

## How Should We Treat Each Other During a Crisis (or Anytime)?

Colossians 3:12-14

March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

Big idea: The way we relate to people should match our identity as God's chosen and beloved people.

### Intro

Read first and then intro

Last week's message was primarily vertical – God is our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble, therefore we need not fear. If you missed that message and your heart is weighed down by fear, I encourage you to check out the audio version on our website ([universitybible.org](http://universitybible.org)) or podcast.

This week I want to look at something more horizontal and relational – how should we treat each other during a global pandemic?

We're social distancing and self-isolating, and for some people that means a lot of time by themselves. There is a very real danger of loneliness that we want to combat. For others that means a lot of time NOT by themselves but rather with their family with no escape valves. They only wish they could be a little lonely, especially those of us that are introverts!

Christianity can never be reduced to a mere list of social rules. But what we find in the Bible is that as God transforms us on the inside, it must affect the way we relate to people on the outside.

We saw this two weeks ago in the first half of Colossians 3. Paul, the author, alternates between facts and commands, indicatives and imperatives. Look back to the beginning of chapter 3 and follow the progression.

- v. 1-2 IF/SINCE you have been raised up with Christ ... keep seeking the things above...set your mind on the things above
- v. 3 FOR you have died and your life is hidden with Christ
- v. 5 THEREFORE consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality . . .
- v. 6 FOR its is because of these things that the wrath of God will come...
- v. 8 BUT NOW you also, put them all aside; anger, ...
- v. 10-11 have put on the new self...

If we separate out the commands from the facts, we cut ourselves off from the source of our inner transformation. It's like trying to draw water from a dry well. That pattern continues, but now it turns to the positive. Rather than explaining what we are to "put off" it explains what we are to "put on."

1. Family identity: ***Chosen***, ***holy***, and deeply ***loved*** (3:12a)
  - a. So
    - i. Our first word is a transition word. Look back at what came before it.
    - ii. V. 1, 3 – we have been "raised up with Christ" and have, in a sense, "died" with Christ
    - iii. V. 11 – because all who have trusted in Jesus are united with Him we are also united with each other across lines that typically divide people.
    - iv. The first half of v 12 leans into that community identity even further. Our common bond is not our building, it is our identity as those who have been united to Jesus, forgiven by Jesus, loved by Jesus.

- b. Each of these 3 descriptions was used of Israel in the Old Testament.
  - i. **Deuteronomy 7:7-8** "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
    - 1. Their national identity was of a people that were rescued by God.
    - 2. Our identity as Christians is that we are people rescued by God, not from Egypt but from the penalty and power of sin. We're forgiven people.
  - ii. **Deuteronomy 14:2** "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.<sup>3</sup> "You shall not eat any detestable thing.
    - 1. Immediately connects the indicative with the imperative, the fact with the command
    - 2. It's not that the church has replaced Israel, but the church made up of all who have trusted in Jesus is experiencing that same type of relationship with God.
- c. God intentionally set His love on you, called you to Himself and set you apart.
  - i. Young girl who was adopted and used to love to hear her parents "tell the story about me" and they would describe the way they met her in an orphanage and made the choice to bring her into their family as their own.
  - ii. That was a source of security for her.
- d. You are holy, set apart for Him.
  - i. **Romans 5:1** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
  - ii. If we have placed our faith in Jesus, we have already been justified and we (present tense) have peace with God through Jesus.
- e. But it isn't merely some legal declaration – you are also deeply loved.
  - i. As we planned our response to the coronavirus our board talked about the need for our people to be safe AND feel safe. You could have one without the other but both are needed.
  - ii. Likewise, we want people who are loved by God to feel loved by God. What do you do if you are loved but you don't feel loved? Consider all that God has done to make you His own. Reflect on the proof of His love that is the cross. Don't let your emotions trump fact.
- f. Reminder, this whole chapter goes back and forth between facts and commands, indicatives and imperatives.
  - i. This identity leads to action. It's not phrased as a "do this or else" command, but as the natural, understandable, inevitable conclusion of our identity.
  - ii. We are part of a new family. How should we live in this family?

**iii. PAUSE**

- 2. Family conduct: Five virtues for Christian community (3:12b)
  - a. Look back up at v. 8 and you'll see a list of 5 vices that destroy unity – anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech.

