

Put on Love

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[0 : 0 0] If you have your Bibles with you, then turn to Colossians chapter 3 with me. We will read from verses 12 to 14.

Colossians 3, 12 to 14. 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.

This is the Word of God. Thank you. Amen. All right, before we look at Colossians 3, let me just pray for a moment for us. Lord, we ask now that you would help us to turn our hearts to your Word, that we would receive it for what it is, your Word, to us, and that we would be able to be helped by the Holy Spirit to really hear it and to be changed.

So we ask, Lord, Holy Spirit, right now would you come and do a work in us as we think about this wonderful few verses. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So we are in a series called Practicing the Christian Life, and we're looking at what Paul, the apostle, says about change, about how to change in your life.

[1 : 3 0] Now, Paul, who wrote this book, Colossians, he was once a man that was on his way to go murder Christians, to go kill lots of Christians. And while he was on his way to go murder Christians, and while he was on his way to do that, Jesus showed up and appeared to him.

The resurrected Christ showed up and changed his life forever. And when that happened, from the outside in, from within his heart out, he experienced a truth, the truth that the cross brought into the world.

And the truth is that when Jesus Christ went to the cross, he did two things. He took on all that is wrong with us, our guilt, our misdeeds dark, from the deepest part of who we are to the most visible actions that we've done in this life.

He took that on himself. And then it's not just that he canceled the debt. It's not just that he forgave us. It's that also he turned and then gave us something we didn't deserve, his righteousness.

So the cross works in two directions. He took on what was wrong with us, but at the same time in the cross, he gives you what he deserves. He took on what you deserve. He gives you what he deserves, a reward.

[2 : 4 1] Now, Paul, on the road to kill a bunch of Christians, he experienced that. And he was transformed. Now, there's a Bible word for that. It's justification that you are set free from all that you deserve through the cross and given an alien righteousness.

That's justification. But then Paul's writing here in Colossians 3 about another Bible word, and that Bible word is sanctification. And it's the word that tells you you're meant from there to grow, to change, to become more and more like the character of Jesus Christ.

And so that's what he's talking to us about here. And what he's doing is he's putting two things together. Justification is the basis for sanctification. That Jesus has done a mighty work for you is the reason to change.

It never goes the other way. It never works in reverse. You don't seek change in your life in order to get forgiveness. You seek change in your life because you've already got it. That's the basis of all change.

And so that's what we've been talking about in this series. And Simon read for us these three little verses, 12 to 14. And we've got a new piece today, a new piece of the puzzle. You've got to go slow when you're talking about change because change is slow.

[3 : 56] And so we're just taking it a few verses at a time. In verses 12 to 14, Paul says today, Today, he gives you another way to think about your identity. And you've got to have that to change.

Another way, a new way to think about your identity. And then he comes and tells you, he shows you the person that you're becoming. The person that God is making you into. And then lastly, let me give you on that basis a practice to bring the practices.

If you've been here, we've been doing some practices. The practice that you can bring all of it together with. Okay, so let's look at that. First, Paul says here, he gives you another way to think about identity as a Christian.

How to think about who you are as a Christian. So right here in verse 12, at the beginning of verse 12, he says, Put on, therefore, put on something.

What is it? Four virtues, patience, meekness, humility, and kindness. But right in between, before he gets to that, there's a little clause. And in verse 12, the little clause is, you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

[5 : 03] So there's the little clause. You are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. Now, there's something old in that. We've already looked at this. Verse 1 to 4, you're beloved of God, the basis of change.

But he's given it to you in a fresh way because that is a quote from Exodus chapter 19. So you don't see it on the surface of the text, but he's actually quoting from the Exodus story.

And in Exodus 19, after God had freed his people from Egypt, he says to them, You are my holy ones, a holy nation, chosen, and my beloved, my precious treasure, my treasured ones.

So he's bringing us back to the Exodus story to think about ourselves. Now, I think that when we come to change, look, if you've been around the last few weeks, I hope maybe you've looked inside yourself for a moment and thought, These are the things that I really continue to struggle with.

