.

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<sup>3</sup> J.I. Packer *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. (Intervarsity: Downers Grove, IL) 2008, 17-18.

God didn't choose them because they chose to exercise their freewill and were remarkably good and holy, He chose them as an act of His freewill, in His grace, because He is good and holy, and He promised to make them like He is. The same holds true for us.

Viewed from this perspective the Doctrine of Election fits perfectly well within orthodox Christian theology - elevating the grace of God and His will over and above mankind's.

All of that being set forth, we will not diverge too much from the text in pursuit of the Doctrine of Free Will since our text is not concerned with that argument; even as we acknowledge that the concept of human responsibility (free will), and an open invitation to 'whosoever will' is also identifiable in Scripture (Mk 8:34; Jhn 3:15-16; 4:10,14; 7:37; Rev 22:17)

As stated earlier, the point of the aforementioned discourse is not to parse all of the nuances of Calvinism nor its counterpoints or alternate views but to recognize and acknowledge how God views the church and its members, as recorded in Holy Scripture -- "as the elect of God, holy, and beloved."

And, since God has chosen His saints, then we do have a responsibility to follow His commands, and to move to the sound of His voice and the direction of the Scriptures.

Election doesn't mean being ineffectual, or unconcerned with others since you're either chosen or you're not.

We acknowledge that we are saved by God's grace and chosen by Him. Since we are chosen by God, seen as holy in His eyes by the blood of Christ, loved by Him despite our deficiencies, then we carry out His will with tenacity, endurance and grit - looking for the others that God has called unto Himself but have yet to respond.

Paul writes to the Ephesians about the intersection of God's grace; God's works that He has prepared for us at some point in the past unknown to us, and our own responsibility:

[Eph 2:8-10 NKJV] 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus ***for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.***

So how does this all bear out practically?

First, as the elect, the loved, the holy, we collectively (based on Paul's use of the second person, plural, imperative) dress ourselves in our Father's clothes.<sup>4</sup> We have no interest in our own filthy rags (Isa 64:6) and we look to the Lord's closet.

We adorn ourselves with tender mercies - that means "concern, sensitivity, compassion," and as the name explicitly declares...mercy.

Remember, mercy is withholding judgment, or condemnation, even if that condemnation and judgment may be justified. Mercy is choosing to forego wrath.

Paul's word choice here<sup>5</sup> really speaks to the internal condition of the believers at Colossae - they were supposed to have soft hearts, and sensitive dispositions.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul's use of the second person, plural, imperative, Ἐνδύσασθε (endusasthe), indicates that the entire church body is, "to put on and to wear clothes—to wear, to dress." Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 525.

<sup>5</sup> σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ (splagkna oiktirmou) may be paraphrased as "sensitive guts" or "soft insides" or "tender hearted."

Furthermore they were to adorn themselves with kindness and humility.

Sometimes we would rather defend our shortcoming in this area by saying, “Well, I guess that’s just how God made me,” or appealing to Jesus’ righteous wrath, rather than admitting that those examples don’t serve us well at all and we are to place ourselves under the authority of Scriptures and allow ourselves to be shaped by it, even if that means repenting along the way.

There are quite a few Christians who need to conduct some self-reflection on the Biblical imperative to be kind.

We can’t blame our character flaws, rudeness, and unkindness on the Lord and just claim that He made us to be prickly porcupines. The Scriptures tell a different story about what happens to people who are following after Jesus.

[Rom 8:29 NKJV] 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined ***[to be] conformed to the image of His Son***, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

AND

[2Co 5:17 NKJV] 17 Therefore, if anyone [is] in Christ, [he is] a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

May the Lord forgive us when we try to explain away our unkindness and lack of humility. We are supposed to be like Him and becoming more like Him along the way.

Additionally, we are to adopt the attributes, we are to be robed in meekness and longsuffering.

The oft cited, common definition of meekness is, “power under control.” We love that definition, it allows us to feel powerful...even if we’re not. Nobody wants to admit they are not powerful.

BDAG, arguably the definitive Lexicon on New Testament Greek and early Christian literature, defines the Greek term behind the English word for “meekness” as, “**the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance, gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness...**”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “πραΰτης” William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 861.

