

Beloved, Put On: Love

Colossians 3:12-14

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Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Let's come before the Lord in prayer as we look at His word together. Dear Father, we come before You now, and we ask, Lord God, that You would send the Holy Spirit to awaken and open the eyes of our understanding. Give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You, that we might know the hope of our calling, that we might know the sure riches of the grace of the blessedness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that we would be a people that walk in love with the love with which You have loved us. And we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

This morning, we want to focus on verses 12 to verse number 14 as we continue in our series in the book of Colossians. And last week, we considered that there is this new man that God has made us into, but he's not perfect yet. He's a new man, as John Murray said, not yet made perfect. He's being renewed, being renewed according to the knowledge of his creator, being renewed to be made more and more reflective of his creator. He lives not on his own, but he lives as part of a community, a community of believers that are made up of all kinds of people: Scythian, barbarian, Jew, Gentile, all strange and colorful kinds of people. But nevertheless, he is part of a community in which Christ is to be all, and He is in all. And therefore, in that community, he is to walk in love and to walk in unity with those that are so different from him because they have the common bond of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But when we come to verses 12 and to verse number 14 this morning, we actually are continuing on from the section on mortification. In verse number five, it says, "Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." And then in verse number eight, it says, "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth." So there are five things that we are to put to death, five things that we are to put off.

But in verse number 12, he picks up the imagery again of putting off but gives us the antithesis or the opposite of that and says, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved," and then he uses the words "put on." And so he's moving from what we have put off as the new man. We put off certain things that don't belong to us as the new man. But also, we are to put on certain things that belong to the new man. And that's an important thing to remember.

Now, what we have to also realize is that God doesn't want us just to put off things in our life. He wants us also to dress ourselves with certain things, certain things that garments that reflect the gospel of the grace of God. Let me illustrate this for you. It's pretty much common knowledge today that clothing is a language. There are certain clothes that you wear, and in a general sense, it represents certain things. It reveals your tastes, your general taste. It may reveal your kind of personality. It may reveal the kind of culture that which you're a part of. And so we know that clothing is a language that reveals certain things about us. It, in fact, reflects our image. It reflects, really, who we are. Not perfectly, of course, but it reflects who we are.

The imagery is also picked up here in the same way. And that's why at workplaces, there's a certain uniform and a certain standard of dress because the workplace wants people to know that here in this workplace, we represent the image of the company. And so if I rocked up to work in trackies and a singlet, I'd lose my job quick smart if I didn't get changed. But there's a uniform that I wear as that reflects the image that the company wants to uphold in its business in the world.

And so, in like manner, God has a uniform for us. Now, it's not the uniform of physical garments that we put on necessarily, but this is the stuff that God wants us to dress our lives with, to dress our hearts with, to dress our new man with, so that we might look like we belong to Him, that we might look like we belong to the people of His possession and are the people that are carrying out His work in the world.

And so, as Paul tells us to put off things, he doesn't want us, as it were,

to be naked, but he wants us to wear things that reflect that we belong to God, that reflect the fact that we are being molded and made into the image of Him who is our creator, garments that reflect the graces of the gospel.

Now, the thing is here, we don't get to choose our wardrobe in this respect. We get to choose what we wear. If you can put on the old man, you can put on the new man. However, we don't get to choose what makes a Christian or what a Christian should look like. God sets that out for us here in the text. He tells us that if you're going to live up to what a new man really is, these are the garments that you should dress your life with and look like.

So the absence of certain sins is not enough. I think for a lot of Christians, we think that sometimes that just because these sins are not present in my life, that means I am pleasing to God. Well, I think we have to realize that just because there's the absence of certain sins in our lives, that's not where it ends. God wants us to be clothed with certain things that reflect that we live out. It's not just a deduction or a reduction of bad things, but it's the addition of things that are consistent with our Christian profession that we ought to put on. God desires that His people would be people who have lives that are filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus.

You see, when God saved us, He put off the body of the sins of the flesh, but He didn't leave us like that. He put on for us the new man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness. And just as God put off and put on for us in conversion this new man that we are now in Christ, He wants us to continue to put off the things that are unbecoming of that new man and then to put on things continually that are befitting of the new man that He has made us into.

You see, God did not only cleanse us from sin; He also put within us His Holy Spirit. And so, we have to see and understand that God is not just happy with the fact that we are not doing certain things. That is quite easily a very legalistic and religious viewpoint in some respects. It's easier to not do certain things, certain restraints that we have, but the Christian life is much more. It's about living the life of Jesus Christ, reflecting the holiness of God in our lives and in our conduct.

