

Life Together: Part 1

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Date: 16 March 2025

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[0 : 0 0] If you've been here, you know, we've been in Colossians for a number of weeks now. We've been in Colossians 3 for a number of weeks now. And this chapter, Colossians 3, is all about how to change.

It's about how to grow spiritually. And so two weeks ago, we saw the grounds for believing that it's possible for somebody like you and me to change. And you see it there beginning in Colossians 3.

There's a lot of identity statements. He says, well, you've died with Christ and your life is hid with Christ. And you've been raised with Christ. See, those are all identity claims.

Paul is saying, for you to grow, you have to understand what's already true of you. And then last week, we saw the negative side of change, where Paul says, if you want to grow, you've got to learn to put off your sin.

Or he uses really violent language, right? He says, you've got to kill your sin. You've got to execute it. Because all those sins, all the sins that we commit, he says, that's part of the old you.

[0 : 5 9] And the old you is dead. That's the you before Christ. And then this week, Paul says, there's a positive side to change too. Which is that for you to grow in Christ, you've got to put something on.

And that's what he talks about this morning. So we're going to read Colossians 3, verses 12 to 17. Hear now God's word. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 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. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And 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 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.

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. Amen.

[2 : 2 6] This is God's word. Amen. So to grow spiritually, Paul says, you've got to put something on. And it's clothes language. He says, you've got to go into your closet and you've got to take out the clothing of Christ.

And what he does is he gives us five virtues here. Compassionate hearts, humility, kindness, meekness, and patience. And we're going to talk about each one of these in turn because you could easily look at this and just say, okay, Paul says just be a better person.

But each of these are a different angle on what it means to grow in Christ. And so we're going to look at them differently. But you also, before we start, you have to see what they have in common too.

What do all these virtues have in common? And I want to suggest that one of the things that these virtues have in common is every one of these virtues requires someone else.

So you can't be a compassionate person unless you have someone to be compassionate towards, right? And yes, you can learn patience without other people. You know, you can learn to be patient in your circumstances.

[3 : 30] But when Paul talks about patience here, he describes it as bearing with one another. So he's talking about living in a community here. In other words, when Paul talks about growing in character, growing in Christian character, he's saying it's something that you can only realize.

It's something that you can only do in a community of faith. That's where you grow in Christian character. And if you want to use it in school terms, you can say Christian character is a group project.

It's something that you can't do it by yourself because it requires other people to practice with and other people to test you, to test whether the character is real or not.

So the main point this morning is that Christ clothes us for community. If you walk away with nothing else, hear that. Christ clothes us for community. And the community of Jesus, the church, is where those clothes are meant to shine.

It's, you know, when you look out into the world and you say, where will Jesus appear to us the most remarkable? It should be in the church because that's where the church is gathered together wearing the clothes of Christ.

[4 : 41] So what we're going to talk about for the next few minutes is what are the clothes of Christ that Paul talks about here? And then secondly, he gives us two really concrete practices to growing in grace.

So we're going to look at those two things. First, the clothing of Christ. First, and we're going to look at one of these virtues one by one. And that's what Paul wants us to do. He wants you to look at these five virtues and set them in front of you and say, all right, this is who Jesus tells you to be, tells you to be.

This is the character he wants you to think about and to become more like, to put on every single day. And you can take the first two together. So the first two is what? Compassionate hearts and kindness.

And you can take them together because they fit together. And you really see that in the way that Jesus lived his life. So I want to give you just one example here. Do you remember the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000?

Right? Who doesn't? It's a famous. The miracle is that he feeds the 5,000. But part of the beauty of it, you miss if all you focus on is the miracle. Because what happened was, and we looked at this about a year ago here, Mark chapter 6, Jesus and his disciples are exhausted.

[5 : 51] They've just found out that John the Baptist had been executed. And so Jesus says, my disciples, they need to retreat. So he takes them into a boat. And it says, he got into a boat with them to take them out into the wilderness to get away.

Because the crowds were just hounding them everywhere they went. And what happened was, right when they landed on the shore of the other place, what did they find? They're crowds. They're mobbed by people who just want to be close to Jesus.

And what happens is, listen to the way Mark describes this. It says, and when Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

I've said it before and I'll say it every time this word comes up. This word compassion is my favorite word in all the New Testament. It's a Greek word because it sounds exactly like what it is.

