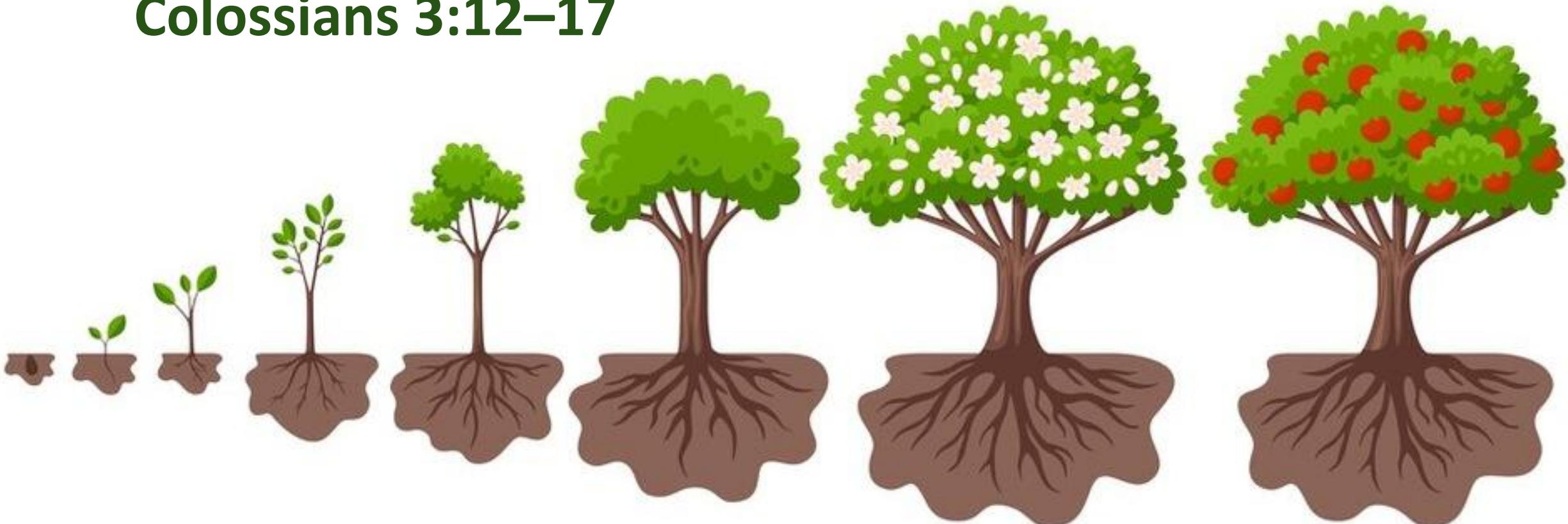


“Bringing Virtue to Life,”

Part 2

Colossians 3:12–17

*Christ over All:
Paul's Letter
to the Colossians*

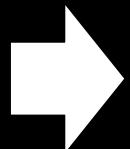


COLOSSIANS 3:12–17

“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 each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 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 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. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS 3:12–17

- Having commanded us to mortify sin (3:5–11) in response to our union with Christ (3:1–4), Paul then describes the virtues that we must nurture in their place (3:12–17).



- I. The Christian's Practical Virtues (vv. 12–13)
- II. The Christian's Comprehensive Virtue (v. 14)
- III. The Christian's Internal Virtues (vv. 15–16)
- IV. The Christian's Vertical Virtue (v. 17)

