

# Right Ways to Master the Flesh (2)

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(Colossians 3:11-17)

Paul concludes his message about mastering the old fleshly nature in this section. In the previous sections he wrote about wrong ways to master the flesh, and he also focused on the fleshly attitudes and behaviors that believers are to “put off.” There were both sensual sins and relational sins that believers are to consider themselves as “dead” to. Growing in Christ-likeness is possible because believers are in Christ and have the indwelling Holy Spirit who gives the desire and power to please Him.

The *principle of replacement* means that when believers put off the old ways they must then put on the new ways. In the last session we saw many examples of things that a believer must put off. To complete the replacement, in this section Paul will explain what a believer must put on. On the heels of Paul’s list of relational sins, today’s passage mentions several social, racial, and class distinctions which were an integral part of the society of Paul’s day.

**Col 3:11 - [a renewal] in which there is no [distinction between] Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.**

Social norms required people to behave differently toward others based on the kinds of distinctions mentioned in this verse. But here Paul tells us that these distinctions should not exist in the body of Christ. We can consider these distinctions and prejudices to be part of the social sins that Paul had just condemned.

The first part of this verse can be translated literally as, “Where not exists Greek and Jew,” and several Bible versions follow this closely. Some say, “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew” (ASV, KJV, NKJV) while others say, “Here there is no Greek or Jew” (ESV, NET, NIV, RSV). Any word-for-word translation of the Bible will probably use one of these renderings, because to say more than that would be to go beyond translation into the area of interpretation.

The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) says, “In Christ there is not Greek and Jew.” It has chosen to identify Christ as the sphere in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew. This makes sense because throughout this letter believers are said to be “in Christ” (Col 1:2, 28; 2:6-7, 10-11; 3:3), and the end of this verse states that “Christ is all, and in all.”

The New American Standard Bible (NASB95) and the Legacy Standard Bible (LSB) both translate the verse by connecting it to the idea of **renewal** in the previous verse. It is as if Paul is saying, “As believers are being renewed and continue to grow in spiritual maturity, they understand that these social, racial, and class distinctions are meaningless within the body of Christ, the Church.” This way of understanding the verse also makes sense. But it seems

important to point out that these Bible versions have gone beyond a strict word-for-word translation and have ventured into the realm of interpretation.

Throughout the ages various people groups have formed their identities around their commonalities across the globe and throughout history. The interesting thing that began to happen in Paul's day was that the Church cut across all of these distinctions. People from radically different groups began to be included in the body of Christ. The Church started to erase all of the tenaciously held social norms and class distinctions.

Within the Church there were believers who had been rescued out of cultured **Greek** society, as well as former members of **Judaism**. Jews made the distinction between the **circumcised** and the **uncircumcised**, or Jews versus Gentiles. The cultured Greeks made the distinction between themselves and the **barbarians** – those who were not Greek speakers and whose speech sounded like gibberish to them. There were even some believers who were **Scythians**, who were considered to be the worst of the barbarians. Of course, many **slaves** became believers right alongside the **free** men from their society. So the Church began to break down cultural norms in the area of social and class distinctions.

Paul has shared wonderful truths about the greatness of Christ throughout this letter, and the important truth which Paul states at the end of this verse is that “**Christ is all, and in all.**” As a result of all that believers have in Christ, Paul will begin to describe what they are to “**put on**” as they seek to be more like Christ.

**Col 3:12 - So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;**

In the last session Paul listed many negative examples of both sensual and relational sins which believers were to “**put aside**,” as if they were removing dirty clothing. In order to complete the picture Paul will begin to explain the positive things that believers should “**put on**,” as if they are replacing old dirty clothing with new garments.

A literal translation of the first part of this verse would be, “Clothe yourselves, therefore, as chosen ones of God, holy and beloved.” The Greek word order has the verb first in this sentence for emphasis. To “**put on**” is the word *enduō* which was commonly used for the act of putting on clothing, and it is the same word that Paul had used in verse 10 where he said, “**put on the new self.**” **Therefore, since Christ is all and in all**, believers are to clothe themselves with these qualities. It is because of the unity that such diverse believers have in Christ that they are able to behave graciously toward each other. Before Paul lists the positive qualities, he gives three truths to motivate believers toward gracious behavior based on their unity in Christ.