And I think when you do that, you come and say, Paul, tell me, give me the how-to, how to get rid of this stuff, this mess, this evil desire down in my heart.

[6 : 12] Tell me how to get rid of it. And Paul says, No, I will not tell you how. I will keep telling you over and over again who you are. So the first how-to Paul keeps doing is he says, You've got to come back over and over to who you are.

Verse 13, he says, Forgive one another because you've already been forgiven. He comes back again and again to the already. What's already true of you, you're already forgiven. And here he says, you've got to come back to who you are.

And he gives you a fresh way to do that by thinking about the Exodus story. Remember the Exodus story? Israel were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. And God came and he rescued them out of their slavery.

And he brought them across the Red Sea and he saved them. And if you remember the details just before Exodus 19, they grumbled the entire way across the Red Sea.

And there was one moment where they said, I wish we were still back in Egypt. And they didn't even want to be rescued. They didn't even want to be saved from slavery. And God did it in any way.

[7 : 16] And he brought them across the Red Sea. And Paul comes and he says, You, are you a Christian? Do you follow Jesus today? You are just the same.

You are Israel. You are the new Israel. And when Jesus went down under the waters of death, the Red Sea waters of the cross, he drowned so that you could pass through.

And he's brought you to the other side and he saved you. And yet, you grumbled the whole way through. And, you know, Paul was trying to murder Christians. And God saved him despite every desire.

And God saved you despite every desire you have. You don't even want it. But he brought it to your life. Right? And he said, what is he saying? He's saying, you've got to think about yourself in the same way.

Jesus Christ's cross is your Exodus story. Luke, in Luke chapter 9, Luke even calls, he says, the cross, the burial, and the resurrection that was to come was Jesus Christ's Exodus.

[8 : 17] It was his deliverance. He went through it. He relived it for you. And what is Paul saying? He's saying the basis of change. This is a review point, by the way. The basis of change.

What is it? It's that when Jesus Christ drowned in the waters of the Red Sea at the cross, he brought you through them safely. And his love for you is the basis for change.

Every week, every week, we keep maybe saying, okay, yeah, you said that week one, Paul. Verse 1 to 4. But he keeps coming back to it. And he keeps saying, you've got to keep coming back every single day to who you already are.

You're already a diamond. You're already an emerald in God's sight. You never graduate from it. It's actually the first step in the how-to of all change in the Christian life. Jesus Christ got what we deserved so that you could get what he deserved.

And only on that basis can you ever change deeply. Let me apply it. Here's another way to say it. The cross disrupts high self-esteem and low self-esteem.

[9 : 22] That's the way to say it. What is high self-esteem? High self-esteem is just pride. It's thinking a whole lot. It's thinking, I'm a person of great value. I'm really proud of who I am.

I'm glad with what I've done in my life. That's high self-esteem. Low self-esteem is the opposite. It's, I hate myself. I want to be different. I wish I had that person's life. And I wish I was different than what I am.

And the cross comes and completely blows up that entire paradigm. Why? Well, because we're all living our lives on this seesaw where if somebody criticizes you, it takes your identity down three notches or four notches or six, however much you can handle criticism.

But then somebody comes along and praises you. And it brings your identity back up a few notches and you feel a little bit better and you're always wavering between high self-esteem and low self-esteem. And you go to the counselor and the counselor says, you've got to think better about yourself.

You need more self-esteem in your life. And what Paul is saying is that the cross drops a bomb into that paradigm and just says, you've got to throw out that entire view.

[10 : 29] The cross says, the cross says, you are far worse than you ever imagined. Your evil desires go so much deeper than you're willing to really say.

And you are far more precious and loved than you could ever dare dream. It says both. Boy, it's the source of mental health, we said week one.

The cross says, you struggle with evil desire far more than you're willing to say to anybody. And at the same time, you are more beloved than you've ever dared dream. So secondly, on that basis, the person that he says now on that basis, you can become the person that we're called to become here.

Secondly, you're free from Egypt. You're free from your slavery. So now go and be free. That's the idea here. And why is he writing this?

Why is he giving us? We're going to look at these four virtues that he gives you. He says, put on love, which looks like kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Why does he have to tell us that?