Furthermore, Louw-Nida, presents this term as, “gentleness of attitude and behavior, in contrast with harshness in one’s dealings with others—...In a number of languages ‘gentleness’ is often expressed as a negation of harshness, so that ‘gentleness’ may often by (sic) rendered as ‘not being harsh with people,’ but gentleness may also be expressed in some instances in an idiomatic manner, for example, ‘always speaking softly to’ or ‘not raising one’s voice.’”<sup>7</sup>

How does that jive with our notions of “power under control?”  
More so, how does it challenge our own temptation to be impressed by our own self-importance?

Longsuffering means exactly what it sounds like - to suffer long, or be patient over the long term.

V.13 Continues to define God’s expectation of those who are elect, holy, and beloved; that they might bear with one another and forgive one another.

Who is the “one another?” The church! Paul is writing to the church in Colossae and apparently they needed to be reminded

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<sup>7</sup> “88.59 πραΰτης” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 748.

that they were to bear with one another and forgive one another rather than employing the host of worldly, fleshly, and sometimes demonic, (see James 3:14-18) options exercised by church members today like: bolting for the exit, creating divisions, tearing down the pastor and staff, tearing each other down, burning the whole place down (metaphorically speaking), or silently fading into obscurity because of hurt feelings and the felt need to stand up for ourselves and assert the primacy of our rights and privileges over and above others.

So then, all of those attributes that we are to “put on” don’t **ONLY** apply to the outside world, but also inside the church -- the mercy, kindness, soft hearts, meekness, humility, and patience -- these are things that we are to extend to our dearly loved family **inside** the church! Even when, or perhaps especially when, we find ourselves at odds with one another.

The attributes of Christ that we wear aren’t meant only to benefit us. They are meant to benefit those we come into contact with as we live life in the Body of Christ.

Forgiveness, that great Christian virtue, is also something we are to exercise freely in churches.

BUT, for a moment let us consider how this fits together with reconciliation. Because what Paul sets forth here is BIG!

Consider what immediately comes to mind if we present this clause: “if anyone has a complaint against another...”

What do we do? Well, many seasoned Christians immediately begin to consider the Biblical instructions for believers in conflict with one another found in Matthew’s gospel:

[Mat 18:15-17 NKJV] 15 "Moreover if your brother **sins** against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 "And if he refuses to hear them, tell [it] to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Notice a few things.

1. It's on the offended party, not the offender to initiate reconciliation.
2. It is not within the offended parties authority to exact retribution or punishment.

Now look at Paul's writing in Colossians and let us reconcile these, if we can.

“If anyone (the offended party) **has a complaint** against another (the offender); even as Christ forgave you (the entire church at Colossae (2nd person, plural -- y'all)) so you all must do.”

***Forgiveness and reconciliation*** are the purposes of confrontation and church discipline within the Body.

The purpose of church discipline or confrontation is not primarily to make somebody apologize or put them in their place or foster an atmosphere of hyper-criticality in the Body.

Notice that Jesus' taught, “If your brother **SINS** against you...” so I would argue that it is wise to restrict our confrontations to matters of sin.

One could also make the argument that these instructions for confronting somebody who has sinned against us or that we have a complaint against are actually to teach **the offended party** about forgiving others and being gracious and merciful more than bringing to light some grievance.

Notice that in Paul's instruction to the Colossians he makes no provision for confrontation but simply leaves it at, "if you have a complaint against somebody else...forgive them like Jesus forgave you" (paraphrased of course).

There's no multi-step plan in Paul's instructions. Only a one step plan...forgive.

Perhaps the entire point is to soften the offended person's heart toward others and teach them about the heart of Christ who forgave us, wretched as we are.

Let me show you what I mean. God had a complaint against us! Rightly so! We were filthy pagans, sons and daughters of the flesh, the world, and the devil.

But...He extended His grace towards us. He forgave us. He forgives us. That forgiveness is simply unmatched but we can model it here on earth if we would submit to God's Word and actually do the thing!

All in all, what we see in these brief two verses is the face of Christ staring back at us. Reminding us that we are to look like Him -- chosen, holy, loved, merciful, kind, humble, meek, eternally patient, bearing with others, forgiving others.

These are not second tier issues that maybe we'll get around to one day if we're not too busy figuring out Calvinism. This is the baseline...if you are a child of God, then this is how you will live.

This is the way of Jesus. This is what He has set us apart to be by His grace, His Spirit, and His Word.