

**General Idea:** God loves you! He chose you to be one of His holy people, so you must clothe yourself in His love and principles. We all must realize that others have faults and show them the grace and forgiveness that Christ has given us. We are to be in unity and filled with gratitude, which will set the tone for our lives, spiritual growth, and our relationship with God and others. This is about what we are to put on and put off in our lives. What are we to put on? Fruit, which is the Holy Spirit working in and through us, so we are oozing with His love. We are to become His masterpiece and showcase of God's goodness and grace. What is produced? Tender mercies, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness; these are virtues that are sealed and empowered by His love for us, which comes from Christ ruling our hearts and His Word indwelling us. This is not a set of ideas we are being asked to consider. Rather, we are called and "*must do*" them! What do we get in return? Peace, as Christ dwells in us and uses us in the lives of others through our words, attitudes, and lifestyle.

### **Contexts and Background:**

This passage is paralleled in Ephesians as Paul was sending out similar instructions to other churches too. He sends a call for us to let Christ rule our hearts and actions, our motives and behaviors, and to put our new lives into effectual action. In this way, we will not waste what God has done in/for us or how He wants us to be toward others. These include the obligations and opportunities of living out our ethics and responsibilities that we have regarding God and one another. The image is the taking off of "grave clothes" as Lazarus did, shedding whatever holds us from growing in Him, and whatever prevents maturity and increasing spirituality that is sincere, real, and vibrant. Our vitality and good character should be the influencers in our spheres of impact, infusing those within our reach for Christ as His ambassadors. We are to be wearing His "grace clothes" as a showcase, not the "grave clothes" of sin, apathy, personal agendas, stifle, gossip, anger, or bitterness. Rather, we are to focus on Christ, so He is clear in our hearts and minds, directing our will and our behaviors.

### **Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:**

- *God's chosen/the elect of God/chosen/holy.* In context, this refers to God's people in community, who have a special guarantee and favor and who have a special personal and communal relationship with Him, as He had with the Israelites in the Old Testament. The writer puts this as a question of *how will we then live in response to our new life together?* It is also in the form of a duty, not to receive salvation, but rather for us to respond to what Christ has freely and lovingly given us. Our Divine election means He chose us not by merit or worth, but just because of His pure and perfect purpose and knowledge, which we do not deserve. This is to motivate our "human responsibility." Election is never an excuse to ignore our faith or responsibility to produce fruit and unity but because we have been chosen and are secure in Christ and we can respond back to Him and others with gratitude. Thus, when the reality of what Christ has done for us hits and motivates us, we can put forth every conceivable effort and passion to live out the Christian life. As Augustine, Calvin, and Spurgeon all said, *divine sovereignty and human responsibility go hand in hand.* So, why would we not put off what holds us back? Why would we not want to be grateful, grace oriented, forgiving, loving, and virtuous (Deut. 4:37; John 3:16; 6:37, 44, 65; 15:1-16; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:29-33; 9:10-24; 11:4-5; 1 Cor. 1:1:2, 30; Eph. 1:4-5; Phil. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:8-9; Tit. 3:4; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2:9)?
- *Holy.* God has declared you holy, set apart for Him—the pleasures and wondrous opportunities to be used by Him. We cannot earn nor do we deserve our grace or gifts from Him. Therefore, let us treat others as He has treated us (John 3:16; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:32; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; Gal. 2:20-21; Col. 1:2; Titus 3:4; 1 John 4:9-19).
- *Dearly loved/beloved.* God loves you and accepts you more powerfully, passionately, purposefully, and deeply than you could ever fathom! You are secure. God "guarantees" you with a clear, powerful, loving, impacting, and lasting relationship with Him. When you are in Christ, God is pleased with you!

You have no need to fear; you are a person of deep value and worth before our Lord! You are forgiven because of Christ and His righteousness that covers you—not because of your deeds or performance. You are unique and complete in Him; and because of this, you are a special person whom God loves and will use to further impact His kingdom (John 6:37, 44, 65; 13:1; 15:16; Rom. 5:1-8; Eph. 1:4-5; Phil. 1:6; Col. 1:21-22; 2:10; 1 John 4:9-11)!