[11 : 32] Because you can pull the slave out of Egypt, but it is very difficult to get the slavery out of the heart of the slave. You can leave Egypt behind legally, forensically.

God can say, you are justified. It's a lot harder for us to say, I'm justified, and grow from there. It's a lot harder. We keep running back. We lived on the seesaw all the time.

The old self keeps coming back and back. There's an African-American spiritual in the States that was written during the Civil War called Go Down Moses. Nobody knows who first wrote it, but it's become a famous black spiritual in the U.S.

that came from the time of slavery in the U.S. The very last stanza, it says, Lord, help us all from bondage flee. Moses said, let my people go.

And let us all in Christ be free. Moses said, let my people go. What is Paul saying? You need to hear these virtues. You need to hear put on a new self over and over.

[12 : 36] Because you keep running back to Egypt, and you've got to say, go down, Moses. God said, let my people go. Jesus did it. And you've got to say, Christ, now let me be free. Let me be free.

Let me be who I am. All right, so we're talking here about growth. Growth. And we're talking about it because you have the safety of an unbreakable love.

So you can be honest today with yourself. All right, so let's do it. Let's be honest with yourself. A couple weeks ago, I told, I mentioned Henry Schugel, Scottish minister, 1660s, Aberdeen.

Who died when he was 28 years old. But he wrote this little letter to a friend that's become a little book called The Life of God and the Soul of Men, Soul of People. And he said, based on Colossians 3, that every single one of us that are Christians, we're a tree.

And the roots of that tree is faith. The trunk is love. And then you've got two branches growing out. And one is humility. One is purity. Okay, that's good.

[13 : 41] We could change it just a little bit. Because Paul comes and says in verse 14, what does he say? He says, love is the glue, is the harmony that binds all virtue. So Henry was right.

Love is the trunk of the tree that you are. But then Paul gives you four branches, not just two. He gives you four branches. He says, kindness and humility, meekness and patience.

These are the four branches. What does Paul do? He's bringing you back with the tree metaphor. Psalm 1 and saying, you're a tree and God is bringing you back to the normalcy of what it means to be a human in the Garden of Eden.

When you grow these four branches of love that brings forth meekness, patience, humility and kindness, it's not weird. It's that you are coming home. You're coming back to the Garden of Eden.

And I can imagine that maybe some of us think, look, if I walk around in 2025 in Scotland, in Edinburgh, and I am a person of deep kindness, meekness, patience and humility, my friends will think I am weird.

[14 : 51] That will not be a good thing. That will not bring me closer to other people. That will push me away from other people. Boy, you've got to get past that because you've got to realize that's not true. Instead, what is he saying?

He's saying those four virtues built off love bring you back to the Garden of Eden. It brings you back to what true humanity looks like, the fullness of humanity. That's what he's saying here.

And so here's a diagnostic for you. These four branches of love that he lists here in verse 12, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. Let me just, all right, will you do an exercise with me for a second and ask, let me ask, how are you with this?

Where are you with these things? What is kindness? Kindness. Kindness. This word for kindness, it's a synonym of the first word compassion that he lists. What is kindness?

Kindness is to be able to take upon yourself the burdens of other people and to weep with those who are weeping and celebrate with those who are celebrating.

[15 : 49] That's what this word means. And so here's a diagnostic. Do you take delight in the wins, the wins, the victories, the good things that are happening in your friends' lives, in your neighbors' lives?

And if you don't, you're struggling with envy. But that's kindness. Secondly, he says humility. Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It's not low self-esteem.

It's thinking of yourself less. It's not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. It's forgetting about yourself and thinking about other people way, way more often than you think about yourself.

What is meekness? Meekness, this word, people think of it as weakness, but the word meekness here is actually the strength of self-control. That's what the word means. And what is meekness?

Meekness is when Christ has gotten so hold of your life and heart that you're relaxed. There's a famous theologian that once said, what's the one word you can describe? How do you describe Jesus?

[16 : 49] And he said he's relaxed. He's okay. He's just relaxed. Meekness is being relaxed. It's the self-control that doesn't rage. It's self-control that is okay.