In the phrase “**those who have been chosen of God**” the word **chosen** is the Greek word *eklektos* which literally means “selected out of.” It emphasizes the fact that God purposely selected each of these different individuals to be members of His body, the Church. Next Paul says these believers are “**holy**” which is the Greek word *hagios*, which means “consecrated or set apart for God.” Finally Paul says these believers are “**beloved**” which is the word *agapaō*. This type of love is unconditional, and it could be described as unmerited, unselfish, and

self-sacrificing. Believers have a unity in Christ which should lead the members of His body to view each other as God's own chosen, consecrated, and beloved people.

*Put on ... a heart of compassion (oiktirmos)*, the sympathetic compassion one shows for the sufferings of others. This is sometimes translated "mercies" and is listed in 2 Cor 1:3 as a character trait of God the Father.

**Kindness** (*chrēstotēs*) is "the grace that pervades a person's nature and mellows all that which would be harsh and severe. It was used to describe wine that has mellowed with age." This is the same quality that God demonstrates to us according to Eph 2:7, and Paul listed it in Gal 5:22 as part of the fruit of the Spirit which should be evident in the lives of all believers.

**Humility** (*tapeinophrosynē*) is lowliness of mind and it means "to have an accurate estimate of one's significance." Genuine humility is a character quality which God values highly, and the epistles of both Paul and Peter list it among the virtues that believers should cultivate (Eph 4:2; Phil 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5).

**Gentleness** (*prautēs*) is often translated as "meekness" and it carries the idea of "power under God's control." Gentleness is a character quality of Jesus (Matt 11:29), and Paul included this word in Gal 5:23 as part of the fruit of the Spirit which all believers should display.

**Patience** (*makrothumia*) literally means "long tempered" and it can be translated as "longsuffering or forbearance toward people." This word is also included in Gal 5:22 as part of the fruit of the Spirit. Both Paul (1 Tim 1:16) and Peter (2 Peter 3:15) made it clear that this is an important character trait of Jesus Himself which believers are to imitate.

**Col 3:13 - bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.**

**Bearing with one another** (*anechomai*) literally means "to hold oneself up or back" and here in this context it carries the idea of maintaining your own good disposition or behavior in the midst of dealing with something or someone who is difficult. Jesus demonstrated this quality many times (Luke 9:41). In Eph 4:1-2 Paul implored believers "to show tolerance for one another." Depending on the context, this could mean enduring persecution (1 Cor 4:12), putting up with difficult people, showing tolerance for others, or patiently bearing the weaknesses of others.

**Forgiving each other** (*charizomai*) usually means "giving", especially giving a gift that is unattainable, unrequested, or undeserved." When it is translated as "forgive" it means that the one to whom a debt is owed gives the cancellation of the debt as a gift of grace or unmerited favor. The more common word for **forgiving** (*ἀφίημι aphīēmi*) is not used here. Paul seems to be emphasizing the gracious aspect of behavior that believers are to demonstrate.

"Whoever has a **complaint** against anyone" uses the Greek word *momphe* which means a fault or something to place blame upon. When fault-finding and accusations are raised between believers, gracious generosity should be the spirit of the response. How believers respond during conflicts with others is a revealing measurement of how well they are putting this section of Colossians into practice in their lives.

At the end of this verse Paul says, **“just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”** This is like the story Jesus told about the king who was settling accounts with those who owed him money (Matt 18:21-35). Believers are not to follow the example of the *Unforgiving Servant* by quibbling with fellow believers over small matters, because the Lord already canceled their own debt which was so great they could never pay it.

**Col 3:14 - Beyond all these things [put on] love, which is the perfect bond of unity.**

The word **beyond** translates the Greek preposition *epi* which means “upon or over.” So **love** is the outer garment that believers are to **“put on”** to encompass all of the other virtues. In 1 Cor 13:4-7 Paul showed that love actually does encompass all of the other virtues – it literally binds them all together in perfect unity. At the end of this verse Paul said, “love, which is the **perfect bond of unity.**” A literal translation would be “a bond of perfection.” **Bond** is the Greek word *sundesmos* which means something which binds or joins things together. In Col 2:19 this same word was translated **ligaments** in the context of how the body of Christ is held together by the so-called “bands” that join all the parts. So in this verse **love** functions the same way. Without love, all of the qualities mentioned previously could become “out of joint.”

