

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 3:12-17

The Christian's Experience – A Putting On (Part 1 – Colossians 3:12-14)

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

There is nothing quite like something new. Just this past week, my son, Luke, bought his first car. While it was not brand new, being new to him, he was excited; very pleased to not take the family van or my truck, but to jump into his own car. He brought it to church and wanted other to see it; to take notice of it. There is nothing quite like something new. We might get some new clothes, and what do we want to do; we want to wear them; show them off. We might get a new phone, or computer and what do we want to do; we want to use it. It makes no sense to buy a new car and not drive it; or to get a new phone and not use it for its intended purpose.

In our text this morning, we are being reminded that we have something new in Christ; we have a new position; a new purpose and a resulting new practice. This new standing and purpose with God comes with the expectation of a new practice. Believers are not to be cotton candy; seemingly all fluffy on the outside but actually made of little substance that instantly dissolves; rather believers are new not only in their standing, but also in the standards they are to keep; they are not only new in their position but now, full of substance; they are to practice living according to their position. Believers are not to be "new" cars without an engine; or a new iphone with a battery; but are those filled with and empowered by the Spirit of Christ to be useful to God for the building up of the church and the kingdom of God.

To this end, our text begins with the word "**so**"; meaning, "in light of what has just been said." This serves as our reminder to remember what came before this statement. It also serves as an introduction to a new consideration in light of what we are to remember. And what are we to remember because of this little word "**so**"? Let us remember that in the previous verses we have a statement concerning our position before God. Beginning in verse 1, believers have been raised with Christ and in verse 3 they have died with Christ and their lives are hidden with Christ in God. And because of this position, this standing; the believer is to consider, or regard himself as dead to sin, putting aside the harmful and hurtful vices listed in verses 5 and 8 and rather "**put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him...**" (3:10).

We are to remember that the old self has been put off, or put away. That old self with its passions and desires, its wants and its needs, its pride and self-centeredness is to be regarded as dead to us; we are to think of ourselves as incapable of continuing in such things because we are in Christ who is incapable of such things. These things have been "**put off**" – removed like old soiled, smelly, disease-ridden clothes because we have died with Christ, we are "born again" and because the Holy God has made us His. Wow! Truly remarkable if these things be so.

And if these things are so, then what is the proper response of the believer? If these things are so, what should be the believer's experience? What should he or she and others

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

around her expect? Beloved, I say to you, that if you have been raised with Christ; and died with Christ and have had your life hidden with Christ, then you ought to live as He desires you to live. In other words, because your life is now hidden in the life of Christ, you need to behave more and more in the reality of your position.

To inspire this behavior in the believers, our text, these three verses of Colossians 3:12-14 presents us with three statements that ought of affect the way we think and act. As I have already alluded to, we find in these verses, first a statement of position; "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved..."; followed by a statement of purpose; "put on"; ending with a statement of practice that takes us through verse 14. Beloved, if you are a new creature in Christ (you position) and you desire to live for Christ (your purpose) then here is what such a new creature looks like (your practice). Using this threefold outline, let us consider now our text:

I. A statement of our position in Christ (3:12a)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved...

Before us is one of the shortest, yet most profound statements concerning the position of the believer in Christ. For all those who are raised up with Christ, who have died and have their lives hidden in Christ; these are said here first and foremost to be those "**who have been chosen of God...**"

To be "chosen of God" is a clear statement of the believer's position. It is the standing of the believer. This statement clearly expresses the truth or doctrine of election. The Greek word here is "*ekletoi*"; from which we get our English word "election." This word is used repeatedly in the New Testament:

Matthew 22:24, "For many are called but few are chosen."

Matthew 24:22 Jesus speaks of God's intervention in the horrors of tribulation "for the sake of the elect."

Luke 18:7 says that it is God who will bring about speedy justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night.

Romans 8:33 declares, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?"

2 Thessalonians 2:13 says, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

In 2 Timothy 2:10 we read, "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory." Here Paul reveals that the motivation of his ministry was the awareness that God had an elect or chosen people who needed to hear the gospel in order to be saved.

