

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 22, 2008

"Gracing" One Another

by Dan Trygg

“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving ('gracing') each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”
Col. 3:12-13

Being the "chosen ones of God" is a high calling, one which will definitely stretch us to new expectations and experiences of growth. The word for "chosen" can also mean "select, choice", referring to something of better quality than what is commonly expected. We use the word in the same way when we call certain premier cuts of meat "USDA choice meat". In this practical section of Paul's letter to the Colossian Christians, he reminds us that as "holy ones", as ones set apart from what is common to be designated for a special purpose, **we will need to learn to live differently than what we have done in the past.** In the previous chapter, he had pointed out how *in Christ we have been made different*. Not only have we been forgiven, we were somehow so completely joined with Jesus that we were miraculously incorporated into His death, resurrection, and even His circumcision, so that the power of sin, the old person, and the flesh would be broken in our lives (Col. 2:10-15). Even the spiritual powers have been defeated and stripped of their authority to keep us under condemnation and in bondage. In Him, we have been made "full", meaning that **all the potential of Christ's work has been established and planted within us.** It is there for us, and remains there for us, in Him. **This potential needs only to be discovered, "unwrapped" and applied in our experience.** We have been firmly rooted in Him, and are now building ourselves up in Him and confirming for ourselves the faith we have been taught. As we live our lives *by faith*, even as we took Jesus into our lives originally, we are fortified in these ways, and experience an abundant, overflow of thanksgiving, as we see the reality of God at work in us (2:6,7).

In many ways, Paul's letter to the Colossians is a close parallel to the book of Ephesians. They were both written at about the same time, during his imprisonment. Both cities were located in Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey. Although the local issues were somewhat different, which causes differences in the two letters, Paul clearly used some of the same highlights and similar themes found in Ephesians here in this book. **These similarities in thought are evident enough to warrant comparisons between the two books, in order to get a better understanding of the apostle's thoughts,** or to clarify what he is saying in one book or the other. The verses of our study for today come from the practical section. Although much more abbreviated than his treatment of it in Ephesians (compare Col. 3:5-4:6 with Ephesians 4:1-6:9), some of the unique ways in which he expresses his thoughts here add valuable insights which deepen the impact of his teaching. These verses sound very much like Ephesians 4:1-3,31,32. **Both books address the issue of Christians learning to get along,** and to develop unity and *agapē* love, **in spite of one another's irritating characteristics.** Let us take a closer look at what he has to say:

1.) **It is clear that he is addressing those who have been hurt, offended or irritated by someone else -- "whoever has a cause of complaint against anyone".** The phrase translated as "*cause of complaint*" is a single word in Greek, which can also mean simply "complaint". The point is that, whether real or imagined, whether the offending party *actually* did something which would be a ground for complaint, or whether the irritation is all within the mind of the offended one, the result is the same. One person has been offended, and now finds fault with, or has a tendency to complain about, blame, or censure the other person. It may not be that the offended party *typically* has a problem with being offended with people, ...or that the one being the source of the irritation has even done anything particularly wrong or offensive. For whatever reason, the person just "rubs you the wrong way", or "gets under your skin", or "clashes" with your personality. Remember, too, that the language is "y'all", addressing "you" as a group. It could be that there will even be people offensive to us *as a group* concerning whom we will need to work this through.

2.) **We are to respond according to who we are in Christ, not according to our immediate fleshly reaction.** I find the language Paul uses here interesting. *As or like* God's "choice ones". This is not meant as pretense, but *as what is real.* **A real identity shift has taken place.** We are no longer who we once were. We are now *God's children*, men and women who have been transferred out from the dominion of darkness to be part of God's family (Col. 1:13). By using "as", Paul enables us to "get outside ourselves" to ask, "What would God's choice, holy people do?" This is meant as a reality check. "Oh, yeah. **I am no longer that old person. I am now a child of God, one set apart to live for Him. I am now free to live a whole new life by the Holy Spirit who lives inside of me.**"