And so, here we have a command in verse number 12, and that command is to put on certain things. And so, what are we to put on? What are the things that God wants us to put on? Well, let's have a look briefly at what we'll go through these briefly together and have a look at them. It says, "Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering." These are five things, just as there were five things to put to death. There were five things to put off, and here are five things to put on. Obviously, there's

much more than five, but it's probably just enough as we can handle. So, He gives us five, but these five are very essential and crucial, as we'll see.

So, the list of virtues that we ought to put on firstly is tender mercies. Now, in the King James Version, it reads "bowels of compassion." Now, that "bowels of compassion" was a word that referred to the seat of the emotions, like the bowels of compassion. The Hebrews used to describe passion from the stomach. We say the heart; they say the stomach. And so, really, as the ESV gives it, conveying that we understand it today, we have a heart. We ought to put on a heart of compassion or tender mercies, or to be a people that have a heart that is compassionate toward others. And so, the first thing we ought to put on is tender mercies, a compassionate heart. That's a heart that feels, that aches, that yearns. That's a heart that shows sympathy for those that have need and for troubled people, as it were, or for even our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

And the Christian is to be one that is like Jesus, in that when He sees the multitudes, He is one who is moved with compassion. The cold, stale, indifferent stoicism of our culture is unbecoming for Christian conduct. We ought to be a people that are affected. You know, it was Jeremiah that looked upon the destruction of Jerusalem, and he said, "My eye affects my heart." And so it is with us, and so it was with Jesus, that when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion. And people that are of tender mercies, Christians ought to be a people that look and feel, that look and enter into that which they are seeing, rather than a stoic indifference to the troubled society in which we live.

And so, the Christian ought to be marked as one who wears such tender mercies, who wears such a heart of compassion that reflects the compassion and love of Jesus Christ. Now, these are like overlapping circles, and you'll find that very quickly as we go through because He talks about a heart of compassion, and He says the next thing here that we are to have is kindness. Now, obviously, a heart of compassion is going to lead into kindness, showing acts of goodness and being someone that is sweet in your spirit, as it were, and desires to do acts of goodness towards others.

But then He goes on to say that not only are we to be that way also, but we are to also put on this humility. Now, humility is the opposite of pride, and it refers to a humbleness of mind or a lowliness of mind that doesn't put yourself above others and doesn't view yourself highly more highly than you ought. It is the mind of Christ, in that it lays down itself for others. It is not self-willed. It is not self-centered. That's what humility refers to. We ought to be, as Peter says, clothed with humility.

Also, the Bible teaches us in this passage that we are to have meekness,

and we ought to put on meekness. And meekness is that temper of spirit that accepts God's dealings with us as good. That's a very difficult thing to do. But when trouble comes into our life or hardship, and as I believe it was Thomas Brooks said, "the crook in the lot," if in God's lots there are some crooked places and some hard ways, we are not to be like the horse that kicks against it but the horse that has been broken in. And he is bridled and he's under the reign of his master and of God's providences in our lives. This is what it means to be meek. It doesn't resist the providences of God but receives them as from the hand of God, knowing that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.

And so, we are also then, lastly here, to put on long-suffering. And that is a patient forbearance that is not easily provoked when things don't go our way. But when we're under great pressure and great difficulty, we bear up under it. We're held up under it, and we suffer long with those issues and those problems that are coming our way. And so, these are the five things that we are told to put on.

But there's one more thing that's not in this list here, but if you look down with me in two verses, that is also mentioned in verse 14. It says, "But above all these things, put on love." Put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And the Bible here tells us that above all these things, superior and supremely to all the things that I just mentioned, put on love. Dress yourself with love because love is the fountain from which all the other graces flow. It is the chief fruit of the spirit. It is the grace of all Christian graces. And in fact, as the Word of God teaches us, it is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul goes so far as to say in 1 Corinthians 13 that if I do all these things and have faith that I can move mountains, and if I give my body to be burned, but I have not love, I am like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And what Paul is trying to help us understand here is that above all these things, we ought to put on love. And I think Paul's making an argument here that I'll show you in just a moment. But just as the first list was referring to sins of lust that were to put to death, and just like the second list was referring to sins of anger that we were to put off, so in this final list here given to us, there are these qualities and virtues that we are to put on that can all be summarized by the great supreme virtue of love, Christian love, the love of God.

