How God Dresses His Elect, Part 2

Colossians 3:13-14

August 2, 2026

It is a joy to return to our study of Colossians, especially as this week we get to finish what we started last week. So Colossians 3:12, we'll start there, read, review, and carry on. Colossians 3:12, "So as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and graciously forgiving each other. Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord graciously forgave you, so also should you.

"Above all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful.

"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with gratefulness in your

hearts to God. 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."

Leaving vice lists behind, Paul has turned a corner, refreshingly, to this positive command in verse 12 and following, which is most welcome, and he's telling us, here, to put on virtue. We get to wear graces of God as our clothing.

We noted last time that the verses divide into two sections: verses 12 to 14, what to put on, how to walk around in it; and then verses 15 to 17, how to live. The peace of Christ rules; the word of Christ dwells; the name of the Lord Jesus accomplishes it all.

But before we get into verses 15 to 17, let's finish verses 12 to 14 and see how perfectly and beautifully and gloriously God dresses us, we who are his elect, we who are chosen to be holy, we who are cherished as his beloved.

We started with our identity in verse 12, and our outline, our first point was, number one, God blesses and justifies his elect. "As the elect of God," verse 12, "holy and beloved," we are the privileged subjects of his renewal project.

God lovingly, powerfully transforms us into the image of the new man. We "grow up in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God," Ephesians 4:13 puts it, "to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Elect, means that we Christians, we are the objects of God's free choice. It's an eternal choice that he made, selected as we are in his perfect decree. Nothing secures us more firmly than the exercise of this free will of his, a pronouncement, a declaration made in the perfection of his eternal will.

Holy, that refers to what we are now, and it refers to what we shall be. We are reconciled to him now because of what Christ has accomplished. "Having been justified by faith" means we have faith. And if we have faith, we have everything. We have received saving grace of God, and God will finish what he started. And what is that project? It's to make us holy and blameless before him.

Beloved, that speaks of our cherished place in God's heart. In God's redemptive program, we are the objects of his love. His love is an eternal love. His love is a defining quality or characteristic or attribute or perfection of his. It's a jealous

love, a love that banishes any and all rivals. It's a powerful, sanctifying love that beautifies us.

Now, God does not dress and beautify us as if we were a set of dress-up dolls, we're just passively wearing whatever God puts on us, and he makes us beautified, and he dresses us up like a set of his playthings.

God beautifies us by involving us. We have wills, we have thoughts, we have an understanding, we have a heart that responds, or doesn't respond, as the case may be, but it responds to him. We learn. We're not robotic. We're not automatons. We're not just passive in the process. God involves us. He commands us to understand and to appreciate and to participate in his renewing work in our lives.

That brings us to, number two, that God dresses and beautifies his elect. God dresses and beautifies his elect. God intends that we should become what we, in actual fact, what we truly are. He wants us to become what we are.

Paul says in verse 12, "As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion." So he issues a command to our hearts that our mind would understand and apprehend it, that our hearts, our emotions would respond with joy to it, and

our wills would be engaged and make choices. And the choice, here, is to follow this command and be obedient to it, to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

All those things, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, all those things are Christ, right? Christ is those things. Christ wore those things. Christ exemplified those things. He never was not those things, not even for a second.

And we are in him. Positionally before God, we are perfect in him in all those attributes, all those virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. And so what we are positionally, we are to become practically. What God has predestined us for, what he set us apart to be, we are to become.

He has imputed his own righteousness to us. Now, in Christ, being united to Christ, he's imputed Christ's righteousness to us. And we are his holy people, his beloved people. And so he intends to impart that righteousness to us progressively, practically, so that we become holy as he is holy, so that we walk as his beloved children.

But it all starts, as we saw in verse 5, as we saw in verses 8 and 9, it all starts with disassociating ourselves with what we once were. That's the mortification project of verse 5. And that is ultimately about purging ourselves in our hearts of all rival loves. That verse ends with a statement about idolatry, that covetousness is ultimately idolatry, covetousness explaining all those other sins, and covetousness itself is an expression of an idolatrous heart.

So we are to kill all rival loves, we're to topple, turn out, demolish all idols, and then rid ourselves of all the bad behavior that's associated with all that former idolatry, according to verses 8 and 9.

And so having denied self, the old self, having put off the old self with all of its evil practices, there's a new set of clothes for us to put on. We're to understand their value, we're to learn their worth. We're to appreciate them.

And then having understood their value, worth and appreciate them, we're to put on these clothes, we're to wear them around, we're to wear them, as it were, wear them smartly.

In verse 12, as we saw last time, there are inner garments that sort of undergird everything and provide a platform for

everything on the outside. So the inward attitudes of compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, they undergird the outward-facing garments, which are attitudes of gentleness and patience.

