

Colossians 3:12-17 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17 | Put on Love

Paul's message to the young church in Colossae is so simple it can be easy to miss. There is a phrase I once heard describing great barbecue, "not complicated, not easy." I think that perfectly fits Paul's message to this young church. Here it is in one of his own sentences.

Colossians 2:6 Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.

This letter is an exhortation and a plea for Christian maturity in a newly formed church, and Paul wants the Colossians to be sure that the path of Christian maturity is not different from the way into Christianity, and that is Christ himself. We entered into Christ not because we sought him, but because he sought us. Therefore our lives are a response to his action and are therefore a practice of receiving his grace.

1. Personal Mortification

Colossians 3:12-17 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

Paul gives us here a list of qualities or virtues which the Christian is to embody. But at every turn Paul calls us back to the truths of the gospel as the means and mode by which we are to embody these qualities of Christ-like character. We are to put them on as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

In this phrase is the foundation of the Christian's self-understanding. We are first of all God's chosen ones. The Christian must understand that it is God who accomplished our salvation in Christ on our behalf while we were yet sinners because of the depth of his love towards us. The doctrine of election, long debated throughout Christian history is not negotiable. While I've met many Christians who balk at the doctrine of election I've never met one who disagrees with the phrase, "we love because he first loved us." This is not just a description of the order of events. It is not, "he loved us then we loved him." Although this is temporally true the point is not temporal, it is causal. The word is not then, but because.

I have heard it said that a true grip on the doctrine of election is a recipe for narcissism. Because it is the narcissist who expects to receive love and special treatment as a means of eliminating their inner feelings of worthlessness, and therefore manipulates the world around them to elicit these unearned benefits. But this reading is a category mistake. We don't receive from this grace from the Lord like we receive praise from a crowd. We receive this grace from the Lord in the way that the animals received their names from Adam. But even more than that, we receive it as from our very creator the one who is the source of all things.

The narcissist must manipulate themselves and others to draw out their required response. The doctrine of election shows that the response we need from God was not drawn out by us, but rather flowed freely from him. We are objects of grace not subjects. We receive the action rather than perform the action. And our response is not one of desert, but rather the humility of a creature before its maker. Although I rebelled against you, you chose to make me clean. It results in praise to God. God who is the object of our praise. And his election of us allows us to rest as named creatures in a received identity. That name in Christ is holy and beloved.

When Adam named the dog he allowed for this meaning to inhere in the word which the dog joyfully received and act doggedly. Keeping its nose wet and demeanor social. Never coveting our hands, but enjoying its four paws. In Christ you are holy and beloved. Its true, your creator said it, he did it. And because of that you put on his qualities.

Colossians 3:12b-13 compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

These qualities are supportive of the coherence of the church community. They are qualities which tend toward the preservation and richness of relationships. They are deeply overlapping. **Compassion** results in **kindness**, **humility** shows itself in the restraint of **meekness**, which is the willingness to suffer injury rather than inflict it. To experience injustice rather than cause injustice. **Patience** manifests itself in bearing with one another. If the American church has lost anything in its adoption of a consumerist disposition it is an ability to bear with one another. Those petty annoyances, idiosyncrasies, and strangeness that we all bring to the table, some more than others are no longer reasons for division. You bear them.

And when you are wronged you forgive. Because you understand that Christ himself has forgiven you. This is what the chosen one looks like. It is the image of a community of those who understand themselves to have been chosen and made holy and beloved by their creator. It is the inverse of narcissism.

2. Love

Colossians 3:14-15 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Among all of these virtues rises to the top one which binds everything together, love. Imagine making an argument and grounding it in love. You would be laughed off and considered a fool. Imagine introducing the topic of love into your workplace, or your business plan? Imagine a politician grounding their campaign in love. This is the highest virtue which binds all the others together and yet is there anything more taboo? We talk about attraction no problem. Justice easily. Equality without a second thought. But love, this is the calling of the Christian.

It is love which binds all the other virtues together and it is love which binds together a group of people. The Christian understands that at the base foundations of existence itself lies not facts and data but love. That which can only be described relationally. Love is what makes you human and preserves the humanity of others. It is not power at the foundations of existence, but love. Power consumes or dissolves. Love preserves. Have you considered what it might mean to grasp this is the highest calling of your life? To be a people whose pursuit of character meant above all else love?

It is love which can make a body of people. Because love does not permit what is wrong in the other, and it does not restrict what is right. This means it does not dissolve into destruction and it does not enmesh into pure unity. It is the unity of the trinity. One and three.

Paul is writing from the Pax Romana. That period of Roman Peace in which all roman citizens were free to pursue what they desired for their lives. They could live in a way which is not interfered with by coercion or compulsion. Paul calls us here to live in the Pax Christiana. It is Christ's peace that rules in our hearts. Here is what we might now. Christ has removed from you all your sins. He draws close to you as your protector now. He has ensured the glory of your future. Let all we do to one another be bound together under this rule.

And be thankful for that. Giving thanks to God allows us to participate in this reality of Christ's peace.

3. Word, Song, Everything

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

So here is what we do.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. When you go camping you do not light a fire and then scatter around the campsite, you all gather around the fire. The word of Christ is this fire. We have it in the scriptures, so let it be what we gather around. I have heard of two bible studies spontaneously springing up out of parish groups and my heart is rejoicing over this opportunity in our church. May you gather together around the word like a campfire, might it dwell in you richly so that you think God's word after him.

We teach one another what the word says, we admonish one another wisely towards its prescriptions. This takes incredible wisdom. So let your heart be quick to hear from the wise among us.

And this Christian community is to be marked by thankful singing to God. Singing is an essential mark of the Christian community because in our shared song together we orient ourselves towards the praise of God. God is love, and he loves us and in him we become a people together. So we sing psalms, and hymn praises, and we lift up spiritual songs. As John Piper famously said, worship is the fuel and purpose of the mission of the church.

Paul concludes with a comprehensive exhortation.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This flows out of the word and teaching and singing. From this place we are able to expand into the whole of our lives and receive this name of Christ upon ourselves. We are a marked people, chosen by God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. All of our lives are to carry with them the reality of our being chosen by God.

Ask this: is this something to which I can be grateful to the Lord? Is this something which represents Christ's work in the world? Is this something which I would do while bearing the name of Christ?

Take up his name which he has given to you. And sing to him loudly with thanksgiving in your heart to him. Let his love be our highest aim. And let us go into the world and the whole of our lives to spread the fame and glory of his name.