This can clearly be seen in 1 Corinthians 13, because if we look at this chapter, everything in this passage is found and described as descriptive of love.

You see, the Bible teaches us in 1 Corinthians 13 that love has these tender mercies, and it is compassionate and sympathizes with people. It says love hopes all things, believes all things, rejoices in truth, and does not rejoice in iniquity. Love comes alongside people, rejoices when things are going well, and doesn't say to them, "Oh, look at you. You've fallen, and we rejoice in that you have fallen." It has a tender mercy about it that comes alongside, rejoices in times of goodness, and seeks to see people go on in that sense.

In the passage in 1 Corinthians, it says that love is kind, just like here, we are to put on kindness. Well, if we put on love, we will put on true kindness. And not only that, it also refers to humility. It says not only are we to put on kindness, for it is kind and does not behave itself rudely, but we are to put on humility. It says love is not puffed up; it doesn't seek its own. And 1 Corinthians 13 refers to meekness as well, even without using the word. It's not easily provoked, but it bears all things.

And finally, it is long-suffering because it says that love is patient. It is long-suffering. It bears, suffers long, and endures all things. And so, Paul says to us here that although all these gifts and all these abilities may one day fade, love will remain forever. Love never fails. Therefore, put on love.

And so, what the passage here is saying to us ultimately is that the Christian ought to be one who puts on love to reflect a love that he has experienced and knows. You see, the unbeliever, the one who doesn't know Jesus Christ, can love, but he cannot love with the love that he does not know. He cannot love with God's love. He cannot love with the love of God. And the Bible teaches us that in Romans 5:6-8. It says, "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Listen to His words: For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man, some would even dare to die." So, men can show love. But look what it says here: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

While we were still sinners, not when we were good, not because we were righteous, not because of anything within us, did He die for us. But He died for us when we were without strength, when we were not righteous, and when we were not good. You see the difference? A man may lay down his life for a good man. A man may lay down his life for a righteous man. But the love of God goes far beyond that. It lays down its life for people who were sinners, who were not good, and who were not righteous. This is the love of God displayed to us in Christ Jesus.

In fact, Jesus goes so far as to say in Luke 6:32, "But if you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who

love them." You see, the love that we are told to put on here is not the love that you had always from the day you were born and the natural affections that you shared. It runs much deeper than that. It's a love that we have tasted of and experienced. It's not the love that sinners can love with. It's the love that only Christians can love with, the new man can show because of the work of Jesus Christ.

Christian love is qualitatively different from the love of an unbeliever. It has no selfish gain and does not seek to self-gratify. It's not a love that produces self-satisfaction. Many people love other people because they get self-satisfaction out of the fact that they have loved. They feel good about themselves because they just showed love to somebody, as it were. Or they perhaps love people because of the benefit that will come in return for them. But the love that we see here in Scripture goes much deeper than that, runs much further than that, and it's the love that God has shown to us in Christ Jesus.

And in verse 14 here in this passage, it says, "You see, love is the bond." It is the tie that binds two objects together. If something has the ability to bind something or to make something bound, you have to have at least three things: you have the binding agent and two other things that the binding agent brings together and holds together. And so, when Paul says here that it's the bond of perfection, he presumes that there is this binding and this bond that is needed amongst believers, as we looked at in verse 11. There's a bond that is needed in the church of Jesus Christ between Jew and Gentile, between bond and free, between Scythian, barbarian, slave, and free. We need this bond. And he says what binds the church together, what binds the people together, is love. This is the binding agent that brings two parties that are contrary, two parties that may be even at war, or two people that aren't getting along together, or live in the same house, or in the same church, or in the same community. And love is the very thing that brings them together and holds them together. The Bible says that love is that bond of perfection. It produces a perfection in the church of God. It produces a maturity in the church of God.

Often, we judge a church by its maturity, thinking about things that are good and important but are not really the marks of true maturity. Sometimes we think that if a church has been around for many years, that it's a mature church because it celebrates its 50th-year anniversary, so to speak, and praise God for that. If a church has been standing for that long, we hope this church stands until Jesus comes. However, that's not the bond of perfection; that's not the mark of perfection.