The Greek word is *splanchna* and it literally means guts. And because compassion in the ancient world, the way that they talked about compassion was that it was something that came out of your guts.

[7 : 02] And that's why when you read the King James Version of the Bible, it doesn't say hearts of compassion. What it actually says is bowels of mercy. Because, and I think we know this instinctively, right?

When you look at someone's suffer, when someone's in pain, where do you feel that? Do you feel it right here? I think I feel it right here more often. And the Bible is talking and saying, that's what compassion is.

It's that feeling that you get in the bowels of your mercy that make you care for the other person, what's going on in their lives. And to us, bowels is a bit of crude language.

But in Jesus' day, he's saying when Jesus saw the crowds, he felt for them. He cared for them from the innermost parts of who he was.

Mark's saying that's what Jesus felt for the crowds, compassion. And, you know, we live in a society that places a high value on compassion, right? Probably more than any other one of these virtues, our society tells us all the time, be compassionate.

[8 : 08] And what they usually mean is, you know, just think about other people. Just care, care, care. And sometimes we can mistake false compassion with true compassion. You know, I call false compassion what I feel when I watch a movie and I cry during the movie.

And then I walk away a few minutes later and don't remember it at all. But real compassion, the kind of compassion that Jesus had, is true compassion. And you know that the difference is, Jesus' compassion always led to action.

And that's why you can put compassion and kindness together. Because in the Bible, kindness is not an attitude. It's something you do.

You know, when we talk about kindness, we talk about someone maybe who we say, you know, that person may have a kind smile. It's that kind of unspoken just warmth that they walk around with.

But when the Bible talks about kindness, what it means is someone who does good, who does kindness. And you see that in the way that Jesus acts when he feeds the 5,000.

[9 : 14] It says he had compassion on them. And out of his compassion, what does he do? Well, he does two things. It says he teaches them and he fed them. And Paul's saying, that's what is being asked of you and I when we put on the clothing of Christ.

Is that we become the kind of people who look at the people around us. And we have compassion. We think about them. We think about what they're going through, what they have been through. And out of that compassion, we move towards them.

And we seek to help them, however that may be. Whether that's helping someone understand the gospel or helping meet their physical needs where they are. Paul tells us that's who you're called to be.

Don't come to church without it. We all know the signs, right? When you go to that restaurant and it's usually trying to be humorous and it says, no shirt, no shoes, no service, Paul's saying that's how the church should be.

There should be a sign above the door of every church that says, don't come in unless you're wearing the right clothes. Except the right clothes are what Paul talks about here. Compassion, kindness, humility.

[10 : 26] Paul says, don't come to church unless you're wearing these clothes. Unless you have them on. You know, it's one thing that has struck me since I've been here. And twice, I've had two different people tell me they would love to come to our church.

But the reason they don't is because they don't have the right clothes. And no amount of convincing that I do for them will make them believe that they can literally just come as they are.

And that's why we want to tell people, come as you are. Whatever clothes you have, that's good enough for you to be here. But at the same time, we want to tell our own people, you better be dressed up. You better have the heart of Christ.

That's what we mean when we say dressed up. Come in your compassion. Come in your humility. Okay? And humility is the third virtue here, right? Biblical humility, what is it?

Humility is this. Putting the interests of others before your own. There's a lot of ways you can define humility. C.S. Lewis used to say, humility is not thinking less of yourself.

[11 : 26] It's thinking of yourself less. And that's one of my favorite definitions. But I think the best definition you get is from Paul. In Philippians 2, Paul says this. He's looking at the church and he says, In humility, count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. And then listen to this. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

But he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. Now, why I love that passage is because Paul is talking about a really simple issue. He's talking about people in the church that are just not getting along.

People just nipping at each other, bickering. And it may seem like such a small thing. And the advice that Paul gives them is not just, stop that. No, what he does is he says, You need to think about Jesus.

You need to have in your mind the mind of Christ. And then he tells you what that means. Think about how Jesus, he didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

[12 : 39] He emptied himself. He took the form of a servant. You know, we think about the cross. Sometimes I think we think of the cross as something so big that you can't apply it to small things.

And Paul's saying you understand the gravity of the cross when you're able to apply it to the smallest moments of your life. That thing that that person said that just grated on you.