So starting with the inward attitudes, a heart of compassion refers to feelings of concern, affection for others, tender compassion toward others, mercy. We cultivate a warmth of feeling for one another, stir affection for close friendship with one another as a very clear testimony of selfless concern for others. We put ourselves aside, our comfort aside, our schedules aside, our plans aside, and we serve others, treat them as more important than ourselves.

An inner attitude, another one, is kindness. Kindness, we could say, is really patterned after Jesus Christ, who is always kind to absolutely everyone. The incarnate Son of God puts the lovingkindness of God on display, and he does so at all times with a gracious disposition, friendliness, approachableness, tenderness.

The compassion, the kindness, both of those first two virtues, they thrive in the good soul of a third attitude, which is humility. Humility. Those who think too highly of themselves, they can never really be compassionate or kind. If you think too

highly of yourself, your compassion runs short with people who are not going to get you where you want to go.

Kindness has an end, but it takes humility to truly be compassionate, to truly be kind because you have to set yourself aside. It takes true humility, not the, as we said last time, not the false caricatures of humility paraded around by religious hypocrites and pretenders, but it's a true humility, the kind of *coram deo* humility, *coram deo* meaning, before the face of God.

It's that kind of *coram deo* humility that was put on display in Christ. That's how he lived his life, always before the face of God, always thinking of God watching over him and him doing his father's will, his father's bidding. It gave him great joy, great pleasure to live that way. But he thought very little of himself. He thought of nothing more than the will of God and those people who were the targets of God's love, teaching truth, understanding.

In humility, there's no self-seeking, there's no boasting, there's no parading of strengths and virtues and achievements. There's no putting oneself forward. There's no taking the highest place, the most comfortable chair, taking the easiest, most comfortable path.

Humility is not about self. Humility is about associating with the lowly. It's about giving yourself to humble tasks since nothing is beneath the humble. Humility is being okay with being overlooked, submitting yourself to the unfolding of God's perfect providence, both good and bad, in your life, knowing that God always has the best in mind for his people. Humility accepts that. Humility adjusts to that.

So compassion, kindness, and humility really provide the undergirding virtues for the two outward-facing virtues that describe really our comportment, our external disposition, kind of how we handle ourselves with others and with the circumstances that we face.

So the virtue of gentleness, that term *prautes* or *praus*, I like the translation, meekness instead of gentleness, but both work. But meekness, that's how our Lord described himself in Matthew 11:29. He very rarely spoke of himself, his inward disposition, but he says, "'I am gentle and humble in heart.'" He said, "I'm a meek man, that's my heart, it's a heart of meekness."

And he walked it, didn't he, even when he was tested by provocations, and some provocations were quite severe. Some people that he met were very hard to love, very hard to care

for, very hard to even sometimes have compassion for. But he was composed always of a general friendliness. He always accommodated his strength to cover weaknesses, to serve others.

Husbands, if your wives are there merely to serve your interests, you're wrong. You're sinning. Your strength is to serve your wife's weakness, to cover over her, to care for her. And you know what she does with that kind of love, that kind of compassion shown toward her? You think she grabs more and more and just fills this consuming void within her, because you are her God? No, a Christian wife, you know what she does? She thrives in that. She responds by wanting to submit in humility and serve her husband with love.

Don't ever be afraid to wear the virtues of the Lord Jesus Christ, to give yourself completely to be like him. Don't look out for yourself. Look out for his interests, and his interests are to make you a meek person. Give of yourself.

Whereas gentleness or meekness refers to our manner of dealing with others, whether provoked or not, patience, patience is on display only when a provocation comes and whether that provocation comes by means of people or circumstances. Patience is exercised when there is provocation. You don't know a patient

person because he has no trouble in his life. Patience is only known when the patience is tested. Makes sense, right?

When tested by people, the Lord proved patient at all times. He never lost his patience. He never had an angry outburst. When the circumstances seemed inconvenient, he always pivoted to follow the new direction revealed in his father's wise providence. He kept his cool always, all the time, walking at all times in the dignity of love. He was never flustered; he was always patience with all things.

Having come through those five virtues, there, stop and think about this. Isn't it amazing that God, the God who created all things, called everything into existence from nothing, isn’t it interesting that God wants to dress us like that? Isn't that interesting, that he wants us to wear that clothing?

In our study of verse 12, what we need to see is that we have kind of entered the divine wardrobe. We've walked around in it. We've admired the beauty of the garments that are hanging there. And we've come to appreciate perhaps a little bit better in our study of verse 12, come to appreciate the quality of the fabric, the vibrancy of the colors that are there, the richness of the textures, the durability.

