

COLOSSIANS 3:11-17 | LIVE LIKE THIS

VERSE 11 - BLUE

The word "where" normally refers to a place. However, here it refers to the condition of the "new man" (v. 10). We could understand it as "within the new, here are the circumstances..." In this new man, Paul says, there is "neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free." This means the individual characteristics of the person in the flesh are now gone, and the individual is hidden in Christ. Thus, "Christ is all, and in all."

In the context of ancient history, "Barbarians" referred to people who were not part of the Greek or Roman civilizations. The term was often used by the Greeks to describe people who spoke languages other than Greek and were considered uncivilized in comparison to the sphere of Greek culture.

The "Scythians" were a specific group of people from the region north of the Black Sea, known for their nomadic lifestyle and exceptional skills in horseback riding and archery. They were often viewed as fierce and warlike. By mentioning Barbarians and Scythians, Paul emphasizes that in the new man, cultural or social distinctions, no matter how significant they were in the past, no longer create barriers between individuals. In Christ, these distinctions are erased, and all are unified.

Paul's perspective in Colossians 3:11 represents a radical departure from the views found in the Torah, the Prophets, and even from the teachings of Jesus. The Torah and the Prophets often emphasize the distinctiveness of the Jewish people, setting them apart from other nations through laws, customs, and rituals. The concept of being a "chosen people" is central, with a clear delineation between Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus, during His earthly ministry, also operated within the framework of Jewish tradition and law. His mission was to the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Jesus even implied that a Gentile woman was on par with the dogs (Matt. 15:26).

In contrast, Paul's message in Colossians 3:11 is one of complete equality and unity in Christ. He asserts that cultural, social, and ethnic distinctions no longer matter within the "new man" created in Christ. This concept can only be true in a new, Pauline outlook and dispensation.

VERSE 12 - BLUE

The heart of this sentence is "Put on...bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering..." The sentence includes a parenthetical adverbial clause which modifies the basic instruction. The adverbial clause is "as the elect of God" who are further modified as "holy and beloved." It is extremely important to note that the word "as" in the clause is an adverb, and thus by its very nature tells HOW to "put on." Grammatically, the phrase "as the elect of God" is not at all in any manner whatsoever describing those Paul is speaking to. Adjectives can describe individuals but adverbs describe actions. Therefore, anyone who uses this verse to claim that the body of Christ is "the elect of God" is simply ignoring good grammar.

The "elect of God" are defined in Scripture as Israel, those called and set apart. This concept is supported by numerous passages in the Bible:

- Isaiah 45:4: "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me." This verse explicitly refers to Israel as the elect.
- Deuteronomy 7:6: "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." Here, Israel is clearly depicted as a chosen and set-apart people.
- Romans 11:28: "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes." This passage underscores that Israel is still considered the elect in the context of God's promises and relationship with them.

These verses collectively highlight that the term "elect of God" is scripturally associated with Israel, a nation called and set apart by God. Since we allow Scripture to interpret itself, we really are bound to the conclusion that Israel is the elect of God.

### Additional Examples of "ὡς" Instructions in the Bible

The following examples further illustrate how the word "as" (Greek: ὡς) functions adverbially, describing the manner of an action without implying identity:

1. **1 Peter 2:13:**
  - "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;"
  - The phrase "as supreme" describes how to submit to the king, indicating the manner of submission without implying that the king is the supreme authority in an absolute sense.
2. **Matthew 6:29:**
  - "And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."
  - The phrase "like one of these" uses the word "like," but could use the word "as," being the same Greek adverb. Solomon is not one of the lilies of the field, but being compared to one.
3. **Ephesians 5:1:**
  - "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;"
  - The phrase "as dear children" describes how to follow God, suggesting a manner of imitation without implying that the listeners are literally children.
4. **Matthew 10:16:**
  - "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."
  - The phrases "as sheep," "as serpents," and "as doves" describe the manner in which the disciples should conduct themselves, indicating innocence, wisdom, and harmlessness without implying that the disciples are literally sheep, serpents, or doves.

These examples demonstrate that "ὡς" (as) in instructions describes the manner of performing an action without implying the identity of the subject. This supports the grammatical point that "as the elect of God" in Colossians 3:12 describes how to "put on" the virtues rather than directly identifying the readers as the elect of God.

For the strongest example that "ὡς" shouldn't be taken to describe the recipient, see notes on verse 13.

### Examples of Proposition Use of "As" in the Bible

In English, prepositions, not adverbs, are used to declare a person to be something. For example, "As a teacher, you should be patient" or "As an expert, what do you recommend?" Here, "as" is used as a preposition to indicate the role or status of the person being described.