Being able to take that moment and say, But you know, Jesus was, he was so patient. He was so humble. He put other people's interests before his own.

And that applies to the smallest conflicts that we have in the church. Can you be humble? Can I be humble? And you know what's striking about this virtue also is humility in the first century was absolutely not a virtue.

In the ancient world, humility was not something to brag about. Well, you wouldn't brag if you were humble anyway, right? But humility in the ancient world was not something that you told your kids, Be like this.

[13 : 49] I mean, think about the great people of the ancient world. The Iliad and the Odyssey. You know, the Iliad and the Odyssey are all about seizing greatness, right? And that the tragedy of life is that death comes and you can never seize the greatness that you want to seize.

You know, Achilles wanted to be someone amazing and death was there at the doorstep keeping him from greatness. And in the ancient world, virtue was seizing your glory.

Virtue was having a life that everyone after you would remember and your children after you would remember and say, they are great. And Jesus comes along and he says, no.

You know what true greatness is? Being willing to be forgotten. Being willing to become a servant and seen by no one in the way that you serve the people around you.

Jesus says, that's greatness. And then he demonstrates that on the cross. He does something that in the ancient world was humiliating. And he redefines what it means to be great.

[14 : 53] And so all that to say, you know, in the ancient world, Christianity was not a pathway that someone who just wanted to be virtuous took. They didn't say, you know, I want to be humble, so I should become a Christian.

No, what happens is people would come face to face with Jesus or the story of Jesus. And they would say, you know, the world around me tells me humility is not something to be wanted or desired.

And yet, but I have found this Jesus. And Jesus has redefined ethics for me so that suddenly humility is what I want, because I want more than anything else to be like Jesus.

I want to put on the clothes of Christ. One of my, one of the best books I've read in the past year is a book by a guy named Tom Holland. He wrote a book called Dominion.

And Tom Holland is an, he's an atheist. And he wrote a book about the story of Christianity. And what he, what he talked about at the beginning was he said, he said, you know, when I was a student, what I wanted was to study the ancient world.

[15 : 56] And I loved books like the Iliad and the Odyssey. And I wanted to understand that world. And he said, the more I got into it, the more I was turned off by it and disgusted by it, by the virtues in books like the Iliad and the Odyssey, just to give an example.

And he said, what I realized was, even though I'm not a Christian, my Western world, my 21st century Western world is shaped so much by Christianity in ways that I had never understood.

So much so that when I look at the values of the ancient world, I, I don't see something beautiful because I've been so shaped by the Christian world. And his argument was, even though he's an atheist, he's saying to us today, he's saying, when we, as the world begins to move away from Christianity, as it's been doing in the Western world, the world will suffer because what Jesus did was he created a society where humility was honored, where the leaders in the country, even if they weren't humble, they knew they better look humble in the eyes of the culture.

And that was a good thing for the whole world. Then you've got meekness here. Meekness, you could say, is not being overly impressed by a sense of oneself. I won't go on about that one because it's a lot like humility.

But then the last one here is patience. And you could think about patience and kindness like they're, they're the mirror opposites. So kindness is when you go out of your way to help someone else.

[17 : 24] Patience is when someone has kind of come into your world and caused an obstruction and you have to show goodness to them. And he says here in verse 13, how does he put it?

He says, bearing with one another. So he says, be patient. And then verse 13 is an explanation of what he means by that. Patience. Here's what it means. It's easy to understand and it's hard to do, right?

Patience. It's more than just saying, I'm going to put up with you. It's saying, I'm going to seek to be right with you. You know, when we, sometimes when we talk about bearing with someone, we talk about it in terms of just toleration.

But you think about the example that we have in the Bible is Jesus. He says here, forgive as the Lord forgave you. And in that, what is the example there? When God is patient with us, he is patient to draw us completely back to himself so that we're, so that he doesn't just tolerate us, but he brings us so that we're in a perfectly right relationship with him, as good as we could be.

And Paul is saying the Christian church, if it's really the church, will be the kind of place where people come in and they put on these clothes of patience and they model bearing with one another.

[18 : 58] And that assumes that the closer we get to one another, friction happens. Paul expects that you're going to need patience if you're going to live with these people. And he's saying, you've got to learn it.

You've got to learn and practice patience. Now, you take all this together. You take all these five virtues together and you could say, all right, this is who I want to be.