- *Clothe yourselves/put on.* This means to emulate the character of our Lord Jesus Christ on how He acted and reacted as He walked this earth. This is a call to take on the character of Jesus and put it on us. Don't worry; we do not construct this on our own. He imparts to us the power and ability to do so through His and the Holy Spirit's work! It is something we do not force to come about; rather, it happens naturally as we learn and grow in Christ. Then, His character envelopes us, wraps around us as we take on the new identity of a person not only saved by grace but empowered and shaped by Him (Gen. 35:2; Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27; 5:19-23; Col. 1:15; 2:3; 3:10; 1 Pet. 5:5)!
- *Tender mercies/compassion.* This is the caring empathy of another person outside of basic selfish nature. It is to recognize, emotionally identify with, and interact with those who are hurting, and helping them by gathering others with the abilities and resources to help them (Job 29:13; Isa. 40:11; Matt. 9:36; 14:14; Mark 1:41; Luke 6:36; 10:25-37; 19:4; Rom. 12:1-2; James 5:11; 1 Peter 3:8).
- *Kindness.* This Fruit produces a readiness to respond with righteousness and thoughtful consideration beyond how people treat us or how they may or may not deserve it (Matt. 11:29-30; Rom. 2:1-4; 12:9-21; 2 Cor. 6:6; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-14; 1 Tim. 3:4; 1 John 3:16-23).
- *Humility.* This Fruit brings about the realization that Christ is our *all in all* and *supreme*, and we are servants with loving servitude hearts. Our liberty and freedom come from His will directing our path because it is best and most loving for us (1 Kings 8:58; Psalm 25; Mark 10:45; 11:29; Luke 22:27; 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 6:1-2; Phil. 2:1-11; Col. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:25; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:3-5).
- *Meekness/gentleness.* This indicates strength under control so we are Christians who encourage others and place others first with action and encouragement, not manipulating or deceiving or overpowering them (Psalm 37:11; Matt. 5: 3-5; 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 5:23; 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25).
- *Patience/longsuffering.* This is the willingness to allow for the failings of others while showing tolerance and fortitude to them. It is also waiting without usurping our will or control because we have peace and direction from God. It is allowing God the room and time to work through us to others around us (Hos. 2:19-23; Psalm 33:20; Matthew 27:14; Rom. 2:4; 5:3; 12:12; Gal. 5:1; Eph. 4:2; Col. 1:11; 1 Tim. 1:16; James 1:3-4,12; 5:10-11).
- *Bear with/forbearing.* Means to "hold up," as to put up with those who rub you the wrong way; liking the unlikable and loving the unlovable with a good attitude and response.
- *Forgive.* Because we have been forgiven, we are to forgive others. This is the example of Christ's work of redemption being practiced by us. If not, we fuel discord and not reconciliation. We must be willing to bear the cost, just as our LORD did. Forgiveness demands a substitution. So, how could we ever back away from forgiving one another? To back away is a bigger insult to our LORD than for the non-Christian to turn his or her back on His Grace—*because we know better*. Remember, knowledge brings responsibility. Forgiveness is absolutely crucial for any relationship to continue, and essential to resolving any conflict! Remember how much you have been forgiven; do not fail to show that same attitude to others! Remember, God does not treat us the way we tend to treat others (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25; Matt. 18:23-35; 1 Cor. 13:5; Eph. 4:32-5:2; Col. 1:14; 2:13-14).