Some people think that because we have a board of elders, maybe 10, 20, or 5 elders, or we have a certain man with a certain gift and qualification,

that means that church will be a mature church. Well, that's not necessarily true. While those things are good and are true desires that God expects from His church, they're not the things that make for maturity in the church of God. We sometimes think that a church is mature by the number of people that sit in the pews every week or by the gifts of the Spirit, like the Corinthian church did, because there were so many gifts in the church that therefore that equates to a certain measure of maturity. But what we have to realize here is that the Scripture is plain and clear: what makes a church mature is the bond that it has in love. You mark a church's maturity as it walks in love.

If the church walks in love through the storms of life, through the troubles that come its way, through the differences that exist within the body of Jesus Christ, you can be sure that that church, in time, is growing and becoming more and more mature, more and more created and formed after the image of its Creator. Let us never forget that love is the bond of perfection.

Now, I want us to look quickly at why we are to put on love, because Paul makes an argument here from Colossians 3:12 as to why we are to put on love. He says, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies." Therefore, as the elect of God, and he uses the words "holy" and "beloved," Paul is simply saying this: you have been chosen by God. God has loved you; God has set you apart for Himself. You are His prized possession. Therefore, love Him and love those around you. It's because you are God's chosen ones, he says, put on love.

What he's saying is you may be Jew, you may be Greek, you may be Scythian, you may be slave, you may be bond, you may be free, but all those distinctions have no relevance in the church of God. The one thing that matters is that you belong to God because God has chosen you. He has taken you out of darkness, brought you into His marvelous light. He has brought you into His body; He has saved you by His grace. And he's saying, therefore, as God's chosen ones, you are the people of His possession. Therefore, you are holy and you are beloved.

You see, the word "elect of God" has its apposition or is described for us in the words "holy" and "beloved." He says you are God's chosen ones in that you have been holy, meaning God has set you apart for Himself. He has chosen you and set you apart for Himself. And beyond that, he says also that you are beloved. And that is in the perfect tense, in the passive tense, that you, having been loved, know what God has done.

God, as the book of Ephesians says, from before the foundation of the world, has chosen us in Christ Jesus that we should be holy and with-

out blame before Him. And then it says, "In love, He predestined us to be adopted children unto Himself." You know what God has done? He has, from all eternity, chosen people in love and in mercy and redeemed them and saved them by His grace.

Those three words that were read in this passage, "elect," "beloved," and "holy," were all read to us in Deuteronomy 7:6-9. In Deuteronomy 7:6-8, it says, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples of the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love, there it is, on you nor choose you. Why? Because you are more in number than any other people, for you are the least of all peoples, but because the Lord loves you and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt."

My friends, this is so important to recognize and to comprehend and to understand that God has set His love upon us, not because of who we were or because of who we are or because of who we may have been or who could have been. God set His love upon us because God is love, and in mercy He chose to save us, He chose to redeem us. And what He's simply saying is here, look, my friends, you are nothing but apart from the grace of God. We're nothing apart from the fact that He's loved us and set us apart to Himself by the fact that He has bestowed such love upon us. God was not motivated in anything of us or by us; He was self-motivated by His own love. It was the comprehension of our sin that He knew we would commit. He knew we would commit sin, He knew we were sinners and rebellious against Him, but He still said, "I'm going to love a people, I'm going to save them, I'm going to change them, I'm going to make them holy and bring them into My everlasting love."

For what purpose? That we might put on love, that we might be a people who know how to love, not people that we know are going to do good things for us because if we love them that love us, what praise have we? You see, if God loved us because we would love Him, because He saw that we would love Him, then what praise would He have? He saved us in our degradation, in our sin. And that's the kind of love that God wants us to show to others, not because others have done certain things or we know they'll do certain things that will please us, therefore we will choose them or we will love them and we will take them to ourselves and be part of that family together. No, no, no, no, because we have been loved by God. Because when we look at the cross of Jesus Christ, we do not see the worthiness of ourselves. We see a sinless, spotless Lamb of God dying for our sins that we ought to have suffered for, that we ought to have paid for.

And so, Paul goes on to explain to us then, how are we to put on love? And look what he says there in Colossians 3:13, "bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." He says, here you go. You want to know if you're putting on love? How's your forgiveness? You want to know if you're putting on love? How's your forbearance? And he says, you know what? Look at Jesus, the One that put up with our sin, bore our sin, took our sin. Not put up with it in the sense that He didn't care about it. No, no, no, He bore it. That's the idea that He's forbore our sin. He took our sin in His own body on the cross. And not only that, He forgave us. All the offenses that we committed against Him, He sent them away.