And listen, we're not just wandering through a rich man's wardrobe as if we're passing by on a fancy tour through some rich man's house in Beverly Hills. The master of the house enters that wardrobe with you and puts his arm around you and says, "Look, these are your clothes. This is what I want you to wear. I want you to put these things on, learn to walk around in them because I love you and because my love poured out upon you. I want you now to represent me by wearing these clothes, walking around in them, getting used to them, wearing them well, wearing them smartly."

That's what our next point is all about. Now that we put on the clothing of the new man, it's time to kind of stress test what we're wearing. It's time to prove it's worth. It's time to learn to walk around in it. So the third point is God, number three, God stresses and sanctifies his elect. God stresses and sanctifies his elect.

The stress test, kind of pulling and stretching and trying to test the seams and test the integrity of the garment, that stress test is not about proving whether the clothing can handle the stress because we've got the full written record of the life of our Lord that shows us this clothing is sound. This clothing

is strong, it is perfect. And with the wearing of this clothing, it never loses its shine, its brilliance, its color, its beauty.

No, the stress test and the testing is about us. It's about proving and improving us. It's about maturing and perfecting us. Look at verse 13 and see if you pick up that sense. Paul says "bearing with one another." Oh, what? What? What's going on? "Bearing with one another and forgiving each other." Why would we need to do that? "Bearing with one another and forgiving each other. Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

Wait a minute. Complaints in the church? May it never be, right? But there it is right in Scripture, biblical proof, as if you needed any, that complaints, yes, they do arise in true churches and yes, among true Christians. The term translated, here, as complaint is related to a verb that has to do with fault-finding. It's a verb that has to do with blaming.

Now, Paul's not making any comment, here, about whether the complaint is legitimate or not. That's kind of beside the point. Paul simply says and acknowledges, here, that complaints will arise, complaints will show up. And it can, here, imply that even in cases of legitimate cause for complaint, that's going to happen even in good churches.

Now, when a complaint is not legitimate, when it's a slander, when it's a false accusation, when it's someone with hurt feelings that just responds unnecessarily with their thin skin, they get all bent out of shape, well, that creates its own kind of trial, doesn't it? And there's just another reason with another grievance, another potential to cause strife, which gives us an opportunity to bear with one another and overlook. But these stresses, whether the complaint is legitimate or not, these stresses test our character, and they expose our virtue or our lack of virtue.

So wearing our new set of clothes, we need to see these occasions of complaint and grievance, not as inconveniences, not something to avoid, not as indications that something's wrong, certainly not justifications for complaining, grumbling, gossiping. We need to see these complaints, difficulties arising, and see them for what they really are. These are providentially timed tests to test our new clothing so that we can practice Christ-like virtues, and we can do so under stress and under test.

Stress is a good thing for us in a fallen world. There's going to come a time in our glorification in the millennial kingdom and beyond, in the eternal state, where we're going to

have no stress whatsoever. We're not going to feel any stress at all. We're going to be perfected. And so our service to God and to Christ will come from a heart like Christ himself that never falters, never stumbles, is never anxious, never stressed, never feels that.

But in this fallen life and in this fallen world, stress has a place. It sanctifies us, and it does so in several ways. First, stress when brought to us, as it says here in verse 13, stress really does reveal whether we have put on what we're supposed to put on.

When stress comes, and we lose our temper, we realize, wait a minute, I didn't put on kindness. I forgot to do that. If we're not wearing what we're supposed to be wearing, that becomes apparent real fast since those ugly attitudes and nasty behaviors of verse 8, all that stuff shows up again.

Second, stress reveals whether we know how to wear the clothing, that is, if we put it on correctly, and then if we're wearing it rightly, if we're wearing it smartly, properly, effectively.

Someone who's in the military and goes into a war zone, and they're wearing their chest plate on their backside, that's not

going to do much good. In order for that chest plate to be effective, in order for body armor to have any effect of all, you've got to wear it properly in order for it to be effective.

Same thing here. We've got to wear these clothes rightly, properly, so that they are effective. This new and improved clothing does a little good if you don't know what you're doing, how to wear it well; and stress is going to reveal that to you.

Third, stress gives us experience in wearing this clothing, walking around in it, as we learn to walk wisely in it and discover the wonderful features of the virtues that we wear. As we learn how to deploy them, as we learn how to respond rightly based on whatever is coming at us, we learn how this clothing aims us toward that challenge, and we overcome it effectively, and it gives us experience and experience, then, becomes not only our instructor, but it's the instructor of all those new soldiers coming behind us. We turn around and teach, train, educate.