- *Grievances/quarrel.* Do not blame or complain to or about others; take responsibility and exercise your faith. A Christian saved by grace should never hold grudges, as it leads to sin, hurt, fear, and brokenness to others and our selves. If God held grudges against us, we could never be saved! Because of Christ's redemptive work in us, not obligation, not coercion—but with gratitude, we are to follow His precepts, put them on, and model them to the best of our abilities. It is His love and example empowering us to produce love for others! Fruit and forgiveness are what exemplifies a Christian community and church and what displays God's love and reconciliation to the world (Col. 1:20-22; 2:14-15; 3:8-9).
- *Above all.* This is an emphatic expression meaning, "this is priority;" God calls us to godliness, especially with our behaviors and words!
- *Love/charity.* The word for "love" here is *Agape*. It was used in Classic Greek literature to refer to someone who was generously favored by a god. It conveys the idea of a person giving all his or her love, or favor, to someone else other than one's self. It is a love that is not earned; rather, it is relational and given freely. It also refers to parents giving all of their love to their child. In the New Testament, *agape* love is used to make a similar point, as God gives to each of us all of His love. It is a love that gives without expectations or a response from the other. It takes the initiative, as Christ did with us, and fosters the Fruit of the Spirit and brotherly love. *Agape* love is also the most common word used both as a noun and a verb in the New Testament. The greatest example of *agape* love is what our Lord Jesus Christ did when He died for our sins. God showed His love by taking our place and the wrath and punishment for our sins. He paid that price through His sinless life and His sacrifice on our behalf. Consequently, God's *agape* love rescued us from the punishment that we deserved. Rather than receiving what we ought to have, we received His favor without earning it (Mark 12:28-31; John 3:16, Matt. 22:34-40; John 13:34-35; Rom. 1:31; 12:10; 1 Cor. 13; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2:8; 3:6; 12; 4:9-10; 5:8; 13; 2 Tim. 3:3).
- *Binds them.* This is *Agape* love, the unselfish love that bonds us to God and to one another. This was the main, supreme virtue in Judaism and the foundation for our relationship with God and others. It is the real, impacting, gluing, and synergizing fruit and character that fuels, impacts, and motivates our character and fruit. Without it we can do nothing (John 13:1; 15:13; 1 Cor. 13; 1 John)!
- *Perfect unity/bond of perfection.* One of the aspects of real, true love is that it is an adhesive to relationships and the effective building up of one another and a church. This is our oneness in Christ as a communal community of believers who come together for something and Someone (Christ) who is bigger than us or our collective unity (Rom. 5:5; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 1:27; 2:2; 1 Thess. 4:9).

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

We need to see this passage not just as a slap beside our head to get right with God so our behaviors are right, but also as an encouragement that we can do it. Since Christ gave us new life, we have the empowerment, gifts, and abilities, and alongside that, the Spirit's indwelling to rise up and live for Him. Because Christ is supreme, because He is there molding and guiding us, we can set our purpose and vision of our life in Him and for Him. He is our real life; He is our all in all. We share in His glory, so we can put to death all that holds us back from embracing and living for Christ, and become persons of spiritual maturity who are effective for the Kingdom! We can recognize sin and remove its influence from us.

How is this done? Simply put by Paul in the next verse, by allowing the Word—Christ's presence—to dwell in us, and learn His instruction, so the peace of Christ will rule in our hearts and minds and translate into our actions. It is all about our spiritual growth impacting us so it impacts others positively and in love. The key is to know that Christ is sufficient, so we can trust in Him—and in Him alone! Our faith is by facts that are tangible, impacting what is intangible. Without His intervention—our spiritual circumcision—we remain in our sins and are dead to God in a hopeless and worthless state. Because of

Christ, we have forgiveness and hope. We are alive and God favors us! Jesus nailed our sins to the cross and in so doing, disarmed the evil of the world. Sin is still roaming around, but neutered as to what it can do to a Christian. He is victorious and we have victory in Him.

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. Have you held grudges? Have others done so with you? If so, how did you feel? How do grudges lead to sin, hurt, fear, and brokenness for others and our selves?
2. What does it mean to you that God loves you and He chose you to be His? How can this help motivate you?
3. Do you think or feel that you are holy? How and why must we clothe ourselves in His love and principles? What happens when we do not—both as individuals and collectively as a church?
4. What is the focus of attention in your life? Is Christ your all in all? If not, why not? What needs to take place in your life for Him to be first in all things?
5. How much hold does Christ's rule have on your heart and actions? How can your motives and behaviors be clues as to what needs to be put off and put on?
6. Have you ever considered that when we waste our new life, we disrespect and dishonor God?
7. How do the attributes in this passage help you produce character and spiritual maturity?
8. How does character show that a Christian is a representative of Christ?
9. Do you understand what Christ did for you? If so, how will you have more hope and confidence to trust and obey Him?
10. What do you need to put on in your life? What do you need to put off?
11. What would happen in your church if most people were sincerely exhibiting tender mercies, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness? What happens when we are stingy with these fruits or prevent them from functioning properly? What can be done to make them work better?
12. What can you do to put your new life into more effectual action and not waste what God has done in you or the opportunities He has for you or how He wants you to be to others?