

“Christian Character”
Colossians 3:12-15
(Preached at Trinity, September 2, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. After instructing the Colossians on the importance of maintaining sound doctrine in **Chapter 2**, in **Chapter 3** Paul turns his attention to the Christian way of living. The Christian must remember who he is and the reality of the Christian life.
Colossians 3:1-2 NAU - "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."
2. As Christians we put off our former sins and live according to our new life in Christ. If we have died with Christ. If we have died to our former life, the consequence is to put away our old self and put on the new.
Colossians 3:9-10 NAU - "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--"
3. In **Verses 5-9** Paul's focus was upon the characteristics of the "old man." He describes the man in his fallen condition. His life is characterized by sin resulting in God's condemnation.
Colossians 3:6 NAU - "For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience"
4. Beginning in **Verse 10** Paul contrasts the life of the believer, describing him as a "new man." The Christian has "put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him"
5. This morning we continue with **Verse 12** which opens with the familiar, "therefore," from the conjunction, "οὖν" which introduces a result or consequence from the preceding. The NASB translates it here, "so." The ESV translates it "then."
It connects us back to **Verse 10**. Since you have put on the new man what is the result? Paul is telling us there is a behavior consistent with the "old man" and there is also a behavior consistent with being a "new man."
6. The believer and unbeliever are contrasted continually in the NT – Wicked and righteous, darkness and light, alive and dead. Paul makes the contrast here as well:
 - A. Those who are lost in their sin are described as "sons of disobedience" and are under God's wrath.
Colossians 3:6-7 NAU - "For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them."
 - B. Those who have been redeemed by Christ are described as "chosen of God, holy and beloved."
Colossians 3:12 NAU - "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved"

7. While in **Verses 5-9** Paul describes behavior consistent with the fallen man, in **Verses 12-15** Paul describes a behavior consistent with the elect, those who are “Chosen of God, holy and beloved.”
 8. This morning I want us to look at the characteristics of the believer. I title this sermon, “Christian Character.” Christians have not yet entered a state of perfection. We still struggle with sin. We are in a great spiritual conflict, a war that rages daily. But there is a consistent character that marks the believer just like there is a consistent character that marks the unbeliever. In **Verse 8** Paul commands us to mortify or set aside the deeds of the flesh – “put them all aside.”
In **Verse 10** Paul commands us to “put on the new self.”
Now, in **Verse 12** Paul describes in greater detail what putting on the new self looks like.
 9. Often, if a pastor presses a pattern of behavior upon his hearers he is accused of moralism. A more accurate term here would be biblicism, allowing the text to speak. The Gospel insists on salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. The Gospel also displays God’s transforming grace upon those who are saved. Martin Luther is credited with the statement: “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”
 10. What we find in these verses is the beauty of holiness and grace that adorns the life of a believer. Paul uses a word that literally means “to put on as a garment.” It is in the imperative. We are to wear the holy garments of the elect. We are to clothe ourselves with these graces of Christian character.
- I. Clothe yourself with compassion
 - A. Compassion is the display of pity upon others. The NT often equates it with mercy.
 1. Compassion looks upon the hurting of others with sympathy. By “heart of compassion” Paul is describing a deep feeling, one which comes from the heart. It leads us to lend, to give, to visit, to feed, to care for, to pray for.
 2. The English word reflects the idea of co-passion, of co-suffering with others. Latin: prefix cum which means “with”
 3. A good example would be the Parable of the Good Samaritan who truly cared for the man in need.
 4. It reflects God’s action towards our fallen hurting condition
2 Corinthians 1:3 NAU - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort," (The word for “mercies” is from the same word here)
 - B. Only this heart enables us to truly look outside ourselves
 1. Paul uses this word in Philippians 2
Philippians 2:1 NAU - "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,"
 2. Such selfless love begins with this heart of compassion. Only such a heart will bring you to enter into the condition of others.
 3. Why are we so critical of others? It is because of our lack of compassion. We don’t take time to enter into their lives.
 4. Developing such a heart first demands confession and repentance. We’ve grieved the Spirit and scarred our own hearts.
Then pray that the Spirit of God would clothe you with a heart of compassion.