Revelation 17:14 describes those coming with the Lord, "and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

These are the "**chosen of God**" and it is folly to seek to refute the clear teaching of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation that God chooses or elects those whom He intends to bless. Truthfully there is not one serious Bible scholar who dares to deny the doctrine of divine election. To be sure, there are many who seek to redefine what all this means, to make it mean something other than what the text, both by grammar and by meaning declares that God by Himself, apart from any outside influence; and for Himself; for His glory; chose some to be the special recipients of His grace and mercy. This is what the text declare, but why is there so much opposition and disregard of the doctrine of election? That there is a group of people "chosen of God" implying that there is another group of people that has not been chosen? There are many reasons perhaps, but let me give you two to consider; first, people do not want to admit the reality and extent of God's sovereignty, wanting instead to control their own lives. And second; people do not want to admit that they are so helpless so as to come to God, that apart from God's gracious choosing of them; they prefer to turn from Him entirely.

And here is the statement of position; a position that motivates the believer's practice; that drives the believer to pursue sanctification as he says to himself, "I have been chosen of God, therefore I will seek to live according to my position." Beloved, to deny the doctrine of God's choosing you by Himself, for Himself is not only to deny the teaching of Scripture, for 2 Peter 1:10, combining the truths of God's sovereign choice of the believer and the believer's motivation to live for God says,

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain (the believer's purpose) about His calling and choosing you (the believer's position); for as long as you practice these things (the believer's practice of verses 3-9), you will never stumble;

Beloved, the best motivation we have for serving God is by pondering the wonder that God would choose us out of all the people in the world! If you are in Christ, you are "chosen of God"!

But our text is not finished with this statement of position. What I see next is a description of sorts; what it means to be "chosen of God" as we read that believers are both "holy" and "beloved." To be holy is to set apart for the Lord's special purpose. It means that you belong exclusively to Him and that your life is no long to be considered for common use. Like the Old Testament High Priest's turban with the gold plate inscribed with the words, "Holy to the Lord" – believers have been inscribed by God. You are holy to God. What a motivation to ministry.

Additionally believers are "beloved." This is a unique statement as it literally reads in the Greek, "having been loved [by the God who chose you]". This means that you are the object of unique and special love. We are reminded that while God loves the world in a general way, he loves the believer in a special and unique way; a way that saves you from your sin; a love that transforms the way you think and a love that changes the way you behave. This is the believer's new position in Christ, chosen, holy and beloved and this is to become the very motivation, the very reason why you seek to live for God, particularly in the context of serving Him through your relationships in the body of Christ. This leads us to our second statement:

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

II. A statement of our purpose in Christ (3:12b)

...put on..."

The main verb or action to which believers are called in our passage is found in those two little words, "put on". There are a number of things we need to consider about this action. First, this command to "put on" is in the emphatic position in the Greek text; meaning simply that the Greek begins with the command. This is not captured in the NASB, but is in ESV where we read, **"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved..."** Before the consideration of our position, Paul states the believer's purpose; he must "put on" something.

To "put on" speaks of suiting up in a new set of clothes. Remember that we read in our previous verses of putting off and putting aside the old self. Now, we are not to remain spiritually naked, but "put on" something new. The verb literally means, "to clothe oneself." But as we will see, we are not to just put any old thing on, but rather the point is to consciously be clothing oneself in the same kind of character and with the same kind of actions that the believer finds in Christ. For the qualities that follow in our text are evident in the life of Jesus Christ. For each of these characteristics of true of Christ. Therefore our purpose, what we must be determined to do, is to clothe ourselves with the character of Christ. Having seen then the statement of our position; that we are chosen of God, holy and beloved; and the statement of our purpose; to put on the character of Christ, we now come to our third statement:

III. A statement of our practice in Christ (3:12c-14)

[put on] a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Here is the statement or the description of our practice in Christ. In these verses we find eight qualities or virtues that are to characterize the believer. Let us consider each of these qualities with the intent of seeing them practiced more and more in our lives.