Fourth, at the end of the day, stress gives us a great appreciation for the new clothing that we've received. It shows us just how versatile and how adaptable and how breathable and how sturdy and how tear-resistant and yet, remarkably, how this clothing never gets one stain. Not one speck of dirt can attach

to it. But through every test and every trial, it just seems to grow more brilliant, more beautiful the more we wear it, the more it's tested, the more it's shown.

I know a lot of Christians who try to navigate through their Christian life by avoiding all stresses. They don't know the value of stress and testing and difficulty and challenge. And so they try to stay away from people, and they try to avoid difficult conversations, and they don't want to get in it. And oh, I've tried that before and that didn't turn out so well.

And so through, I'd call it fear and cowardice, or you could also call it self-centeredness, this clothing that they wear, they may wear it if they're in Christ, if they're truly in Christ and they wear it, but it drapes off of them and falls loosely and doesn't serve them at all; and the testing and the strengthening and the difficulty in the trial never causes it to shine and show forth its true color.

You know where Christ shined most? In the hour of greatest testing and trial, when he was there bowing his knee in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying for you and for me, praying that he would endure, praying that he would go through the trial. We saw him shine when he was on the cross forgiving his tormentors.

We saw the brilliance and the vivid color of his clothing, though he was stripped bare.

Beloved, have a heart, be strong, don't be cowardly and don't be selfish, but give yourself to the stress. Give yourself to the test. This is what God made you for. His clothing will cause you to bear up under it. You just need to give it a go. So the point of the stresses, the testing we face as Christians, ultimately, it's really to expose weaknesses, reveals our need for improvement.

It trains us in wisdom to grow in our competency by means of experience, give us a deep, abiding appreciation for the gift of these virtues, and in the end of the day, to give praise and honor and glory to God. Nobody grows if life is easy and comfortable and fun all the time. You just become soft and weak and good for nothing. Give yourself to the test. Give yourself to the stress. Face it, go through it. God will help you.

Back to verse 13, and notice the source of the stresses. Ultimately, God is the source because he's the providential, sovereign God of all things. He's the one who sends these things. But notice through whom he sends them, the stresses that test our new clothing. What's the source? It's in verse 13. It's one another. It's each other, it's anyone, and it's you.

So the source of stress to test our new clothing, it's you and me, folks. It’s us. Yes, God is ultimately sovereign, and he sends it, but you know what? It's you and I that are the source of the stress that we face. Your local church, then, you need to see it as the testing environment, as the proving ground, and you need to see your fellow church members as providing you with ample opportunity to practice forbearance and forgiveness.

We can tend to think of the church as a refuge, as a place of rest, and it is that, for sure, rest from a harsh and persecuting world. But the picture would be incomplete if you leave it there, if you fail to consider that the church is really a training center. It's an incubator for new growth, and it's a testing lab to prove us, improve us. The church is not meant to be comfortable, only, but also to press us and stress us and test us, so that we learn and grow and mature.

So cast in that light, aren’t problems just wonderful? God, in his good and wise providence, he sends us stresses in the form of the sins of other people, the disagreements, the conflicts that arise among Christians who are not yet fully sanctified. And when he sends stresses, he allows us to practice forbearance with each other and forgiveness with each other.

Our own sins, let's admit it folks, our own pettiness, often, our own feelings getting hurt, our pride getting bruised, our sensitivities being exposed, our foolishness put on display, embarrassing us, our sins and mistakes and our follies cause stress to other people. You become the test for your brothers and your sisters in Christ, or they become the test for you.

We have each other in our weaknesses and in our errors and, yes, at times in our sinfulness, we have each other to provide the stressful situations that we need and the occasions that we need to put on hearts of compassion and kindness and humility and meekness and patience. And then, through it all, to forbear and forgive one another, knowing that the Lord forgave us.

The word, forbear, means to regard with tolerance, and so to tolerate is not in the modern, postmodern sense; it's in the best sense of that word. It's not the tolerance of the times we live in, refusing to speak clearly or make objective judgments about sin or righteousness.

The tolerance spoken of, here, comes from a kind heart with a desire to be forbearing, eager to overlook faults done to ourselves and to absorb whatever offenses against ourselves, just to absorb them and then crumble them in a kind heart and

let them go as just so much ash burned in the fires of our fervent love for one another.

I like how the commentator Douglas Moo explained this quality. He said, "While not requiring the greatest display of Christian kindness and patience, bearing with one another is nevertheless a first and necessary step in establishing community. The demand acknowledges that every Christian fellowship is made up of all kinds of people and that we will accordingly sometimes find ourselves in close fellowship with people who are very different than we are."

