



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

## Dress to Match Your Status

### Colossians 3.12–13<sup>1</sup>

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#### Review

1. Paul begins the practical section of Colossians by pointing back to his declaration in 2.12: the Colossians had been buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him through their faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.
  - a. “Therefore” they were to keep seeking and keep thinking of the things above (3.1–2).
  - b. Reason: they had died, their lives had been and remained hidden with Christ in God, and they had the assurance they would be revealed in glory with him (3.3–4).
2. In view of those blessings, Paul emphasized that behavior matters, focusing first on the dying part of seeking the things above; “therefore” (v. 5) they were to kill behaviors that belonged to the earth: sensual sins (vv. 5–7), anger sins (v. 8), integrity sins (vv. 9–10), and sins of prejudice (v. 11).
3. But Christian faith is not about what we are not to do; Paul’s third “therefore” (3.12) in the passage focuses on the rising part of seeking the things above.

#### A Change of Metaphor

4. Notice that Paul changes the metaphor for the behavior we are to do.
  - a. Following the Greek text, the ESV begins with plural aorist imperative, “put on” (ἐνδύσασθε, *endusasthe*), a command to decisive action (v. 12).

#### Identity before Behavior (3.12a)

5. But before he says what Christians are to do, he focuses on our identity, who we are.
  - a. Paul aligns with the methodology of ancient ethics instruction, beginning with the *summum bonum*, the highest good, the reason for living, *before* turning to social and individual behavior, the focus of modern ethics courses (see Kreeft 1989, 17–18).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the NET; italics in Scripture citations are my additions.

<sup>2</sup> Writing in World War II, C. S. Lewis compared the three necessary components of ethics instruction to the merchant-ship convoys ferrying supplies from the U. S. to its allies. The ships needed to know: (1) how to cooperate, to keep from bumping into each other; this corresponds to social ethics; (2) each ship had to know how to stay shipshape and seaworthy; this corresponds to individual ethics; (3) most important, the ships had to know the convoy’s mission, why it was at sea in the first place; this corresponds to the question of the greatest good. See Lewis 1952, 72; also Kreeft 1990, 77.

- b. Paul singles out three facts about risen people (all are plural); we are:
  - 1) “The elect of God” (or “chosen,” ESV, NIV); the plural adjective from ἐκλεκτός (*eklektos*)
  - 2) “Holy”; the plural adjective from ἅγιος (*hagios*).
  - 3) “Dearly loved” (NET, NIV; “beloved” in ESV), a perfect plural participle from the verb, ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*); “esteemed” would be a good translation.
- 6. While all of these terms convey rich meanings of themselves, we miss something of Paul’s point if we do not appreciate that all had a rich heritage in ancient Israel.
  - a. The fundamental aspect of Israel’s self-perception was they were chosen by God, were therefore called to be holy (cf. Lev 11.44; etc.), and were to remember that they were especially loved.
  - b. These traits, more than human ability or accomplishments, gave them their identity; Deut 7.6–8 summarizes the point.
- 7. Think about the implication of this for the Colossian church (and Gentile churches ever since).
  - a. A community with a significant Gentile constituency “were being invited to consider themselves full participants in the people and heritage of Israel” (Dunn 1996, 228).
  - b. In other words, they were to see themselves as the new-age embodiment of “God’s true Israel” (Wright 1986, 141) (cf. Gal 6.16; Rom 9.6–8; Phil 3.3).
  - c. We also need to understand our place in Israel’s heritage, as participants in the continuation of God’s plan from eternity (for more elaboration on this idea, see Eph 2–3).