The word that is translated **“perfect”** is the Greek word *teleiotēs* which comes from the word *teleios*. It describes something that has reached its intended goal. It is complete or fully mature. Without **love**, all of the other qualities would not be complete. They would not be able to fulfill their intended purpose. **Love** is essential to growing in Christ-likeness.

**Col 3:15 - Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.**

**“Let the peace of Christ rule.”** This kind of **peace** (*eirēnē*) includes the qualities of harmony, tranquility, and calm unity that have their source in Christ. Believers must let peace **rule** in their lives. **Rule** (*brabeuō*) means “to arbitrate, govern, or control.” Peace must rule over the attitudes and actions of believers within the body of Christ.

The next part of this verse says, **“to which indeed you were called in one body,”** and this gives us the connection between the rule of peace and the fellowship of the members in the body of Christ, the Church. Maintaining unity within the body is a major reason for allowing peace to rule among the members.

Finally Paul adds his command for them to **“be thankful.”** The commands in this verse are in the present tense, which means that believers are to continually do these things and to make a habit of doing them. This last phrase could be translated, “Keep on becoming thankful.”

**Col 3:16 - Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms [and] hymns [and] spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**

**“The word of Christ”** appears at the beginning of the original sentence for emphasis. Paul’s command is in the present tense, so believers are to continually be in the habit of letting the

word of God make its home within them. To “ **dwell within** ” is the Greek word *enoikeō* which has as its root the word *oikos* that is a house or dwelling place. Believers can think of themselves as the house where the word of God lives. **Richly** is a form of the same word Paul used in Col 1:27 where he said that “God willed to make known what is the **riches** of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles.” He also used this word in Col 2:2 where he said that believers should attain “all the **wealth** that comes from the full assurance of understanding, in a true knowledge of God’s mystery.” God’s word is our only source of true knowledge, which Paul expressed throughout this letter. Just as he did in Col 2:3 where he said that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ, here Paul also adds “**with all wisdom.**”

In the last part of this verse there are three participles which have the same force as commands – *teaching*, *admonishing*, and *singing* – all in the present tense, which means that believers should make a habit of doing them. The **word of Christ** is emphasized in this verse because **it** should be the foundation for accomplishing all of these things. “**Teaching**” (*didaskō*) involves giving instruction in the truths of the faith. “**Admonishing**” (*noutheteō*) literally means “to put in mind,” and it involves calling attention to something, exhorting, or giving warnings.” “**Singing**” (*adō*) means “to express praise and devotion to God through song,” and Paul listed three types of songs: the **psalms** from the Old Testament, new **hymns** composed by Christians, and **spiritual odes** which can be chants or any words that are sung to express praise to God. But all singing must be grounded in the **word of Christ** as its foundation. At the end of this verse Paul encourages **thankfulness** again. All of these activities in the body of Christ should be done in a spirit of gracious thanksgiving.

**Col 3:17 - Whatever you do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.**

Paul is telling us, “Whatever you say or do,” so this command covers all aspects of behavior. The important truth here is that everything must be done **in the name of the Lord Jesus**. There should be no division in our lives between the secular and the sacred – between the spiritual and the worldly. Because believers are in Christ, everything is sacred and spiritual.

To live in the **name of the Lord Jesus** means that believers represent Him and no longer live only for themselves. Words and deeds must be chosen with a view to honoring Him, and the goal should be to bring Him glory. In order to do this, believers obviously must grow in their knowledge of Him and His ways. They must live according to His pattern of life and in obedience to His authority. This is why it is so important that believers “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, setting our minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” (Col 3:1-2)

The **name of the Lord Jesus** sets a high standard of living, so believers must rely on the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit. If believers live in Christ, then it is **through Him** that our prayers, praise, and thanksgiving rise to **God the Father**. Living this way means that everything believers do and say comes from a source which is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Let us strive more and more to live our lives in the name and for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.