The first quality is that of **"compassion"** – literally "the bowels of mercy". This trait speaks the tender feelings that are shown in concern for others. It means to be sympathetic and merciful to others. We see "compassion" in the life of Jesus as described in Matthew 9:36, **"Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd."** Let me ask you, Does your heart go out to those who are hurting physically, emotionally, socially and/or spiritually? Are you more eager to meet another's needs than your own? Are you able to spot another's needs before they come to you for help? This is what it means to "put on" compassion. Are you putting on compassion?

The second quality is that of **"kindness."** Kindness is a gracious and generous sensitivity toward others that seeks to care for others in both word and action. Are you a kind person? Would others say that you are a kind (or harsh) person based upon your deed and words? When others mistreat you, do you still seek to be kind? And is your kindness toward others motivated by an awareness of God's kindness to you resulting in a sincere desire and joy to serve others? Are you putting on kindness?

The third quality to put on is that of **"humility"**. You have heard this before, but "humility" was not regarded as a virtue among the Romans. Humility, a word that means "lowliness of thinking", was considered weak and of being pathetic to most of the people to whom Paul was

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

writing. But biblical humility is absolutely necessary if we are going to be compassionate and kind, looking out for the welfare of others, rather than looking out only for the welfare of self. As Ken Blanchard has noted, "Humility does not mean you think less of yourself (for you are chosen, holy and beloved; but rather); It means you think of yourself less." Humility has been defined as the absence of self-exaltation. Let me ask you, are you seeking to exalt yourself or God in your words and actions? Can you serve others with concern of whether you are noticed or not? Do you regard others as more important than yourself? That is humility. That is what the believer is to "put on."

The fourth quality is "**gentleness**". I see gentleness as being the flipside to humility. You cannot be humble without being gentle and you cannot be rightly gentle without being humble. The basic meaning of the word is "power under control". One reference speaks of gentleness as "the restrained and obedient powers of the personality brought into subjection and submission to God's will by the Holy Spirit." That clears it up right? Some of you have heard that the idea of gentleness is pictured in the bringing of a wild horse under control. Before Christ we are wild and reckless in our personalities. But in Christ all of our strengths, intelligence and talents are brought under the control of the Spirit of God so that this person might demonstrate kindness to others. Let me ask you, are you willing to give up your own rights and even to suffer injury of the sake of others? Is your temperament controlled by God so that you seek to respond to others with kindness regardless of the situation? Can you, like Jesus, seek to accomplish God's purpose without using force or strong-arm tactics? This is gentleness that we must put on.

Paul loves list, so here is the fifth quality, that of "**patience**." The word "patience" speaks of the ability to retrain one's anger or sense of retaliation or even a spirit of exasperation with a view or hope for the situation being bettered. Sometimes translated "longsuffering" it speaks of enduring long even in the face of personal insult or injury. Patience is the ability not to burn with anger at even the smallest of provocations. It is the determination not to get downhearted or even the least disappointed in the midst of trying circumstances. The believer is to endure his circumstances without feelings of revenge and to stand firm in his resolved to be kind and gentle despite the rebuffs, the ingratitude or the unpleasantness of other people. Let me ask you, do you endure exasperating circumstances without anger or without the desire to get back at others? Do you know that the ultimate reason for impatience is pride, believing that you deserve better? Do you seek to be as patient with others as God is patient with you? Let us put on patience.

The next quality, found in verse 13, is that of "**bearing with one another**" or literally, "putting up with or tolerating one another." Now before you say, "Wow, Pastor, I put up with people all the time!" let us remember the context. It is not about simply putting up with people while being exasperated with time, but lovingly and genuinely bearing with other people to show them the compassion of Christ. To be "bearing with one another" means not allowing the weakness and shortcomings of others to keep you from engaging in and interacting with others. When someone "hurts" you; your feelings or causes you distress; isn't your first reaction to pull away? Believers are not to pull away. Someone has said that this is "enduring with others without complaint." Let us never forget that each believer is still a work in progress; God is still refining each and every one of us. Therefore, we must put up with others despite their sins, regardless of the idiosyncrasies and even in the face of their weakness. Does your involvement with other believers take precedence in your life? Are you willing to preserve your involvement with others at all costs? This is what it means to put on a spirit of bearing with one another.

