

PUT ON: PART I

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14
JANUARY 22, 2017

¹² 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.

INTRODUCTION

This is not a difficult text to understand. Some pieces of the bible are difficult to understand, but not this one. The ideas are common to Paul's writings. In his letter to the Ephesians, his words describe what the church should be. While what he writes is easy to understand, it's a difficult text to put into practice.

Mark Twain is quoted as saying the following: "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

This is a beautiful passage! It's almost a "unicorn" of a biblical text on community — something you read about but rarely see practiced in the church. When we see what's here, we will long for our church to be like this.

IDENTITY

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved...

PUT ON:

This word literally means "to wear". Last week we saw Paul use this idea of "putting" in three other ways: *Put to death* (i.e., "Kill it"), *Put away* ("Remove it"), and *Put off* ("Disarm it").

Here's what Paul is saying about identity: You don't change without a change in identity, and the most powerful agent for change in your life is your relationship to God. He calls the Church *God's chosen ones*. Any personal change that you or I see comes from an identity given by God.

1. CHOSEN

The gospel story, and what God is doing in your life, is God's idea. He's in charge: It's His rescue mission. Being "chosen" is described by the second characteristic of one's identity.

(cf. Jn 15:16; Ep 1:4; 1Pe 2:9)

2. HOLY

When God sets us apart, He doesn't save you to sit there. The gospel places a calling upon your life: You're meant to be great; You're set apart for the purposes of God.

(cf. Ec 3:14)

3. BELOVED

This might be the most important piece of understanding our identity before we move into the kinds of people we're supposed to be: I'm loved as I am, but I'm not left as I am.

(cf. Ep 2:10)

ACTIVITY

compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...

PUT ON:

1. COMPASSIONATE HEARTS

The word Paul uses here literally reads "bowels of compassion". This kind of heart is consumed by visceral compassion: love characterized by tenderhearted mercy for others.

(cf. Phm 12; 1Jn 3:17; Phl 2:1)

2. KINDNESS

In the Greek, this kindness word means either “graciousness” or “goodness”.

(cf. Ro 2:4; Ep 2:7; 2Co 6:3-6)

3. HUMILITY

Humility in the bible is a command, not a fruit. When it comes to humility we’re talking about “my” attitude about “me.” Meekness on the other hand, is power under control for the sake of others.

(cf. 1Pe 5:5; Phl 2:3,8)

4. MEEKNESS

Gentleness means to approach others — including one’s enemies — in a humble and caring spirit, not using force to get one’s way (Mounce). Lindemann defines it as the power which, in a situation of conflict, enables us to criticize another’s conduct so that they experience it as help and not as condemnation. Still, another commentator writes that it is a willingness to suffer injury rather than inflict it.

(cf. Ja 3:13)

5. PATIENCE

The word he uses for patience here is made up two words: the first meaning “long” and the second meaning “wrath”. We might say then, that for Paul to be patient means to have a long fuse.

(cf. Ro 2:4)

¹³ bearing with one another and...

The idea of *bearing with* someone means to endure with them through something. Mark uses this phrase when he writes of Jesus healing the demon-possessed boy when he asks, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.”

The writer of Hebrews uses it again when he appeals his readers to bear with him through the exhortation.

See, the difficulty of practicing this in community is that the gospel requires a “long suffering” kind of community. Paul doesn’t assume that once you work these characteristics into your heart that the community will work, that church will work, or that there will never be any difficulty or conflict. One of the greatest unexamined assumptions in the Church today is that because so-and-so is a Christian, then we’ll be good. Either it will be a good place to work, or relationships will be easier with people in my group — the list goes on.

Do you ever get surprised that a Christian doesn’t think exactly like you? We are so wired to leave the second anything gets difficult. Our personal peace and comfort are so high on the list, that we assume Jesus couldn’t possibly be calling us to discomfort for the gospel to be seen.

We will fail; we will falter in our attempts to live as the kind of community and the kind of Christians we’re supposed to be. If you love Centerpoint and what it stands for, give us about two weeks and we’ll disappoint you. But will the gospel of Jesus be so precious to you, that you are willing to do what’s described in Ephesians 4:2? “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love”?

The church is a place where we bear with one another in love because we’re called to something greater than personal vengeance in relationships. We’re called to something greater than the normal way everyone else operates in relationships. Sometimes we’re called to more than merely a lack of relational conflict. Apathy towards one another is a poison in community.

Do you have anyone in your life — when it comes to relational difficulty — saying, “Bear with them.” It means that I bear with the consequences of your bad choices in relationships. I bear with your lack of character. I bear with your lack of maturity. I bear with the different ways you do things. I bear with your different cultures. Think about the early Church made up of Barbarians, Greeks, Jews, Sycthians, slaves, freedmen, and slave owners. Nothing says that things were easy for the 1st century Church. Christian community isn’t easy.

(cf. Mk 9:19; He 13:22; Ep 4:2)

if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other...

Application of these graces are meant to be with “one another”. Significantly, Paul focuses on the individual who is to have patience, rather than the one who has caused the problem. This is because the place to begin in any group tension is with oneself rather than others. Ask yourself this: How do I handle division in my relationships? Hopefully, you can respond by saying, “With forgiveness”.

You can't practice any of these character qualities outside the context of community. If you don't want to change — if you want to remain the same — flee from community. But if you want to take seriously the call to *Put on* the clothing that you're meant to wear because you're in relationship with God, then you must be in the context where these virtues are lived out.

(cf. Mt 18)

as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

How would you define forgiveness? Matthew 18 talks about it as giving up a desire for payback, because of a proper perspective of God, self, sin. The standard in community is Jesus' character. We're never meant to work this out alone.

When I meet with men for pre-marital counseling I always ask them these questions: Who are you supposed to be? What's God calling you to? Where do you need to repent in your relationship with Jesus?

Doesn't this seem great, but impossible? Here's the thing: Nobody is like this this... These types of relationships don't exist in the world! This is only available to the Church. These kinds of relationships are what take a church from ordinary, to miraculous.

UNITY

¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Love informs my character witness with other people. Paul used this idea earlier in Colossians when talked about the “ligaments” of the Church: “and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.” We have plenty of doctors in this church. Some tell me what a ligament is. It's a short band of tough, flexible, fibrous connective tissue that connects two bones or cartilages or holds together a joint.

The expression means that mutual love would bring the group to perfection. Perfect harmony literally means to achieve a ripeness of knowledge or practice. This word is only used twice in the bible, the only other place being in Hebrews. There, the writer says, “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God”.

Look back at the third identity statement Paul makes in verse 12. *Beloved*. Now he says to *put on* what? *Love*. The gospel changes us by giving us a new identity and a new way of relating to one another. When this happens, Jesus brings people together in perfect unity. This is the only way that Craig — a balloon maker from Miami — and Timothy — a violin player from Hawaii — can be part of the same church. It's Jesus that draws each of us to Himself and effectively draws us to others who aren't like us. It's the gospel!

(cf. Co 2:19; He 6:1)

PRAYER

Father, thank you for sending your Son to redeem broken and sinful people, and for giving us new identities as people You call chosen, holy, and beloved. We ask that You would make Centerpoint a church that bears with one another and forgives one another, just as You have done with us. Let us put on love and be the kind of church only you can empower us to be. We ask this in Your Son's holy name, Amen.