BRINGING
VIRTUE
TO LIFE

I. The Christian's Practical Virtues (3:12–13)

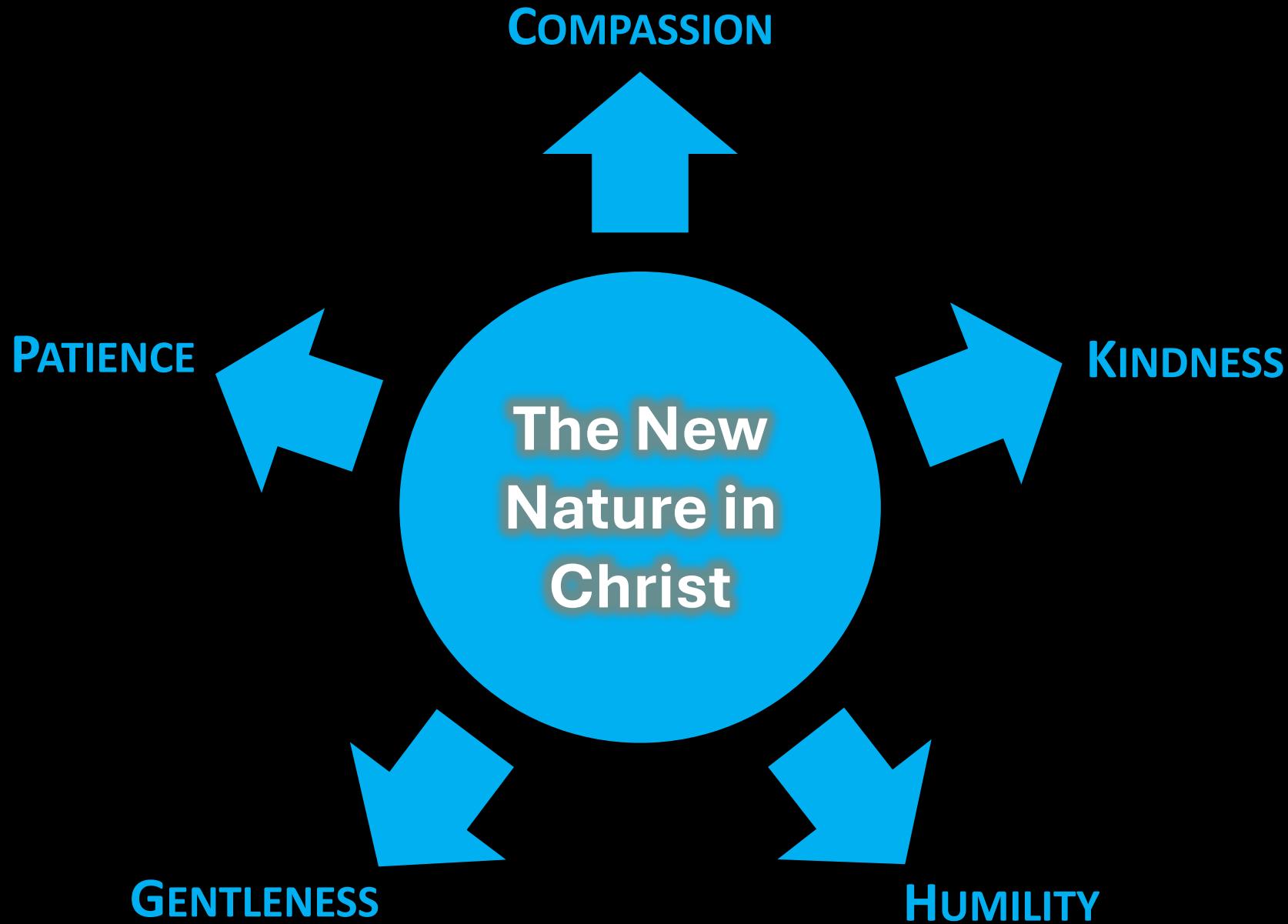
‘So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.’

A. The Basis of the Command (v. 12a)

B. The Substance of the Command (v. 12b)

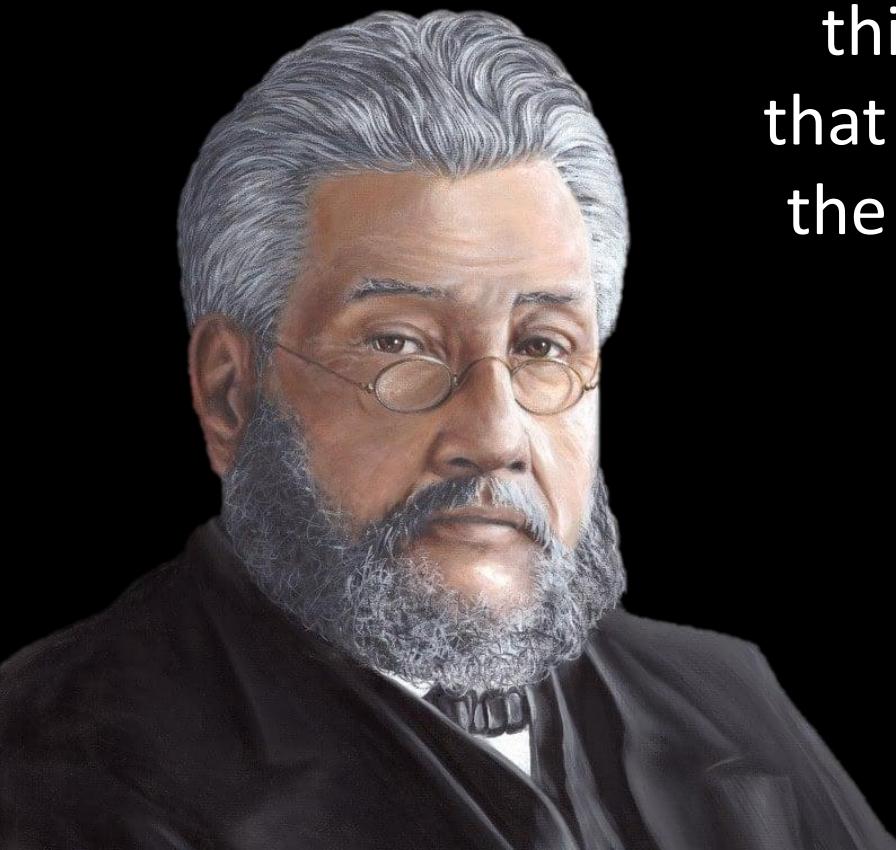
C. The Focus of the Command (v. 12b)