I'll just pause and say, look around, folks. We're very different. I mean, the fact of this local church, it's a miracle. We would never know each other apart from God and his grace saving us, uniting us to Christ, and then providentially moving all the pieces on the chess board, so that we're all here in Greeley, Colorado, together in this church.

Moo goes on to say, "For the sake of maintaining community, we will sometimes have to put up with people with whom we would not normally choose to associate." Don't take that as, in a Well, I guess I have to put up with people, though I know many

of you've had to put up with me. It's less about that. It really is. We need to see it more in positive terms, as in, man, what an opportunity.

When people are only around those who are just like themselves, you know how stunted they are in their life and their growth and their experience? They're like, you need dimensional people who are very uninteresting. You want to find the person who is most interesting to be around, talk to, most gracious, most kind? Find that person who has had to rub shoulders in conversation with and in disagreement with people all over the world.

Small wonder that the local church has members made up of such diverse cultural backgrounds as we find, like in Colossians 3:11: Greeks, Jews, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free. In God's wisdom and the amazing work of his grace, Christ is all and in all and drives all together. It is so cool. There is no institution on earth like this. They try it over at the UN. It doesn't work.

Here in our own local church in Northern Colorado, we have people from all kinds of places, ethnicities, cultures, backgrounds. We have people here from Africa, from Asia, from Europe, both western and eastern Europe. We have people from

Oceana. We have people from Latin America and the strange and mysterious ways of the foreigners from places like Canada, all kinds of people.

So we're bound to bump up against each other from time to time and feel offended at times. We need to get out of our comfort zone so we can show care and hospitality and mercy and kindness to those whose ways and cultures and customs and languages are different from our own. We need to go out of our way, in fact, to make the stranger and the foreigner feel welcome in our presence.

How many of you knew that all those places around the world were represented here in our church? Some of you may know that. How many of you have brought those people into your home to say, tell me about where you come from. Tell me about the churches where you are. Tell me about your testimony, where you've been, where you've come from. Tell me what seems strange about our country to you. Especially in loving the household of faith, our brothers and sisters of Christ, this is our privilege, beloved, to bear with one another in love.

Moo is quick to add, here, he says, "More than forbearance is ultimately called for," by which he means forgiving one another. And the standard, here, is the Lord's forgiveness. We

may remember Peter's question to Jesus in Matthew 18:21, "'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'" thinking himself a magnanimous in asking that. And the Lord said, keep on going, keep on counting, keep on having a forgiving spirit. Never stop being willing, eager and ready to forgive.

You may have heard the expression, "Keep giving because you can't out-give God." It's the same thing with forgiveness. Keep on forgiving because you cannot out-forgive God. And he proved that when he forgave you. The parable Jesus told at the end of Matthew 18 teaches us, doesn't it? No one comes anywhere close to the forgiveness that God has shown to us in forgiving us of our sins.

This is what Paul would have us consider in Colossians 3:13, "Just as the Lord forgave you, so also should," you should, ought to, moral imperative on you, "you must forgive." If you don't forgive, we've got big questions about your heart, my friend.

In the Lord's forgiveness, we must see several things. We have to see his forgiving disposition, his ready inclination to be quick to forgive offenses and sins. We have to see his actual forgiveness of our sins portrayed most poignantly on the cross

itself, as he was nailed to that cross of wood by the hands of sinners like you and me.

We need to remember, beloved, that were it not for the grace of God and were it not for his timing and where he placed us, you and I would be walking around that cross, howling at him, cursing him, scoffing him, mocking him, if we had the opportunity, using the hammer and the nails to nail him to that cross. We're no better than those Jews and Gentiles. We are them.

His actual forgiveness of our sins on that cross, and then his continual forgiveness of our sins whenever we ask him, you know what he does when we come to him and ask him for forgiveness? He forgives us quickly and immediately and absolutely and completely. And he separates us from our sins as far as the east is from the west. You can never bring those two together.

So the forgiveness of our Lord is the model that we follow in forgiving others. Interesting, this is how in Colossians 2:6, Paul says, "Since we received Christ Jesus," and notice the term, there, "the Lord," "since we received Christ Jesus the Lord," the Master, the *kyrios*, "so walk in him." If he is your

kyrios, if he is your Lord, if he is your Master, get to walking like he walks.

And now, here in Colossians 1:3, which is the next use of the term, Lord, *kyrios*, Master, you go from walk after the Lord who commands you to forgive like the Lord. If we're going to walk like the Master, and in the Master, we're going to forgive as he forgave us.

Now I've had questions on forgiveness come up all the time. We may as well raise and answer just kind of the basic ones right now. How do we forgive someone who doesn't confess the sins and ask for our forgiveness?