When you're insulted, you're not wrecked. You're not wrecked. You're okay. You can handle it. Meekness is quick forgiveness. It's that when you're meek, you have the ability to forgive on the spot.

That's meekness. Lastly, patience. Patience is bearing with the faults of other people. So it's not expecting somebody else in your life to be further down the road of growth than they are.

The expectation that you're willing to say, I will meet you where you are. I will bear with your fault. I will take it on. I'll take it in myself. That's patience. Now let me just ask, how are you with these?

How are you doing with these four branches that grow from the love, the trunk of the Christian life? Well, Paul uses this metaphor, put on.

[17 : 49] Put these things on. Dress yourself in these four virtues, which are just expressions of love. It's clothing metaphor. Let me mix my metaphors for a second.

We all struggle with running straight back to Egypt and coming back to the promised land over and over again. The old self and the new self wrestling deep down within us all the time.

Okay, Paul says we all struggle with clothing, putting on and putting off all the time. The things that we're struggling with in our hearts and then coming back to humility and running away from it back and forth. I think that probably it could be that you feel like, no, it's not good.

It is. It is this way. Look, it is this way. Putting on patience, humility, meekness, and kindness will always, to some degree, feel like putting on your dad's jacket.

You know, it's too big for you. Or worse. You put on these virtues. You fight for these virtues in your life. You take on the virtues of Christ, the love of Christ in your life, and fight for patience and kindness and meekness and humility.

[18 : 54] It's worse than wearing a dress too big for you, a jacket that's too big for you like a little kid. It's more like spandex, you know. It's form-fitted, and it's not flattering, and it's uncomfortable.

You see, let me make this a little more concrete. Maybe you grew up in a family where everybody in your family gossiped all the time.

Or maybe you grew up in a context where you were taught, trained habitually to be judgmental and overly negative about everything. Or maybe you grew up in a family in a context where you've developed in your household a legalism, a moralism, where really the true assessment of decency, of Christianity, is just good behavior.

It's Santa Claus theology. You know, you better watch out. He's watching you all the time. You better get yourself together. You have an expectation for people all around you. You know, you're telling people to stop using words like that.

You've grown up in a context of legalism. Or maybe you've developed a stoicism in your life that was trained into you habitually over years and years and years where you cannot cry with somebody that's crying.

[20 : 10] You can't do it. You can't break through and weep with the weeping. You can't really enjoy anybody else's wins in your life at all. Now, these things are not personality issues.

They are habits. Paul says you've got to put on new clothes. You've got to get past it. You've got to fight for something new. You've got to put on a new dress. It could be that you've grown up in a household that was so full of banter all the time, you're unable now later in life to say to anybody, I love you.

You can't say it. You feel it, but you can never get it off your tongue because the household you grew up in was so full of banter that that was just the clothing everybody put on all the time. And so you're not willing to actually say to anybody, I think you're great and these are the wonderful things about you.

You're not able to say it because you've been trained out of it. And Paul says you've got to put on new clothing. And when you first do that, it's going to be more like spandex than suits that fit.

It's not going to feel right. It's going to be awkward. And he's saying you've got to be willing to say I'm safe in the hands of Jesus and I want to put on the integrity of Christ.

[21 : 19] And it's not personality. It's that I've been given the virtues of the kingdom. I've got to put them on. I've got to break through. I've got to fight for this. No matter how awkward it may be in my life, it's just not the person I am.

No. He's saying you can't say it. You've got to get past that. Here, let me give you an example and I'll move on to the final thing. He gives us two examples.

He says bearing with one another and forgiving one another. These are the two ways. That's just him saying what does this look like lived? It looks like bearing with people and forgiving people. That's what it looks like lived out.

What's patience? Patience is bearing with other people's faults. What is kindness? It's bearing somebody else's pain in your own life. What is meekness?

It's the immediate self-control of quick forgiveness. You see, so he's just saying that when he mentions forgiveness and bearing, he's saying this is just what it looks like. If you're growing in this, how can you tell?

[22 : 18] It's because you're a person who's bearing with other people, both their wins and their faults, their weaknesses, and you're forgiving quickly. And that's what it looks like actually lived out. Here's the example.