But you've also got to realize and remind yourself over and over again, it's, this is not just morality. This is about a person. This is about Jesus Christ. And remember what we said that Colossians three, if there's a theme to it, if there's a theme to Christian change at all, it's this.

Become who you are. Because you're in Christ, you're called to put on the clothes of Christ. And it's a good reminder when you see Paul say here at the end, forgive as the Lord has forgiven you.

He's saying, look at Jesus. Do you see that when you go to him, do you see what he's wearing? When you speak to Jesus, he is wearing kindness and he is wearing compassion and he's wearing patience with you.

[20 : 06] That's how he interacts with you. And he's saying, let that change how you go about the rest of your world. The ancient, some of the reformers in the 1500s, when they talked about this idea of righteousness, which is what Paul's calling us here to.

They would often say the righteousness that you and I need is an alien righteousness. And what they meant was it's a righteousness that you don't have, but has to be given to you.

And you look at this list. And what that means is if you just say to yourself, I'm going to be more meek, I'm going to be more humble. You'll never do it. You'll never do it on your own strength.

The only way to grow in these things is to look at Jesus and say, I need you to give me your righteousness. I need what we talked about with the kids this morning, sanctification. I need you, Lord, to begin to form my heart and to shape it so that it will be more like you in all these ways.

OK, now there's a couple other terms we use here. He talks about love. He actually says it's the most important one. All right. But I'm going to say very little about it, because all he really says is love is the thing that connects these virtues.

[21 : 17] Love is like the base layer that explains these other virtues. And then what does he say? He says, let the peace. In verse 15, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful.

Now, when when you read that normally, I think there's a temptation to say, all right, I just need to be more peaceful. And it's actually not what Paul's saying here.

Remember, everything Paul's saying in Colossians three is a communal command. These are all y'all commands, things that you're meant to do together. And when he says rule, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, the language there, that word rule, it's not so much about kingship.

It's about it's the language that you would use in when you're talking about a judge, like an arbitrator. And he's saying, let let the peace of Christ be the things that that arbitrates, that like grounds all of your relationships.

So he's talking to the to the whole church together and saying, all right, when y'all are together and conflicts arise or you can't make a decision or you don't know how to get along with each other, you've got to let the peace of Christ be your umpire.

[22 : 29] Be the one who calls foul and says, you know, you actually we can't go in that direction because this is out of accord with what it means to have the peace of Christ in this place.

OK, I have a friend who was preaching on this and I was listening to what he had to say about it. And he compared he compared all these things to a rock tumbler. You know, you put a bunch of rocks in the tumbler and they're all they've got all got these jagged edges.

And the idea of a rock tumbler is as they as they are knocked against one another, that's how they become soft and beautiful. That's the friction of being with one another.

And that's what Paul is saying here is if you want to grow in grace, the way to do it is actually by moving towards community, which for a lot of us may be the most painful place to be.

Because we say to ourselves, you know, I like to think I'm patient, but don't put me with those people. Paul's saying you move together and let the Holy Spirit soften all of our edges.

[23 : 33] That's what we're doing together. OK, now, lastly, Paul gives us two practices to grow in grace together. And they're really simple. Verse 16 and 17.

The first one, he says, let the word of Christ dwell within you richly. The word of Christ. Now, he's not talking about the Bible per se.

And we know that because when Paul wrote this, he's writing before Colossians was probably written before most of the other parts of the New Testament were written. And we also know that he's probably not talking about the whole Bible because at the beginning of Colossians, he talks to them.

And he says in verse I think it's verse five. He says, you have already believed in the word, the gospel. So it's not to say that the Bible is not important, but he's he's specifically here talking about the message of the gospel, the message of what Jesus Christ has done.

That's the word of Christ. He says, I want you to let that word of Christ, the message about Jesus dwell within this community richly. And he tells us how to do it.

[24 : 42] He says, well, first of all, it's teaching and admonishing. A healthy if you want to know how to judge a healthy church. One of the ways to measure a healthy church is do they place the gospel front and center of who they are, the things they do and their teaching ministry?

You know, Paul's saying here there's there's an importance of having a teaching ministry at a church because for you to grow, you've got to set your eyes on the gospel and you've got to keep going back to Jesus and understanding who he is, what he's done and the implications that for the rest of the world.