Another question is, are we supposed to confront every single sin we see? Since that seems impractical, maybe what he's saying here is just about a frame of mind. You're just supposed to have this kind of forgiving, squishy attitude all the time and just kind of let everything go, forgive, forgive everything, and just be a doormat to everybody's sins and offenses.

A number of questions in that kind of category of questions come up when we talk about forgiveness all the time. So let's just address a couple of them. First, we need to make a distinction between the attitude of forgiveness and the

transaction of forgiveness. Some people write it down as attitudinal forgiveness versus transactional forgiveness.

So we are to have an attitude of forgiveness at all times. And I really think that that's what Paul is referring to in the first part of verse 13, where he says "bearing with one another." That's attitudinal. We're to have a forbearing attitude at all times, a kind of a forgiving attitude that's very willing to let petty offenses go, let minor complaints go, let personal grievances go.

Now, in greater offenses or with a characteristic habit and a pattern of sinning where trust has been broken, where offenses are hurting others, causing division in the church, and on and on, this calls for a transaction of forgiveness, okay? So to help the offending brother, to help him stop sinning, to help him to reconcile the relationship, to help her rebuild trust, to help her to be able to grow in unity and harmony in the church, a transaction of forgiveness is needed.

This is what Jesus is referring to in Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private." Notice he doesn't say, "If your brother sins against you." He leaves it broad. Maybe he's not sinning against you. Maybe the sin you see

is some repeated habit and pattern of sin of someone else. You've been watching it for quite some time; it's not changing.

So the loving confrontation that Jesus envisions, there, and that really is filled in through the rest of the New Testament, it's really over repeated offenses or the particularly serious grievous offenses, things that can be recorded, things that can be, take a photograph of or take a video of, or record on a recording device, such as sins listed in Colossians 3:5 or Colossians 3:8 or the other vice lists in Scripture, something that is heinous, a high-handed sin that really causes great offense and brings disrepute to the church and besmirches the name of Christ. Big deals.

So when there are notable or perhaps public examples of such things or where there is a characteristic pattern of this kind of behavior, it's time for loving confrontation, not letting it go in a spirit of tolerance, but speaking the truth in love. We need to go and reprove our brother in private.

That's when Jesus said, Matthew 18:15-16, "'If he listens to you, you've won your brother.'" Awesome, good for you, you've loved well. You've responded to the stress, and you've come through it, and now your robe is glistening yet a bit more, the colors are a bit more vibrant because you put it to the test.

"'If he doesn't listen,'" Jesus continues in Matthew 18:16, "'take two or three others with you,'" and on it goes in Matthew 18:16-17.

In listening to you, that points to a transaction of forgiveness that has gone well. Here's how that goes. One Christian confronts and reproves the sin of another. And when I say, another, I mean another Christian. Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 5, we're not supposed to run around in our workplace into the world and go confront every sinner we see. He says, "What have we to do with those who are outside the church? Those who are outside the church God will judge."

It's those who are inside the church, that's where we're going to practice this loving confrontation. That's where we're to pursue, if we need to, this transaction of forgiveness. So one Christian confronts and reproves the sin of another Christian, calls attention to the offending behavior, cites biblical support.

The offender responds humbly, acknowledges the sin is sin, confesses it, and asks for forgiveness. And the one who is offended grants forgiveness as the Lord has done many times for him. He forgives his brother quickly, immediately, absolutely,

completely. He follows the example set by the Lord and how he has forgiven us. That's how it's supposed to work.

I realize that there are all kinds of contingencies and considerations and different, you know, org chart and tree diagram and how these things can go. We're not going to have the time to get into all that right now. But if any of this has gone by too fast, or if you have more questions, worry not. You're going to have plenty of opportunities to practice this point on forgiveness.

God's going to continue to stress you and oppress you because he loves you enough not to leave you as you are. You need growth, every single one of you. And I do. Let me add this. If God is so interested in clothing us like this, are you interested in seeing your brothers and sisters so clothed? Because you ought to be.

If you see your brother or your sister who still is dressing like a barbarian or a Scythian, you know, gaudy outfit, clashing colors, rough clothing of such poor quality, all kinds of stuff pinned to the lapel, honestly, Christian, have a care to confront that brother or that sister. Teach them how to dress. Don't leave them in that terrible state. If in God's grace, if in his great grace, he does everything to sanctify and

purify and perfect us, well then you and I had better get to the business of joining him in that, hadn't we?

In fact, that's what comes next in verse 14, in our final point, number four, God embellishes and glorifies his elect. God embellishes and glorifies his elect. Maybe some of you are thinking about it, use of the word, embellishment, that has something to do with a so-called, white lie, like an embellished fish story, a tall tale that makes the original tale sound way better than it really is.