#### *What the Elect of God Should Wear (3.12b)*

- 8. Verse 12b enumerates five character traits—all exemplified by Christ—that believers are to “put on.”
- 9. “A heart of mercy” (σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ, *splagchna oiktirmou*).
  - a. ESV and NIV—“compassion”; NKJV—“tender mercies;” but note the KJV’s “bowels of mercy.”
  - b. The KJV is closer to antiquity’s understanding of the part of a person “where the seat of emotions was thought to be located” (Dunn 1996, 228), the entrails being the place where something is deeply felt.
  - c. Linking the deep feelings with “mercy,” or pity, which is a trait of God himself (Rom 12.1–2; 2 Cor 1.3), strengthens our appreciation of the phrase as “a deep sensitivity to the needs and sorrows of others” that expresses the “sympathy<sup>3</sup> with others that affects one’s innermost being” (Wright 1986, 141).
- 10. “Kindness” (χρηστότης, *chrēstotēs*).
  - a. Another term associated with God’s goodness (Rom 2.4), expected of those who are created in his image (Col 3.10).
  - b. This also is a relationship word.
- 11. “Humility” (ταπεινοφροσύνη, *tapeinophrosynē*) (cf. Phil 2.3; Eph 4.2).
  - a. For the Greeks, this was an unpopular trait, too closely related to servility to ever be considered a popular virtue (Dunn 1996, 229).
  - b. It is not the idea of worthlessness, but one of submission out of an honest assessment of our need for God.

<sup>3</sup> I would add “empathy” to this point.

- c. But this was the character trait of Jesus that led him to the cross, the model for how we should treat others (Phil 2.1–11), and a characteristic of Paul himself (Acts 20.19).

12. “Gentleness” (πραΰτης, *prautēs*).

- a. Traditionally, this is translated “meekness” (ESV).
- b. The word conveys the idea of strength that is under control and has to do with approaching people in a way that refuses rudeness or arrogance (Wright 1986, 142).
- c. It is also a character trait of Jesus, who stressed it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 11.29; 5.5).

13. “Patience” (μακροθυμία, *makrothymia*).

- a. The Hebrew background for this word is picturesque: one who has a long nose.<sup>4</sup>
- b. It also has to do with our relationship with people, and is sometimes translated “longsuffering.”
- c. It is the opposite of resentment or wrath—and serves as the perfect introduction to what follows.

*Doing the Hard Work in Relationships (3.13)*

14. The reality is that in relationships, it is often necessary to “restrain your natural reaction towards odd or difficult people, let them be themselves—and forgive whatever grievances you may have against another” (Wright 1986, 142).

15. Because it is realistic that there will be times when we have “a complaint against another” (ESV), we must *learn* (cf. Matt 11.29) to “bear with one another.”

- a. This is a *present* tense participial phrase (ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων, *anechomenoi allēlōn*) that explains how we demonstrate the character of people who are elect, holy, and dearly loved.
- b. The word “has the sense of ‘endure, bear with, tolerate’” (Dunn 1996, 230).
- c. It assumes that we will encounter difficult attitudes and behaviors that are immature or tiresome, and that when we do, we are to tolerate troublesome people.<sup>5</sup>

16. This also means that we are going to be required to be “forgiving [of] one another.”

- a. This is also a *present* tense participial phrase (χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς, *charizomenoi heautois*).
- b. It is a necessary part of bearing with others; note that it is required because someone has done something against which we might have a legitimate “[cause of] complaint” (μομφή, *momphē*); the offending party is at fault and deserving of blame or censure.
- c. Note: this is not the vocabulary word first-year Greek students learn for “forgive.”
  - 1) This verb, used 23 times in the NT, means to do or grant a favor, or discharge from an obligation (Danker 2009, 381), and is the verb form of χάρις (*charis*), “grace.”
  - 2) It fits perfectly with the idea of being patient with and tolerating others: we are to decide to extend grace to them (similar uses of the word appear in 2 Cor 2.7, 10; 12.13; Eph 4.32; Col 2.13; cf. also Rom 8.32—God will “*freely give* us all things”).

17. Tolerating and forgiving are the ultimate embodiments of Christ’s character, as the last part of verse 13 shows: we are to extend grace to others just as the Lord has extended grace to us.

- a. We grow to value others as Jesus has valued us to the point that we extend grace to them just as he has extended it to us.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g., Prov 25.12 where two words, length ( ַרְאָק, *ʾāraq*) and nose (or anger; ַרְאָ, *ʾap*) are translated “patience.”

<sup>5</sup> Note that this cannot be done because it “feels” good; it requires a conscious decision to act this way.

- b. This means that we will show “mutual respect and support,... recognition of mutual vulnerability,... valuing of each other beyond individual hurts and faults” (Dunn 1996, 231).

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### Works Cited

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