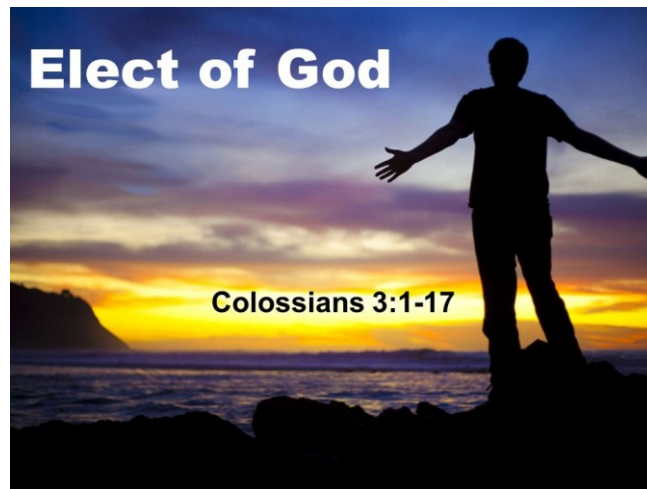


“Therefore, elect of God”



Peter McArthur

There's a Jewish saying that goes something like this:

**How odd of God,
to choose the Jews.
It's not so odd,
the Jews chose God.**

This is based on the idea that Israel was an “elected, chosen” people. God chose them above all other peoples at the time. My oh my, that will really cause some people to stumble!

However in this month's teaching I don't want to go too far down that rabbit-hole of thought, but just to say the doctrine of “election” is rather a complicated one, and often gets people's backs up very quickly as they try to defend their particular understanding. So to begin with I would simply like to present a foundational thought.

Whatever you might think “election” is (being “chosen by God”), at the core is the concept that election (“chosenness”) is mutual, it's a reciprocal relationship. God chooses you; you respond back to God by choosing Him. In other words, the chosen people are also the choosing people!

A bit complicated? Don't worry we're moving on in a moment to something much more exhilarating. Suffice it to say that God actually initiated the choice, because He's in control and has a divine purpose to fulfill. So even though God chose Abraham and his descendants to start with, the whole thing would've been quite meaningless if they hadn't reciprocated by “choosing” YHWH as their God. In this kind of relationship there has to be both a free acceptance of it and also a participation in it.

OK, enough of the difficult theology stuff. Now let's pick up on what Paul said about us being “the elect of God” (Colossians 3:12-17).

As those who have been **elect 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. **Above 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.

That great phrase (**elect of God, holy and beloved**) holds within it a great wonder. It's a very deep truth that stretches from Eternity into Time, and how we choose to express it Daily as God's beloved. Note the sequence from Eternity into Time and into a Daily expression of His love. It's almost poetic in its truth.

Three things stand out here - Elect, Holy, and Beloved. *Election* is from eternity. This precedes *Holiness* which then becomes centred in time. We the holy beloved ones, feeling God's love then choose to express it in our day to day lives.

After Paul introduces this marvellous theme he almost bluntly says "put on". Well you can only "put on" if first you "put off" the habits of the former life, the "old man".

Now **put off** all these things: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, shameful speech out of your mouth (verse 8).

Then he follows through with saying there are 7 things to "put on". Note that the number 7 usually stands for **perfection** in Biblical symbolism. These are listed as "a heart of ①compassion, ②kindness, ③humility, ④gentleness and ⑤patience, ⑥bearing with one another, and ⑦forgiving each other".

Interestingly enough the word for "heart" is actually *bowels* which is an ancient way of saying you express deep compassion, which was believed to have its seat in the inward parts of the body (heart, liver, lungs, etc.). It has the meaning of deep-seated emotions and affections, a place where great passion is found.

Paul then says "**bearing with one another**" (verse 13). Literally it means to "bear with one another and forgive yourself" (see Matthew 6:12 and Ephesians 4:32). It's a pronoun emphasizing the truth that we are *all* members of Christ's body – members one of another - so that in forgiving *each other* we also forgive *ourselves* (see Vincent's Word Studies).

The world puts it the other way around by saying we have to forgive ourselves first, and only then are we able to forgive others. That's not true. It might sound correct but it puts US first, when Scripture says put OTHERS before you. God and others first, then self.

The phrase "**bearing with one another**" actually means "*holding yourselves back from one another*". We could say "don't irritate each other, and keep yourself from provoking other believers". It's about the brethren as a whole, the Body of Christ, not us as individuals! The very reverse of how the world is acting at present with "selfies" etc.

In verse 14 Paul says "**above all**". The wording is a metaphor for a garment. Some versions have "*above all*" or "*over all*" and it means to "*put on*" like an upper piece of clothing. There's

a play on words here as Paul refers to the Christian's garments. Clothe yourselves with all Christian grace towards the brethren. It's been called **the garments of a renewed soul**. A lovely phrase.