And what Paul's simply saying is, listen, people that are loved by God, you need to love with this kind of love. Don't hold grudges against one another. Don't count the offenses that someone has done to you. Don't add up the tally. Don't look at what that person did last week or how they looked at you or how they didn't invite you to this or did that. He goes, realize this, that when God saved you, He saved you apart from you. He forgave you, not because of you. He forgave your sin. He sent your sin away. He goes, therefore send the sins of others that have been committed to you away. Don't hold them. Don't bear them. Let them go. Forgive even as Christ forgave you. So you must do, the Bible says. That's love. That's what it looks like to put on love.

As Charles Wesley said in his hymn, "He emptied Himself of all but love and bled for Adam's helpless race. 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, that O my God had found out me. Amazing love, how can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?" He understood and knew that Jesus emptied Himself as it were of all but love. He's simply trying to say that He clothed Himself in His humiliation with love and took upon Him the form of a servant and made in likeness as a man. He humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross.

And can't we humble ourselves and put on love to the husband that's offended us, to the wife that grieved us, to the children that didn't respect us, to the boss that has changed our schedule around perhaps and has given us a bad week? Can't we send their offenses away, dear people of God? Can't we say, "No, I'm not going to hold that against them. I've been redeemed with a redemption that I did not deserve. I have been loved by a love which I did not earn. Can't I show and put on that same love to those in my life? Can't I put on that love to those in my community? Can't I put on that love to those in my vicinity that God has placed me in?" God is saying, "Listen, as a new man, you must do that. You need to do that. It's not up for grabs. This is the wardrobe God's given us, and He's given us a garment called love that binds us together, and He's saying, 'Love one

another. Love one another as Christ has loved us."

And just in closing, there are other ways we can put on love that I just want us to give our attention to just for a moment in application. What I've been speaking about today is about the love that God has shown for us that motivates us to love others. You know what that means? The degree to which we know that love will determine the fervor, the desire, the strength of the love that we will show to others. The degree that we understand the love of God toward us will impact our love for others. And therefore, it is incumbent upon us as God's people to make a lifetime study of the love of God in light of the sinfulness of our sin. Turn to any epistle of the New Testament, and you'll see it laid out in that format. We have wronged God, but He has loved us. Make a study of it.

"Oh, I want to put on love. I want a heart of love. What am I to do?" Listen, this is what you are to do. You are to wake up in the morning, say this figuratively, count the amount of minutes that it takes you to put on your garments, to search through your wardrobe, to find your physical clothes that you may spend half an hour, 20 minutes, an hour, 15 minutes doing. I don't know how long; everyone's different. Whatever that number may be is not significant. But the point is this: the problem with God's people today is that we give more attention to putting on physical garments that we might look in a way that is suitable to our profession, in a way that is suitable to our context. But how much time do we put on to love? How much time do we put on to study the love of God, to give our thought to God, to give our attention to God as we come before Him in prayer, as we open His Word, as we study Him out?

How much of our life is given to the meditation of the love of God, given to the meditation of our own sinfulness? If the truth be known, we spend more time doing things, dressing ourselves outwardly than we do dressing our hearts with the love of God. My friends, I'm not saying don't take time to get ready. All I'm simply saying is, where is the priority? Where is the priority of our love? Are we more concerned that I walk out of the doors of my house looking like Jesus Christ or looking like someone that is a good worker? Am I more concerned that I walk out of the doors of my house and into the doors of the workplace with humility, with meekness, with grace, with love, with the reflection of Jesus Christ? Or am I more concerned about how they look in my tie or what I'm wearing that day, my shoes, or whatever it may be?

You see, my friend, the truth be known, we give more attention to the things of this earth than the things of heaven. But we've been told in this passage, "If you have then been risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting on the right hand of God." What are those things?

Love. Put it on. Give yourself to it.

Pray every morning, "God, clothe me with Your love. God, I desire that the Holy Spirit, the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, will be shed abroad in my heart this day." So that I might rise from my closet, that's my prayer closet, and go out into the world with a renewed love, with a renewed fervor, with a renewed vision to set my love upon men and women that even wrong me.

There's a hymn that says, "Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. The fellowship of kindred minds is like that to that above. Before our Father's throne, we pour our ardent prayers; our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares. We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear."

I pray that God will help us to be a people that put on love. Let us pray.