“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 each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

- 1) **“A heart of compassion”** – “a display of concern over another’s misfortune”; the disposition of showing mercy to those who suffer, and bringing relief.
- 2) **“Kindness”** – “the quality of being helpful or beneficial.”
- 3) **“Humility”** – “one’s low estimate of oneself”; the practice of regarding another as more important than yourself (Phil 2:3); the art of self-forgetfulness.

A portrait of Charles Spurgeon, a 19th-century English Baptist preacher. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, high-collared coat over a white shirt with a dark bow tie. He has a full, dark beard and mustache, and his hair is powdered and styled upwards. He is wearing round-rimmed glasses. The background is a solid, dark color.

“You are not mature if you have a high esteem of yourself. He who boasts in himself is but a babe in Christ, if indeed he be in Christ at all. Young Christians may think much of themselves. Growing Christians think themselves nothing. Mature Christians know that they are less than nothing. The more holy we are, the more we mourn our infirmities, and the humbler is our estimate of ourselves.”

—Charles Spurgeon

“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 each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

4) **“Gentleness”** –“the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance”; a difficult term to translate, since it describes so much (see Gal 6:1; Eph 4:1–2; 2 Tim 2:24–25; Titus 3:1–2; James 3:13).

“It may be best understood by its contrast to its opposites: roughness, bad temper, sudden anger, brusqueness” (George Knight).

Jesus epitomized *gentleness* (e.g., Matt 11:29; 2 Cor 10:1); the Holy Spirit produces *gentleness* (e.g., Gal 5:23).

“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 each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”**

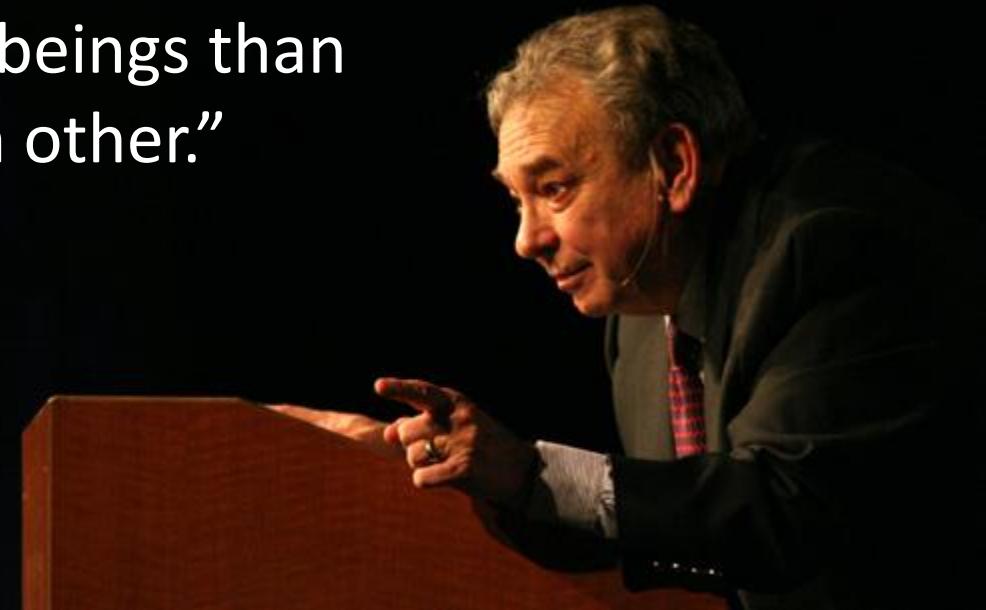
5) **“Patience”** – “the state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome.”

This virtue relates specifically to remaining “tranquil” while awaiting repentance and change in others (see 1 Cor 13:4; Eph 4:1–2; 1 Thess 5:14).

God is a God of *patience* (e.g., Rom 2:4; 1 Tim 1:16); the Holy Spirit produces *patience* (Gal 5:22).