Well the word embellishment or embellish can be used that way, for sure, to refer to exaggeration. But there's another and original and a far more positive connotation of the word, embellish, to embellish can also mean to adorn, beautify, to make even more stunning by adding particular touches to it.

Wives do this all the time to an already lovely dress or an outfit, adding that little finishing touch to make that look complete. And sometimes husbands even notice. To be fair, wives, we love what we see. We're just not always able to explain and put into words because we're struck with the beauty.

Every now and again, you just want to throw in a little like, let's explain wives and husbands to each other. We all

need that. But Colossians 3:14 says, "Above all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." Embellished with love, the whole of our adornment becomes bound together with love.

There's a bit of ambiguity on how to interpret this prepositional phrase, *epi pasin*, which means, in all or above all, at the start of the sentence. It could mean, in addition to all, like the adding this as one more virtue besides all these other virtues I've mentioned.

Could be, on top or over all. It could be, like, put it on over the top of that, which continues the clothing metaphor as if love is kind of like an overcoat. It could be, over and above all, as in, superlatively essential, don't neglect love.

Hard to make a decision on it because Paul explains the significance of love as kind of a unifying and a perfecting force. If we supply, as our LSB translation does, taking the verb, put on, from verse 12 and reproduce it here, we see love is one more virtue that we must wear as a garment. So the binding unifying quality of love, this leads to the perfection that God intends for his elect, who are holy and beloved.

The idea, though, is, if we look at verse 14 again, "above all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity," the idea is a little different than how that translation suggests, because that translation, the LSB, renders, perfect, as an adjective that modifies the word, bond. Perfect bond and the word, perfect, is not an adjective, here; it's a noun. So it's the word, perfection.

That is to say that love itself is the bond of perfection. Not the perfect bond of unity, but the bond of perfection. The King James Version says, "the bond of perfectness." It's a noun. This is bringing us full circle from verse 12, because we who are God's beloved are portrayed now as his beloved in verse 14, because we are adorned as we are by his love. That's perfectness.

Love is the defining characteristic of God's elect, the defining virtue of the redeemed bride of Christ. "'By all this, all men will know that you are my disciples,'" John 13:35, "'if you have love for one another.'" Love doesn't only provide outward adornment. We need to see it's kind of woven like a magic thread through every single virtue. It fastens the entire outfit together, joining every piece in integrity and unity and strength.

The heart of compassion, it's generated by the love that we have for one another, creating a concern and a deepening affection. What is kindness, but the expression of God's love? In fact, love and kindness kind of unite in his character revealed to Moses in Exodus 34:6. Remember that? "Yahweh abounds in lovingkindness."

So the second virtue in the list of five in verse 12 finds expression, there: lovingkindness, humility. Humility comes in deference to God and love for him. We know who we are. We know what we are. And when we know how he has loved us and what his love cost, what Jesus endured for our sake, for love, we are humbled to the floor, aren't we? Love humbles.

Gentleness, meekness, again, this in the interest of loving others. We sacrifice self. We use our strength to serve in the place of their weakness. We serve their need with our strength. With our supply we fulfill their need. It's all driven by love. And patience? What is patience but the practice of love when facing provocation, dealing with hard circumstances, being forbearing and forgiving with difficult people.

This is what we see over in the love chapter, what may be the most well-known and most widely accepted and appreciated chapter in the entire Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, "Love is patient.

Love is kind. Love is not jealous. It does not brag. It's not puffed up," another negative expression for humility, right?

"It doesn't act unbecomingly. It doesn't seek its own. It's not provoked, doesn't take into account a wrong suffered." In other words, it's kind. "It does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but it does rejoice with the truth. It bears all things and believes all things and hopes all things and endures all things. And love never fails."

And that's why I say this virtue of love, it weaves its way and works its way through every single virtue of the Christian life, and to such a degree that it adds its own color to every one of them. It motivates and flavors and forms and shapes every single virtue and grace in our life. It becomes like that coat of many colors given by a loving father to his most cherished and beloved son. It becomes the robe that covers all, an identifying outer garment, marking us as belonging to God.

It's no wonder, then, then, when all of us are wearing these garments and manifesting these attitudes and practicing these virtues, it's no wonder that we are bound together in unity, such that love is the bond that leads to perfection, maturation. It increasingly glorifies Christ in us. It

incrementally reveals God's sanctifying grace in us, sets us apart as truly belonging to him.

This is why Paul tells the Ephesians in Ephesians 4:15-16, that we're to be "speaking the truth in love." You know, we translate that, "speaking the truth." The word is built off of *alethea*, which is truth, but it's *aletheuo*, which means, to truth. So live out the truth in love. Speak the truth, yes, but live it out, too, how you conduct your life. Is it conducted in love, the priorities you set, the things you do, the stuff on your calendar, the things you think that are most important?