The church. Paul's writing here to Colossians, a church, and they all came from different backgrounds. And he's trying to get them to like each other and love each other. And they came from all sorts of different ethnicities.

And in that time, the ethnic people groups were really at war. But now they've become this church, this one thing. And, you know, think about this. Here's a great example. The church.

This church. Maybe you're here today as a visitor. Whatever church you're a part of, if you are a part of one. Have you ever found a local church where you thought, you know, this place does everything from creche to adult ministry, from AV to music, from the worship service, the order of worship to the bulletin, and boy, the preaching.

It does everything in exactly the way I would do it if I was king or queen for a day. And the answer is, of course, yes. The answer is yes, obviously. Because we're, you know, it's St. Columba's.

[23 : 29] You're here. Right? So we can move on. No, the answer is, of course not. No, you have not. And you never will. You never will.

If you've hopped from church to church throughout your life, you will never find it. You won't. Why? Because, look, getting everything you want, getting all your preferences, getting all, look, I don't get all my preferences.

What none of us do here, getting all your preferences would be the absolute worst thing. None of us need that. Right? Because you don't have the opportunity to bear and forgive unless you're in the church community not always getting your way.

And how do, look, how do, let me say it this way, how do rocks become smooth? How do stones become smooth? Years and years of bumping into each other. You know, you've got to, the jagged edges and the sharpie points will never come off unless you are in the community constantly bumping into each other.

And giving your preferences away in order to bear with people and forgive them like that. What is quick forgiveness? What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is not just saying, I forgive you.

[24 : 39] It's forgetting the offense. That's how Jesus forgives. And so if it's constantly coming up, the grudges in the community are coming up and up in your heart and your mind. You've yet to get there. You've yet to forgive.

Right? How do rocky stones become smooth? We need to be bumping up against each other. It's actually the way of sanctification. It's a gift. Let me give you one more application.

If you're watching today from home, and you're watching from home not because you're unwell, not because you need to be at home. And many, many people in our church community do need to be at home right now.

But if you're watching from home because it's easier and because it's comfortable, I just want to say to you, you're not getting this. You can't really seek it.

Like we're talking about here. It's about being here and being a part of the physical community of God's people. You've got to have that. So let me ask you finally, are you in the battle?

[25 : 39] Are you taking off clothes that fit really nicely right now, but actually God says, according to the Garden of Eden, the image of God you were made to be, they don't fit? They don't fit.

The mortification side. And are you actively seeking, fighting to put on the clothes that do feel a little awkward sometimes? But are the clothes that God really made you to wear?

It's love birthed in patience, meekness, humility, and kindness. So let me close with this. A practice.

Pursuing it. Putting it on. Let's put it on. Three steps to put it on. This is more than just, okay, this is more than just reading your Bible.

Though you must. Instead, this is coming to the Bible and coming to your prayer life and coming to the day in, day out work of renewing your faith and actually taking on a spiritual practice.

[26 : 40] That is more than mechanical reading. Okay? And here's what it looks like. First up, when you come to Scripture, when you come to prayer, when you come to that time of reflecting on Christianity and who you are, number one, spiritual diagnosis.

Every day, spiritual diagnosis. And this is what it looks like. You ask every day, what are my problems? What is my specific Egypt? You look at the things you struggle with by your hands, by your eyes, by your words, the physical sins that are manifest in relationship.

And then you work back from there and say, what are the desires underneath that? What is the thing that I love more than God that is causing me to do these things? You've got to diagnose your Egypt every single day.

Every single day, you've got to come back to this. And when you do that, the way to do it is to think about your sin that you struggle with and then think about the cost. And you say to yourself, you pray, you say, I have tried in this habit, this sin, to rip away from God his glory.

And the ripple effect of that has been that it's hurt other people in my life. And then you say, and it was my sin that held him there. You say, I put him on the cross.

[28 : 01] This is the spiritual practice. You diagnose, you say, I put him there. I crucified him. And then there's no excuses, no hiding, no excuses at all.