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

The seventh quality is that of **“forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”** The word for “forgive” emphasizes the gracious nature of forgiveness, the idea being that you do not forgive because someone earns your forgiveness, but you do it out of love as one who too has received the grace to forgive.

It is interesting how much Paul says about the quality of forgiveness in comparison to the other qualities. He adds this statement about complaints against one another. The complaint here speaks of those times in our experience of church life “when” not “if” but “when” we wrong another. Sometimes we can act so surprised that another believer might offend us. Beloved, it is an inevitable fact that as fallen people still being sanctified we will wrong others. So, while the complaint may be justified, the Word tells us here to rethink it in light of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ toward us. To be forgiving one another means to be rescuing them from yourself, from your anger; from your wrath; whether deserved or not. It means that you will not hold their offense against them to diminish your fellowship. It means to give them a full pardon, even as you have been pardoned by Christ. In other words, if Christ has forgiven you; you must forgive others. This is your promise not to hold another’s wrong against him or her. Let me ask you, do you forgive others as Christ has forgiven you? Is there someone you need to rescue from yourself? Are you willing to ask others to forgive you? This is what it means to put on the spirit of forgiving each other.

And finally then, the eighth and final quality Paul mentions as being the practice of those whose position is **“chosen of God, holy and beloved”** and of those whose purpose is to **“put on”** the virtues of Christ; the very crown jewel of all the previous virtues is that of love. We read in verse 14, **“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”** While this could be translated “in addition to all these other things, add love” it can also be what I see to be more accurately translated as “on top of all the others or more important than all the others, put on love.”

Last week, in looking at Ephesians 5:25-27 and the command that husbands love their wives, we defined love, the very same word found in our text this morning, this way: *“a one-way, unconditional and continual decision of the will, a decision that affects both one’s actions and affections, that seeks the highest good for another, regardless of the cost and all for the glory of God.”*

In all the previous qualities of the believers practice, have you noticed that both our actions and affections are included? If we are to be like Christ, then we must love and love, by definition, includes, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other. Indeed, as we read in 1 Peter 4:10, **“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”** This is to be the believers experience and practice. Because you are “chosen of God, holy and beloved” you are to be clothed in love. Why? Because our text tells us that this love is “the perfect bond of unity.” This tells us that it is love that binds and holds us together. One commentary says that love is “the fastening together of separate items which are thus brought together into a unity.” This reminds us that while there are so many different personalities that make up the church, they are all held together by the active love of the body for one another. A love that looks like the virtues of these verses; a love that looks like Christ. This is what we are to put on. These are the clothes that we

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

must be wearing. Let me ask you, ." Are your actions motivated by a sincere love for God and others? How is your love for God and others tangibly demonstrated?

Let me close with a most profound consideration that I read in preparing for this message. Listen carefully as the very well-being of our church and any local congregation is affected by such a consideration. As one preacher wrote:

Paul would have us ask ourselves as we go in and out among our brothers and sisters in Christ, "Am I wearing my new clothes to church?"

What kind of church would the local church that I attend be if everyone was just like me? How long would the church be able to pay its bills, support its ministries, and back its missionaries? If everyone reacted as I do, how long would it survive? If everyone won as many souls as I do, would the church be growing or declining? Suppose that everyone supported the services the way I do, would there be any gatherings of God's people? If everyone studied their Bible and prayed as much as I do, what would the church be like? Suppose everyone followed my example when it came to visitation, teaching Sunday school, caring for the nursery, or helping with the chores – what kind of a church would it be?

Let us ask ourselves these questions and repent where we must and pray that we would put on our new clothes and be the church that God wants us to be. We are new creatures in Christ, with new clothes to be worn; let us wear them to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2010 Edward K. Godfrey. *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, and 2300 South 13th Street, Rogers, AR 72758.*