

Your New Relationship with Virtue

Colossians 3:12-17

The Soul-satisfying Grace of God should make us gracious toward one another.

LTS: Eph. 4:17-24

In February of this year my family and I made the long trek From Fort Worth, TX, to Cape May, New Jersey to watch our son, Wesley, graduate from Coastguard Basic Training. When he left home eight weeks earlier, he was a shaggy-headed teenager dressed in blue jeans, tennis shoes, and nondescript short sleeve polo shirt.

We knew that upon arrival at the base he would have been gifted a free haircut -complements of Uncle Sam. And we had been told that after Boot Camp, not only his hair but his walk and posture would be noticeably different as well. So, we expected that when we got to see him for the first time, we would probably notice some outstanding modifications in his appearance. But honestly, nothing could have prepared us for the change we were about to behold when we laid eyes on him for the first time. Standing in the courtyard under a bright winter sun, we heard them coming – the whole company of them! They were marching in perfect unison and chanting – almost singing – a cadence we could barely understand. And as these young seamen marched past the throng of family and friends who had gathered to see the spectacle, we caught a glimpse of him – our Son, Wesley. But he hardly resembled our Wesley at all! This was the new and improved Wesley Kirk!

To our amazement, that shaggy-headed teenage boy we sent off to Boot Camp had, in eight week's time, become a soldier. Dressed in his formal, blue perfectly pressed Bravo Uniform, complete with glistening black shoes and white service cap, he looked so sharp, his mother and I hardly recognized him!

I thought about that day as I sat in my study this week working my way through the text before us this morning. Last week we heard Paul declare that when a man or woman comes into relationship with Jesus Christ, they strip themselves of the old clothes of the former life and throw them all away.

This week, Paul picks up that same theme, only this time he will talk to us NOT about what we should Put Off, but what we must Put On. If there were a uniform all Christians should wear, what would it look like? Paul is prepared to tell us, and we will read about it in Colossians 3

Read Col. 3:12-17

Paul's theme in this section of his letter is that the spiritual changes that take place in the believer's heart in salvation will manifest themselves in a changed life. A Changed heart always produces changed behavior. Where there is life - there is fruit. And the fruit that Paul is concerned about in this passage is how we relate to one another.

The way Christians behave toward one another identifies us like a uniform identifies what country a soldier serves, or what team an athlete belongs to. We will know he plays for the Dallas Cowboys, for instance, when we see the Star on his Jersey. And we will know if he belongs to Christ when we see... what? What should we see in the life of a believer as he/she relates to others? Well, this is the question Paul intends to answer.

In Col. 3:12 Paul, instead of jumping right in to talk about appropriate attitudes and behaviors, he makes an appeal to our identity. Only after that does he rehearse the fourteen parts of the "uniform" that every Christian should "wear." Some parts of the uniform are attitudes, others are behaviors. I'm not sure how many we will actually have time to look at this morning, but I have included seven in your notes. These are seven virtues that should mark the way Christian people relate to others. Namely, we should be guided by...

- I. The Virtue of Compassion:
- II. The Virtue of Kindness:
- III. The virtue of Humility:
- IV. The Virtue of Meekness:
- V. The Virtue of Patience:
- VI. The Virtue of Forbearance:
- VII. The Virtue of Forgiveness.

First, however, we need to talk about our identity. In the O.T., the people of God were identified as distinct from the world by the law of God and their obedience to it. Israel was NOT merely a nation, they were (listen carefully) A Chosen People.

And, while the Christian church has not been given a new slate of laws to obey, there are certain kinds of attitudes and behaviors that should mark us as a unique people in the world.

This brings us to Paul's statement that grounds all of these virtues in the common identity that believers share. He says (3:12),

“Put on then, as God's chosen people.”

Beloved, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have a new identity. You are numbered among God's chosen people; the “elect” of God. When those terms are used in the Bible, they are not written to provoke controversy. They are written to give us HOPE and Motivation!

In the past several weeks we have learned a lot about our Union with Christ. When God thinks about you as a person, he doesn't think of you according to how you have lived but according to how Jesus lived. God thinks of you as fully identified with Christ. And the phrase Paul loves to use when speaking of Union is “In Christ.”

Turn back with me to Ephesians chapter 1 and let's just read a section of this passage to refresh on what it means to be God's N.T. chosen people who live before the Father as those who are In Christ. Paul writes:

Eph. 1:3-11

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

You see, beloved, the Bible's teaching on Election, Calling, Adoption, Perseverance, the doctrines of grace, all of it communicates one truth we must never forget; Namely, as God's "Chosen People" EVERYTHING is a GIFT from God. that every aspect of being a Christian is a gift from God. Everything we have from God comes to us as a gift of His sovereign grace. In everything, He is the Giver and we are always the Receivers. It NEVER works the other way. We received it all Not by effort, works, or the achievement of righteousness, but by His grace. Free grace. Sovereign grace; Saving grace, Unmerited Grace. Amazing Grace. And because of this grace which has eternally united us to Jesus, God calls us (v. 12) "Chosen, Holy and loved. He chose us from before the foundation of the world. He set us apart for himself (holy), and He loves us. Here's how Paul says it (3:12) "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy, and beloved..."

Notice the word, "then." "Put on THEN." The word "Then" is a synonym for "therefore." It hints to us that whatever he is about to say is grounded in something he's already said. And what comes immediately before is this statement about our identity as Christians.