But you come and you own the truth about it. Number two, then go to God. Go straight to the Lord. Don't hide it all from him like Adam and Eve did in the garden.

Instead, you go straight to God and you confess. And you need daily confession and you need weekly confession. So we today, Simon led us in a prayer of confession.

We sang a psalm of confession, Psalm 103. We've now, we're trying to habituate a bit to do confession and worship every week. I don't know how you use that time. I don't know how that time hits you at all.

But what I can say is this, that from the Bible, we need it. We need it so much. Every Christian has evil desire to fight deep down within. And when we come to confess our sins together on a Sunday, what we're doing is we're looking around in a community and saying all of us together can collectively say, I am not the person God made me to be.

[29 : 08] I have not yet gotten there. And so we're collectively saying that together when we come and confess our sins. What do you do? You confess. Spiritual diagnosis goes straight to God.

Confess your sins. And then you think about the cross again. And the second time you think about the cross, it's not to say, I put him there. This time it's to say, oh, he went there for me.

Oh, it was his joy. It was his joy to die for me. My sins, they are many.

But now I see his mercy is more. And then you ask the Holy Spirit to kill in you whatever it is that you're struggling with and say, I want the four branches.

I want kindness, humility, patience, and meekness. Kill that. Give me this, Lord. And then lastly, these all come from John Owen, by the way, Mortification of Sin, his book.

[30 : 05] He has nine. I told you last week I'd bring it down to three. I'm getting the nine in, you can tell. But there are three. Spiritual diagnosis goes straight to the Lord. And then lastly, Owen says, guard yourself for the future.

Guard yourself for the future. This is what Owen writes. He says, assume that your problem, your sin struggles are an aggressive snake and it'll keep growing heads.

I heard the story this week from a pastor about this very issue. He told the story of a man in his congregation who had been an alcoholic and a drug addict.

And he had been attending Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous or something like that in their church for 41 straight years. And for 41 straight years, he was clean.

Not a single drop of anything. And he would go to the meetings twice a week. And a young man who was an alcoholic and drug addict came to the meeting with him. And the young man said, you have been here for 41 years twice a week.

[31 : 12] I think you're okay. I think, you know, why do you keep coming back week in and week out? And the man's reply, this pastor said, he said, I keep coming because I know that I'm about 15 minutes away at every moment from falling right back into the monster that I once was.

He said, I'm 15 minutes away at every moment. And, you know, he said, I've gotten to 15 minutes. It's taken me 41 years. It used to be one. And, you know, Owen says, you diagnose who you are.

You own it before the Lord. You look at the cross. You confess your sins. You ask the Spirit to change you. And then you guard yourself because you know that the snakes within keep growing heads. And they're monsters.

And they keep coming back. The evil desires. And so he says, you've got to be proactive. You've got to kill your sin lest it be killing you. You've got to evaluate your environment, your temperament, the reasons why, the relationships, your habits, your schedule.

All these sorts of things. Why am I prone to this? And so I'll finish with this. Owen says, the key, long, long desire for deliverance.

[32 : 23] He writes, longing, breathing, panting for deliverance is the grace in itself. And that grace, longing to be transformed, that in itself has mighty power to conform the soul into the likeness of what it longs for.

Desire. Desire to change. Desire to become more and more like Jesus. Desire to become more and more like Jesus.

I'm not going to be the same person I am in one year. I'm not going to be the same person I am in one month. I'm going to get serious about putting on the virtues of change because I know that Jesus Christ will never take my seat away from the table.

I'm safe. What's the basis? It's the love of Jesus. Jesus loves me. This I know. For the Bible tells me so. And so you have the power to change.

Let's pray. Father, do this great work in us. We want our sins to die. And we want to be people that are happy. And so we know today that we can't be happy without more love, more peace, more patience, more joy.

[33 : 57] Through meekness, through self-control, through humility. So we want the harmony of love that you talk about here. So do a great work in us, we pray.

We pray, Lord. And we need the Holy Spirit. We know that our discipline is not going to cut it. But thank you. Thank you, Jesus, for keeping us safe.

And then we ask now for the Holy Spirit to do this mighty change in our hearts. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.