“Longsuffering, forbearing patience is to be the Christian’s reflection of the character of God. It is part of God’s character to be slow to anger and quick to be merciful. Part of the incomprehensibility of God in terms of my own relationship with Him is this: I cannot fathom how a holy God has been able to put up with me marring His creation to the degree I have for three score and five years. For me to live another day requires a continuation of God’s gracious patience with my sin. . . . It becomes even more difficult to fathom when we see a sinless Being being more patient with sinful beings than sinful beings are with each other.”

—R. C. Sproul



“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 each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

D. The Application of the Command (v. 13)

- Verse 13 provides a practical look at how these five virtues (v. 12a) are exercised in everyday life.
- In particular, Paul applies them to two common scenarios:
 - (a) dealing with others *who have differences with us* (preferences, levels of maturity, etc.); and
 - (b) dealing with others *who have sinned against us*.

“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 each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

- 1) **“Bearing with one another”** – translated as “showing tolerance for one another” in Ephesians 4:2; Chrysostom describes it as “passing things over”; an essential ingredient for Christian community (see Col 3:11).

“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. For the sake of maintaining community, we will sometimes have to ‘put up with’ people with whom we would not normally choose to associate” (Douglas Moo, *Colossians*, 279).

“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 each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

- 2) “**Forgiving each other**” – root idea: *grace* (χάρις, *charis*); “to show oneself *gracious* by forgiving wrongdoing.”

“Forgiveness” – a decision to stop counting the sin against the offending person and to cease from feeling offended (even if the sin is remembered).



The verb “conveys the idea that forgiving others is an act of grace, freely offered, often not ‘deserved’” (Moo, *Colossians*, 279).

“The price of refusing to forgive is high. Unforgiveness produces hatred, bitterness, animosity, anger, and retribution. . . . Refusing to forgive imprisons people in their past. Unforgiving people keep their pain alive by constantly picking at the open wounds and keeping it from healing. Bitterness takes root in their hearts and defiles them (Heb. 12:15).

Anger rages out of control and negative emotions run unchecked. Life is filled with turmoil and strife instead of joy and peace.”

—John MacArthur, *Second Corinthians*, 50

THE COST OF UNFORGIVENESS

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“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 each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

“Whoever has a complaint against anyone” – notice the unqualified nature of the instruction: “whoever” and “anyone.”

“Complaint” = “a fault found,” “an offense taken,” “a payment demanded.”

Proverbs 19:11 – “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.”

“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 each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; **just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.**”

“**Just as the Lord forgave you**” – knowing the extreme difficulty of this instruction, Paul introduces a *standard for comparison*.

Paul’s logic? You have received the far greater expression of forgiveness than you possibly need to extend to others.

- **Colossians 2:13** – “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.”

“**So also should you**” – therefore, imitate the standard (also Eph 4:32).

“Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle *them*, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, “Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.” And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, “Pay back what you owe. . . .

“So his fellow slave fell *to the ground* and *began* to plead with him, saying, “Have patience with me and I will repay you.” But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?” And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.””

—Matthew 18:21–35

“The idea is not simply that we have been forgiven, and therefore we ought to forgive, but that *God Himself*, in Christ has forgiven us, and therefore our debt is incalculable. No matter how much wretched evil has been done against us, it is little compared with the offense that we have thrown in the face of God. Yet God in Christ has forgiven us. If we know anything of the release of this forgiveness, if we have glimpsed anything of the magnitude of the debt we owe to God, our forgiveness of others will not seem to be such a large leap.”

—D. A. Carson, *Love in the Hard Places*, 80–81

“Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love.

—**Micah 7:18**

THE CHRISTIAN'S STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

- ✓ Remember who you now are, and that by God's doing.
- ✓ Recognize that progress in the Christian life—conformity to Jesus Christ—does not happen by accident; it requires intentional effort.
- ✓ The five practical virtues that Paul lists are not optional; they are not limited to certain personality types; they are obligatory for all believers.
- ✓ Assess your progress: Are you one who increasingly brings benefit and gladness to your relationships?
- ✓ Memorize the names of these virtues to repeat to yourself throughout the day: *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*

- ✓ The vitality of these virtues will be tested not by easy relationships, but by difficult ones—with people who are *different from us*, and especially with people who have *transgressed against us*.
- ✓ Meditate much on the example of God in Christ—in His manifestation of these virtues, but especially in His free expression of forgiveness to you.
- ✓ Keep short accounts. The longer you delay obedience to the command to forgive, the more difficult it becomes. Do not give the devil a foothold (Eph 4:27).
- ✓ These virtues are supernatural—the product of the Spirit's sanctifying activity. Pray for His work to be done.