1. **2 Corinthians 5:20:**
  - "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."
  - In this verse, "as though" is used to indicate the manner in which the apostles are acting, indicating they are, in fact, representing God's plea.
2. **Titus 1:7:**
  - "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;"
  - Here, "as the steward of God" is used to describe the bishop's role, emphasizing the responsibilities and qualities expected of someone in that position. The bishop is "the steward of God."
3. **1 Peter 2:16:**
  - "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."
  - In this passage, "as free" and "as the servants of God" are used to describe the believers' status and how they should conduct themselves, highlighting their freedom and their servitude to God.

These examples illustrate how "as" functions as a preposition to declare a person's role or status in English, providing clarity and context to the statement.

All of this serves as an argument for using basic Greek grammar to assist in the interpretation of Scripture. In English, it is sometimes difficult to decipher if "as" is used adverbially or prepositionally, but Greek always makes this completely clear. It can be done without Greek tools, but the tools will speed the process and eliminate the error of guesswork for one who is not a strong English grammarian.

### **Summary of the Argument for Verse 12**

In Colossians 3:12, Paul instructs believers to "put on" virtues such as mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering. The phrase "as the elect of God" is an adverbial clause that describes how to put on these virtues, not who the believers are. The term "elect of God" scripturally refers to Israel, as evidenced by multiple passages. Therefore, Paul is not identifying the believers as the elect of God but is instructing them to adopt these virtues in the manner of the elect.

### **The Worst Offender**

I'll give "the worst offender" award to the New Living Translation, which renders this verse as, "Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must...." In doing so, they make it absolutely impossible for the English reader to have even the slightest clue that the phrase could be taken adverbially. It is a shameful translation of the verse, deserving of all condemnation.

We will save the list of things instructed for our notes on verse 13.

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### **VERSE 13 - BLUE**

Paul has given a list of virtues to put on in the manner of the elect. Since the elect are given as exemplary in this issue, to be imitated, we should be able to find passages in the Hebrew Scriptures which explicitly teach that they are to do such things, and indeed we do.

### **Old Testament Passages Corresponding to Each Virtue:**

1. Bowels of Mercies (Compassion)
  1. Isaiah 49:13:
    - "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted."
  2. Micah 6:8:
    - "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"
2. Kindness
  1. Zechariah 7:9:
    - "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother:"
  2. Proverbs 19:22:
    - "The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar."
3. Humbleness of Mind (Humility)
  1. Micah 6:8:
    - "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"
  2. Proverbs 22:4:
    - "By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life."
4. Meekness
  1. Psalm 25:9:
    - "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way."

2. Isaiah 29:19:
  - "The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."
5. Longsuffering (Patience)
  1. Exodus 34:6:
    - "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,"
  2. Psalm 86:15:
    - "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth."
6. Forbearing One Another (Tolerance, Patience with One Another)
  1. Proverbs 19:11:
    - "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression."
  2. Ecclesiastes 7:9:
    - "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools."
7. Forgiving One Another
  1. Leviticus 19:17-18:
    - "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD."
  2. Proverbs 17:9:
    - "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends."

These passages collectively highlight the virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness. The Old Testament often instructs or describes the people of God exhibiting these virtues, which are consistent with the attributes that the recipients of Colossians are to put on in the same manner as "elect of God."

Concerning the last item on the list ("forgiving one another"), there is also an adverbial modifier: "as Christ forgave you." This is an excellent reminder in close proximity with "as the elect" in v. 12 to show the importance of understanding the adverb "as" differently from the preposition "as."

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#### VERSE 14 - BLUE

Paul adds one more virtue as "the icing on the cake": he uses the Greek word ἀγάπη (agape), which is sometimes translated as "love" but here as "charity."

In the KJV, the translation choice between "love" and "charity" for ἀγάπη depends on the contextual emphasis:

- **Charity** is used to highlight selfless, enduring, and practical love within the community and personal relationships.
- **Love** is used more broadly for love in its essence and general expressions of affection.

While some argue that the KJV should have consistently translated ἀγάπη as "love," such a view overlooks the nuances in both Greek and English usage. The agape shown by God, or between friends or lovers, differs from the agape a Christian believer might show to a stranger or fellow believer. The word "charity" in Latin, Old French, and Middle English was used exclusively to convey a Christian expression of the essence of love. In 1611, "charity" was a more precise translation than simply "love."

In modern English, "charity" has evolved to have a broader, often non-religious connotation. Unfortunately, we lack a contemporary word that conveys the same expression of exclusively Christian love. Therefore, it is more instructive to teach KJV users the historical and theological significance of "charity" rather than simplifying it to "love."