You see (Paul reminds us), once upon a time you were a people who (1:13) once lived in the domain of darkness. Again (1:21) we were "alienated and hostile in mind and personally involved in all kinds of evil deeds." We were not only spiritually bankrupt and blind; we also hated the only one who could save us! But now, by the power the free grace of God, we have been rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son." By no merit of our own, we have become Children of the King and heirs of all he has because of God's life-giving, heart-transforming, soul-satisfying grace.

The message here is simple: The Soul-satisfying Grace of God in us should make us gracious to one another. Because the great God of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords has extended grace to us, we should extend grace to each other. Every one of these virtues finds its root and source in the free grace of God toward us.

I have chosen to call these characteristics Virtues, but we could just as easily identify them as graces. If we have them, they came to us by grace. And if we minister them, they are expressions of grace.

Last week we were reminded that a new relationship with God produces a new relationship with sin. This time Paul is showing us that a new relationship with God produces a new relationship with virtue.

Well, I suspect this list is going to require more than a couple messages, so we better get started. The first piece of the Christian uniform, so to speak, is...

I. The Virtue of Compassion:

1. Compassion is literally “bowels of compassion.” These ancient people thought of strong emotions as originating NOT in the heart but in the bowels. The word speaks of tenderness expressed to those who suffer. Compassion is word repeatedly used of Jesus. He often had a compassionate reaction to people in need. For example, there was that one occasion where we read (MK. 6:34) that He had compassion on the leaderless multitude. They were like scattered sheep without a Shepherd. Jesus felt compassion for them.
2. Paul uses the same term in the book of Romans when he appeals to brothers by the mercies of God (Rom 12:1). And then when he writes to the Corinthians, he calls God the father of mercies and the God of all comfort.
3. Why should we have compassion on others? Well, because God has been so compassionate toward us. We were lost, without hope – without God in this world. He could have ignored our plight. He could have left us in our desperate state. He could have turned his back on our need. But, he is the Father of mercies and the God of compassion.
4. And because we have received his compassion, we should be on the look out for every opportunity to have compassion on others. Is there anyone during this Covid-19 Pandemic on whom you might show compassion today?
5. The second piece of the Christian uniform is...

II. The Virtue of Kindness:

1. Several of these Christian virtues are among the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and this is one of them. The GK word Paul uses here is a combination of goodness and kindness, and graciousness. It is the virtue the Spirit produces in us that tempers one’s natural tendency toward being harsh.¹
2. In Lk. 6:35 we are told that God shows kindness even to people who are evil and ungrateful. As Christians, when we are treated badly (for whatever the reason) we don’t need to respond tit-for-tat. We can still be kind. And remember, it’s God’s kindness that leads people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Perhaps our kindness to others will have the same effect.

¹ MacArthur, John. Colossians & Philemon. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1992. P. 155

3. A good example of kindness is the story of the Good Samaritan, who had nothing to gain by helping the man in need, but he did it anyway.

4. the third virtue is...

III. the Virtue of Humility.

1. Humility is the opposite of self-exalting or self-serving. Humility was not considered a virtue in the pagan world. It was thought to be a sign of weakness. “The N.T., however, deepened and enriched its meaning and made it one of the noblest of graces.²

2. Humility as a virtue is exalted by Paul in Phil. 2 where we are told (2:3-7) to “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

3. We should note that Paul says here that this attitude is “yours in Christ Jesus.” In other words, we have the capacity to relate to one another in all humility because it comes to us as part of our Union with Christ. Since Jesus exercised humility, we who are “in him” can rank ourselves under others for their good as well.

4. Like Paul’s world, ours does not appreciate humility, but it is a precious grace in the eyes of God. May the Lord find us to be not only a knowledgeable people (knowing God’s word) but a humble people (knowing God’s character).

5. The Fourth Christian virtue is...

IV. The Virtue of Meekness:

1. The usual term in our parlance is Gentleness. Of course, this is a word that’s closely related to humility. Meekness is not the same as being spineless. Rather, it is submissiveness when one is being provoked. It is a willingness to suffer rather than to inflict suffering.

² Gaebelain, Frank E, J. D Douglas, Walter C Kaiser, etc. The Expositor's Bible Commentary : Vol. Volume 11, Ephesians - Philemon /. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, V. 11. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981, p.156.

2. According to Jesus, Meekness is a description of his own heart. I think I mentioned a while back that there is only one place in the Bible where Jesus speaks about his own heart. As Dane Ortlund writes,

The one place in the Bible where the Son of God pulls back the veil and lets us peer way down into the core of who he is, we are NOT told that he is ‘austere and demanding in heart.’ We are NOT told that he is exalted and dignified in heart.’ We are not even told that he is “joyful and generous of heart.” Letting Jesus set the terms, his surprising claim is that he is “gentle and lowly.” The word of “Lowly” is often translated Meek.

3. “Meek” has the connotation of being destitute or thrust down. When Jesus says he is lowly he is employing the photo negative of a term like lofty or out of reach. When Jesus says he is lowly (Meek) he means that he is approachable and accessible.

4. This is wonderful news. It tells us that Jesus is not hard to reach. You don’t have to jump through a lot of spiritual hoops to get to him. “The minimum bar to be enfolded into the embrace of Jesus, Ortlund says, is simply: open yourself up to Him. It is all He needs. Indeed, it is the only thing that works.

5. Are you approachable and accessible to people? Do you hold yourself aloof above those to whom you are not naturally attracted? Jesus isn’t like that, so neither should we.

The Soul-satisfying Grace of God should make us gracious toward one another.