A healthy church will set the gospel front and center. And that's not to say that that's a check that we always have for our church. Right. Are we continually placing the gospel in the center of the way that we forgive one another?

Just like he was talking about with patience. You know, you should be patient because remember, you remember how you are forgiven? That's an example of what it means to set the gospel, the word of Christ front and center.

And and then he says here another one which may surprise you. There's another way to grow. Singing. You see how what he says there in verse 16 halfway down?

[25 : 52] He says, 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.

You know, I think sometimes, especially in a Presbyterian church where if there's a stereotype of a Presbyterian church, it's that we place all of our emphasis on the word of God, specifically on the sermon.

You know, the sermon is what we're here for. And Paul is saying the sermon is important because that's where the word is. But the psalm, the psalms and the songs are also important because that's where the word is.

You know, good, good music. Good music in the church should be preaching the gospel just as much as the sermon should. And Paul's saying every, every, you know, every part of the service should be a declaration of the gospel and should be.

He says, we got to sing. Why do we have to sing? Well, there's a lot of reasons. One is because we're made in God's image. And did you know that in the Bible, one of the images that the Old Testament gives us is that God is a God who sings.

[27 : 01] In Zephaniah 3, Zephaniah says, God will rejoice over you with singing. Part of what it means to be made in the image of God is that music does something to us.

There's a power to music that can't come from anywhere else. Singing, we know this. It helps with your memory. How many Bible verses do you know?

And how many Beatles albums or Taylor Swift albums or whatever your genre is, do you know word by word completely?

Right? And music has a power. When you sing a song over and over again, whatever your music is, there's this power to remember. And that's why we've got a whole book in the Bible, at least one, dedicated just to music, the Psalms.

Dedicated to singing because God knows that we're, I don't even understand it. But music changes us somehow. It involves your whole body.

[28 : 03] That's another reason why it's important. You stand up, you use your diaphragm. It engages every part of who you are. And, you know, one measure, have you ever thought about this? One measure of a healthy church is do they sing?

You know, a lot of times we judge a church by on its worship style. But what Paul says you judge a church by is do the people sing? Do the people sing to one another with hymns, songs, and spiritual songs?

And is what they're singing the word of Christ? Are they singing biblical truths in their music? God looks at each one of us and he says, I made you to be a singer.

And some of us say, you know, I can't sing. You know, the Bible says nothing about the quality of our music. Well, maybe it does somewhere as far as, you know, who should be playing the piano. But the Bible doesn't say if you're not a good singer, don't worry about it.

No, it says each of you sing to one another in hymn songs and spiritual songs and let that change you. You know, Charlie, our daughter, had a baseball practice a couple days ago. And there's no one in our family who can play a sport worth anything.

[29 : 12] But she seems like she's kind of getting it. And she's, what I can tell about her at least, is that she's coachable. And so when the coach says, you need to hold the bat like this, or, you know, because you're left-handed, you need to sit on this side of the mound, she listens.

And if you've played a sport, you know that sometimes it's what the coach tells you doesn't feel right. You know, when you practice your golf swing and you're corrected, it doesn't feel right.

But what do you do? You say to the coach, this doesn't seem right to me, but you're the coach, and I trust that you understand what I need. And Paul's looking at the congregation saying, you need to sing.

You need to sing and see what happens. This is the form of growing in grace. It's focusing on the word of Christ. It's focusing on singing, listening to, singing to God, singing praises to God, okay?

I'm going to close in a way that will point to next week, which is just look at verse 17. I heard a pastor recently say that if he could memorize one verse in the Bible, it would be verse 17, because it encompasses all of the Bible, where he says, whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

[30 : 26] I'm not going to say much about that, but just notice how this picture that Paul has of growth and grace, where Christ comes down to us.

We put on the clothes of Christ. We are transformed. And then at the very end, what does he say? Whatever you do. So he emphasizes life in the community of faith.

But then he says, all right, now wherever you go outside of these walls, do it in the name of Jesus Christ. Do it to his glory. And we'll see that next week when we look at the different relationships that we have in the church.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the gospel. We thank you that Christ has done for us what we never could have done for ourselves. And we pray that we will hope not only in the forgiveness of sins, but in the transformation that is promised to us through our union with Christ.

In your son's name we pray. Amen.