Note, too, the use of the adjectives "holy" and "beloved" in this context. They are significant. "Holy" means "set apart, different from the everyday, dedicated to God". **Paul is reminding us to look for an *unusual* response, not one typical of the average person.** The word "beloved" is actually a participle, one meaning "having been loved and still loved". The significance is that we can be secure in God's love. We have experienced it. We have been redeemed and touched by it. **As ones secure in the awareness of God's love, how should we respond to the "unlovely"?** Did not God's love reach *to us* while we were "unlovely" and "offensive" to Him (Rom. 5:8-10)? As ones having-been-loved-and-still-loved, **how should our response be different from that of someone not knowing Jesus?**

3.) We are to "put on" something. The word in Greek is the same as is used for getting dressed, to "put on" a set of clothes. This is a *conscious choice*, a command which we can either obey or disobey, respond to, reject, or ignore. **To live as God's choice people, we must *choose* to put on a new set of emotional clothes.**

This means, first of all, that it is *possible* to do this in a healthy way, or God would not suggest this to us.

Secondly, the form of the verb suggests that we do this *at a point in time*, ... whenever we are aware of the negative attitude. He does not state it in a way that would indicate ongoing action, because our emotions are not capable of being kept at bay in an ongoing fashion. Instead, the verb suggests that *when* we feel the resentment or irritation, we are to choose to process the negative emotion in light of our new identity, and the overcoming love of God for our distasteful brother or sister.

Third, the fact that the verb is only a point of time action also leaves room for the possibility that our negative emotions may return on another occasion. If so, we are to process it all again, at *that* point in time.

Finally, the form of the verb is also in the middle voice, which means that either we are intensely involved in the action, or that the action somehow limits or affects us. It is obvious that our choice to "put on" these emotional clothes will affect us. At times, the emotional struggle may be very intense. Successfully choosing to embrace the perspective and emotions of God's Spirit will most definitely change and limit us.

What are we to "put on"? The rest of the sentence describes this in two ways, by (a.) attitudinal adjectives, and (b.) participial processes. **To put on this new mind, the renewed mind of the new man (vs. 10), we must choose to employ both *attitude adjustments and changes in practical action*.**

(a.) Attitudes.

(i.) A *heart of compassion* -- Literally, the word "heart" is not there in Greek. It is actually "bowels" or "intestines" of compassion. The intestines were thought to be the seat of emotion, especially one's affections, inward longings, and compassion. There are two basic words for compassion in the NT. One means compassion issuing in an act of help. This one means to feel compassion, mercy or pity on someone. **The emphasis is on the *emotional identification with the person of our concern*.** "Bowels of compassion", then, is a very strong phrase used to describe coming to "feel for them" in their need. **In this case, their "need" is that part of them that is irritating you**, ... anything that is not in accordance with truth, maturity, love, wisdom, or Christlikeness.

(ii.) *Kindness* -- an attitude of emotional "softness" toward another, a consideration of them, a willingness to care for them and see to their comfort. It also incorporates feelings of mercy.

(iii.) *Humility* -- Literally, "lowly-mindedness". It is dialing down one's pride and defensiveness, and being open to learn and receive from another.

(iv.) *Gentleness* -- The Greek word incorporates lowly-mindedness, teachableness, and gentleness. Cultivating an attitude and demeanor of gentleness toward another makes you feel open toward them, not closed, "hard", or abrupt.

(v.) *Patience* -- The Greek word, *makrothumia*, literally means "distance from explosive anger". It refers to tolerance, to be long-suffering, to indulge another, to patiently forbear. To "put on" an attitude of patience means you will "hang in there" longer with the person, allowing the possibility for relationship to develop where otherwise you would not bother to get to know the other person. It also means you dial down or moderate your anger, so that it is under control.

(b.) Actions.

(i.) *Bearing with one another* -- This word means to forbear, endure, or put up with. The form is an ongoing participle (an "-ing" word), meaning that it is action that needs to be maintained.

(ii.) *Forgiving each other* -- **This is the verbal form of the word for "grace"**. It is an ongoing participle, as well, "gracing to yourselves". There is a different word for "forgive", which means to release someone from your debt (i.e., your *retaliation or revenge*). **This word means to show them *undeserved* favor**, to be open, gracious, accepting, friendly, kind, etc., *in spite of* the past offenses or present undesirability of the person. The phrase, "just as the Lord forgave (graced) you", gives us a clear example of this. **Why do we do this? To build unity in the Body, ...to express *agapē*, ...to glorify God both by our obedience and by revealing His Spirit's work in us before a watching world.**