The wording "**above all these things**" is quite important. It doesn't mean "as well as these things" or "besides these things". So what does he mean by "these things"? Well Paul is referring to the things that he's just mentioned in verses 12 and 13. The seven attitudes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving each other.

Now I dare say that all these 7 by themselves would seem to us to be pretty heavy to live by! That's a lot of virtues to try and live out each day. But here's Paul saying "over and above all these pretty demanding virtues I want you to put on something else". Fair go Paul; you're already loading us up with enough!

Well, that's how the flesh and religion would respond I'm sure. But we are the elect, the chosen, the redeemed ones, and there's a demand on us – we've been bought with a price and we are not ourselves any longer (1 Cor 6:20).

So Paul (by the Holy Spirit) has every right to place an even bigger demand upon us; "above all these things" put on something even greater, LOVE!

Well we should expect that I suppose. Scripture is saturated with that word. Love embraces and knits together all the 7 virtues. Even the word "*bond*" is a reference to a girdle which binds and holds all the other garments together. So Paul is saying that self-sacrificial love (*agape*) acts like a girdle that holds all the other 7 virtues together in unity. What a thought.

You can have the 7 great and wonderful virtues in your life, but if *agape*, self-sacrificial love isn't holding them altogether, it's really not worth anything. We need God's *agape* love to bind all things in perfect unity. That special word *perfect* or *perfectness* is a collective idea in Scripture, not a personal concept. When the world talks about being perfect it's nearly always referring to an individual's aspiration to attain to something greater and bigger and better.

However the Biblical concept of perfection is about the whole, the corporate Body of Christ, the ALL of us perfectly joined together in God-given unity (1 Cor 1:10).

Perfection is a collective idea which goes back to what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:27 "**Christ in you, the hope of glory**". Many Christians think the "you" refers to them as individuals; Christ in YOU the born-again believer. But it doesn't.

Here the Greek word "you" is plural. Paul is saying Christ Jesus is in us corporately, that is the hope of glory. So putting on *agape* self-sacrificial love is the girdle, the bond that holds us ALL together as the Body of Christ as we express the 7 virtues. It's all about the BODY folks. As difficult as it can be at times, that's what the glory is about – loving the brethren with a self-sacrificial love. I've failed in it and you probably have too (or will). But at the end it's not our attempts trying to be better Christians; it's about having been chosen, responding to the Father's choice, and aligning with what He is purposing. Grace would be a great word here!

Then finally he draws it together by saying let the "**word** (logos) **of Christ richly dwell within you**". Again it's plural. It's a phrase he normally doesn't use and only appears here in all of his epistles. He's saying the Gospel word by which you've been chosen and called and is apparent in Christ, is to be clearly seen in your mutual lives. Allow it to richly and abundantly be in you and it will produce the spirit of true godly wisdom in you corporately. Of

course as this is expressed in us as a Body, it has the flow-on effect of taking root in us individually. The two go hand in hand.

By letting the words of Christ's teachings inhabit our deepest inner being it becomes a permanent part of our thinking. As this happens the "**peace of Christ rules in our hearts**" (verse 15). This word "rules" actually means *umpire*, so the point is that the peace which only Christ gives will act like an umpire to govern, control and even adjust issues that may arise among brethren.

Someone said it's like Christ having the casting-vote in any church disagreement. And of course it will always be on the side of love. Let Christ decide, that's the point. Just imagine what it would be like if we all practiced this as a general rule in church disagreements? Letting love truly reside and decide. The unity of the Body is a strong argument indeed for peace among the saints.

There's another level to this. While the peace of Christ can umpire in cases when there's antagonism between brethren, it can also apply to times when our individual thoughts and attitudes are in direct disagreement with the Father Himself. Most of us probably wouldn't openly disagree with the Father or challenge Him (although some do), but we can and frankly do, when we choose not to invite Him into some of our personal decision making moments.

While we might never openly say we oppose the Father, in reality we probably do. Think of times when you've chosen NOT to ask Him for direction just in case He should give His opinion or guidance. You know what He's going to say, so better not to ask Him. Or when it's been easier to block out that Voice because you know only too well He's likely to give contradictory advice to what you're thinking or planning. Or am I the only one who's done this?

Paul wraps up all of this by inciting us to be thankful (Col 3:15-17).

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.

"**Whatever you do, do all**" is what it literally says. This refers to both our WORDS as well as our DEEDS. An old Puritan saying goes like this: "**Let your words be right, and your deeds upright.**"

"**In the name of the Lord Jesus**" could be used as a kind of Golden Rule for us. Do the "all" in the spirit and attitude of Jesus!

"**Giving thanks**" is Paul's great exhortation to us. He sees it as a spiritual duty of very great importance; so should we. "**A thankful heart makes a victorious and attractive character.**"

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