II. Clothe yourself with kindness

- A. Kindness is simply being good to others – the character traits Paul describes here overlap each other. One leads to the other.
1. Kindness is treating others with generosity – it means to be considerate of others, helpful, gentle and sensitive
Simply speaking, it means to be nice towards others.
It is the opposite of the actions described in **Verse 8**.
 2. This is the attribute of God that Paul says leads men to repentance
Romans 2:4 NAU - "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"
KJV – “goodness”
As the sinner reflects upon the riches of God’s kindness towards him his heart is broken over how he has repaid God with hatred.
- B. Kindness means being gracious towards others.
1. Kindness is at the heart of forgiveness
Kindness doesn’t hold a grudge – it is gracious towards others
 2. We should pray for this grace. Paul says it is evidence of the indwelling Spirit
Galatians 5:22 NAU - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,"

III. Clothe yourself with humility

- A. Humility is a modest opinion of one’s own self-importance.
1. Christian humility is a condition of the heart whereby our pride and self-importance is being progressively weakened. We are enabled to bow in absolute submission to the sovereign authority of Christ. We are enabled to set our minds on Christ rather than upon ourselves.
 2. Such a condition enables us to trust Christ enough to humble ourselves before others.
 3. It is truly a blessed church who has members who are able to look beyond themselves to the wellbeing of others.
Philippians 2:3-4 NAU - "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."
- B. The word literally refers to a voluntary submission.
1. By nature, we despise submission. It takes much grace to bow the knee
 2. It begins by bowing before Christ
 3. It leads us to be willing to give up our rights for others.

- C. The next quality is very similar – translated gentleness.
1. It refers to meekness
William Hendriksen describes it as: “submissiveness under provocation, the willingness rather to *suffer* injury than to *inflict* it.”¹
 2. The world sees meekness as weakness
For the Christian it is great strength because it is a high confidence in Christ. It is the fruit of humility whereby our confidence doesn’t rest upon our own strength but upon the power of God. It is a willingness to give ourselves over to God’s provision.
 3. Such a heart enables us to walk with confidence before others. We don’t have to battle for position because we follow the One who orders all things.
- IV. Put on a heart of Patience - μακροθυμία
- A. Patience is the ability to endure
 1. The KJV translates this word “longsuffering.” It carries the idea of calmly enduring the wrongs and abuses of others. It implies forbearance with others when they don’t meet our expectation
 2. God teaches us patience by His Spirit. Few things come instantly. Sanctification is a life-long process.
 3. Calvin: Patience is the mind that brings us “to take everything in good part and not to be easily offended.”
 4. This is another reflection of God’s character towards us. He is wonderfully patient with us. The Holy Spirit creates in us this heart of patience.
 - B. Like many of these graces it is a reflection of the indwelling Holy Spirit
Galatians 5:22 NAU - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,"
 1. We are impatient because of our failure to trust God
 2. Only when we rest in Christ can we be content to wait upon Him. To wait upon Him to change our situation, or wait upon Him to work within others.
- V. Put on a heart of Forgiveness – **Verse 13**
- A. Paul uses a word that speaks of bearing under a load - ἀνέχω – “holding up”
 1. It speaks of great tolerance -
 2. In 1 Corinthians Paul speaks of the nature of love
1 Corinthians 13:7 NAU - "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."
 3. It is a heart that doesn’t continue to hold the faults of others against them
 - B. This is a place we find it easy to excuse ourselves. Most would say, “I’m a forgiving person.”
 1. We picture someone coming and begging our forgiveness and we say, “Ok, I forgive you.”

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 6:157.

2. But do we harbor resentment over wrongs, bitterness, hard feelings? Do we continue to hold a grudge over some past offense?
Again, in 1 Corinthians Paul says of love,
1 Corinthians 13:5 - "does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,"
3. Jesus spoke in terms that were meant to strike fear:
Mark 11:26 NAU - "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."
 - a. We are justified by faith alone, not by our actions. But the person who has experienced the infinite forgiveness of God will be quick to forgive others.
 - b. Lloyd-Jones spoke on this – “If we think our sins are forgiven by God and we refuse to forgive somebody else, we are making a mistake; we have never been forgiven. I say to the glory of God and in utter humility, that whenever I see myself before God and realize even something of what my blessed Lord has done for me, I am ready to forgive anybody anything. I cannot withhold it, I do not even want to withhold it.”²
4. Only the forgiving heart can pray the Lord’s Prayer – “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”
Colossians 3:13 NAU - "just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

Conclusion:

1. These graces reflect the life in Christ. In the previous chapter Paul wrote of sharing in the fullness of Christ. We have the Holy Spirit in us who works in us these graces of Christian character.
2. The expression, “full of the Holy Spirit” describes a life in submission to Him. Most spend their lives resisting Him. Paul admonishes us:
Ephesians 4:30 NAU - "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."
3. A person “full of the Spirit” is the person who has learned submission.
 - a. In Ephesians Paul commands us to be filled with the Holy Spirit:
Ephesians 5:18 NAU - "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,"
 - b. Then he illustrates what it looks like
Ephesians 5:21 NAU - "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

² Lloyd-Jones, D. Martin, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Vol.2* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), Pages 75-76.