Does your schedule reflect love for other people? Does how you spend your money reflect love for other people, not just in your own family? Well, my children are my closest disciples, so I must focus all my love on them and just shower them with gifts.

It's good to give good gifts to your children, but maybe take your child with you as you go serve that person in need, that shut-in, that person who can't get out. Go serve with your child. Then you're really discipling. Then you're really giving a gift that creates character, shows something different.

Truth-ing in love? Paul says we're "to grow up." Become perfect is another way of putting that, "grow up in all aspects into him who's the head, even Christ, him from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part. It causes the growth of the body for the continuing building up of itself in love." Start to finish: love. And so, as Greg Beale says, "When all the virtues are bound together by love, there will be a unity of all the believing members of the body of Christ." So true.

Love is, as you know, a defining attribute of God, 1 John 4:8. And God, who is one, he in his essence is the essence of unity and perfection and integrity and strength. And so love, which binds the members of the Trinity together, defines and unifies and binds God's elect together. Love holds us fast, animates us, moves us, fills our hearts with affection for one another and a longing for Christ.

And so it is that the righteous covering of Christ that enrobes us before God, by which God declares us righteous, our practice begins to match our position. What's imputed to us starts to be imparted to us so that we become what we truly are.

We're positional saints, yes, but we are being practically sanctified, and we will one day be fully glorified.

So the question that remains, then: How do we put these virtues on. We who come from what's described in Colossians 3:5-9, we came from that. We were trained by the world. We were discipled and habituated in sinful attitudes and ambitions and selfish desires and self-seeking ways. What hope do we have in putting off sin and putting on righteousness?

Well, we know that we have every hope in God, right, he who has done the greater thing, forgiving all of our sins, justifying us by faith in Christ, giving us life and immortality in the gospel instead of the condemnation and death that we deserved. Listen, if he could do the greater miracle, and he has, well, then he can take this all the way. He can save us to the uttermost, and he can glorify us, too. But let me just show you how. You have your Bibles open to Colossians 3. Just give

you a little bit of a preview of what's yet to come. Verse 15, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful." You know, when the peace of Christ rules or calls balls and strikes in your heart, that's you slowing down so that you can put on these virtues.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." When the word of Christ is dwelling in you richly, when it makes its home in you, when the word of Christ is flowing through your veins, it's informing you, it's showing you, giving you warnings about bad behavior and promises about good. You're to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom, teaching," and then, get this, "admonishing one another."

That's the hard work of going and getting out of your comfort zone and going to tell somebody that you love, hey, you're wrong here. You're letting your Scythian armor and little stuff hanging off of you, nasty stuff, you're letting that show again. I know you came from Scythia. I know they were your people. You're dead to them. Now, you're in Christ. That's teaching. That's "admonishing one another in all wisdom." We're to do so "with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." We're to sing "with gratefulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, you do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

How are we going to get this done? How are we going to wear the different clothing? We who've come from the world, we who are from all different cultures and places and have all kinds of families, some broken, some healthy, how are we to get this

done? How are we to change? How are we to put off what we once were and put on what we want to be, what we are positionally in God and in Christ? How are we to do that?

It's by the power that's inherent in Christ himself. He will do it. It's the peace of Christ that rules us. It's the word of Christ that richly dwells in us. It's by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that all will be fully accomplished in us to the praise of his glorious grace. He's going to do it. Do you trust him in this? And if you say, Yes, does that mean you will obey him in this? Because those who trust, obey.

This is how God covers us, with the virtues and the graces of Christ. This is how he adorns his beloved in the unifying love shared between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is how he brings us to perfection. Our part? We need to get dressed. We need to get dressed every single day, help one another get dressed, to be renewed in the virtue of the new man, and walk around proudly in the rich robes of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Father, what great things you have done for us, things that we're reading about and don't fully apprehend just yet. We hear the telling of it, we're attracted to it, we desire it, and yet the full expression of it remains future to us as we seek that

time of glorification. But I pray that we would be motivated to wear what you've given us to wear, that we would find it our daily joy to dress well and to wear it smartly, to be effective in the clothing that you've given to us.

Help us to see not only our own need in that regard and our own joy, but let us affect one another. Let us serve one another even as we forbear and have to forgive, for that is a practice of putting on the virtue. Let us help one another and encourage and exhort one another day by day. We pray, Father, that you would do these good things in us, having accomplished the greatest thing, to give us eternal life in Christ. We pray that you would do this as well, that you who began a good work in us would complete it to the day of Christ Jesus, for it's in his name we pray. Amen.