- i. Those are to be put aside because they don't fit our new identity.
- b. Now we see five virtues that do fit us that we are to "put on."
  - i. Meynell –Each of these can feel like a very tall order, especially when we are tired, or overstretched, or simply struggling with life.
    - 1. If you were here in person I would ask by show of hands how many of you feel tired, overstretched, or simply struggling with life right now.
    - 2. I imagine many hands would go up!
  - ii. Right after this list we'll see instructions for when we fall short with each other in these virtues.
- c. First, a heart of compassion
  - i. We say "heart," ancient Greek said "bowels" – why? When you feel deep emotion and compassion, where do you feel it? It tends to feel like it's in your stomach, like a pit in your stomach when you feel great emotion.
  - ii. We are to have a heart of compassion for one another.
  - iii. Application during this period of fear with the coronavirus – have compassion. Have compassion on those who are vulnerable. Have compassion on those who are older and more at risk. Have compassion on those whose industries might be affected by the reduction in travel and gathering.
  - iv. We can be caught up in our own unique suffering and disappointment – maybe a vacation canceled, a sport season on hold, birthday parties disrupted, income insecure. Each of those is real and they hurt. To have a heart of compassion means we will care about others' disappointments and loss as well, even if they feel "less than" ours.
- d. Second, kindness
  - i. A gracious attitude of goodness
  - ii. It's the way God has treated us:
    - 1. **Romans 2:4** 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?
- e. Third, humility
  - i. Not in a self-abasement of the false teachers of chapter 2 or the rigorous asceticism, but a true humility of valuing others above yourself.
  - ii. The person who wears the garment of humility knows who God is, what man is, and who he or she is.
  - iii. What does the garment of humility look like in the age of corona?
    - 1. Recognizing the limits of what we know
    - 2. If we're receiving good guidance to limit gatherings, self-isolate, and take other precautions, humility says, "Ok, I'm going to trust those with expertise in communicable diseases."
    - 3. At it's core, humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. It's not a "woe is me, I'm not good at anything" mentality. But it means to increasingly look out for the needs of others more than your own.
      - a. **Philippians 2:3-5** Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup> do

not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

4. Holding our plans for the future very loosely

a. Never has James 4:14-15 seemed more applicable

b. **James 4:14-15** Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup> Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

f. Fourth, gentleness

i. Not overly impressed by our own self-importance, not trying to intimidate with a show of strength

g. Fifth, patience

i. Long suffering, recognizing that other people might operate on a different time schedule or think a different way than you.

ii. Jared Wilson, "How can I become gentle and patient with others while believing I'm the \*least\* of sinners?"

1. Paul said of himself, "I am the chief of sinners." If we always see others as bigger sinners than ourselves, we won't be patient, gentle, or compassionate. We'll be judgmental in all the wrong ways, condemning, critical, and proud.

h. Each of these virtues can only be worn in community with others, in relationships. They aren't character qualities that we can practice in isolation.

i. This season is different. Our relationships and interactions will be affected by this crisis, but not all the changes need to be bad.

ii. I've had rich conversations with many of you this week. We've emailed, talked on the phone, talked on video chat, talked in person from a safe distance and with freshly washed hands. We've prayed together. I've seen people showing compassion and kindness in new ways.

i. But, what do we do when these relationships are strained and frayed? What do we do when we fall short of compassion, kindness, gentleness and people are hurt.

i. Remember the context of this is within the church body, but it extended to every relationship.

ii. What do you do with the people in your own home when you no longer have the outlets of time apart for work, school, and sports?

3. Family conflict: Learning to ***bear*** with and ***forgive*** one another (3:13-14)

a. We bear with one another and forgive one another, putting on love over the top of everything else.

b. We bear with someone when we endure and live with their weaknesses and minor annoyances.

i. **Ephesians 4:1-3** Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, <sup>3</sup> being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

ii. "Showing tolerance" is the same word – we don't "show tolerance" or "bear with" someone when we agree with them and like everything they are doing. We show tolerance or bear with them when it's rubbing us the wrong way – when they don't load the dishwasher the way we want them to (the right way), when they don't pick the songs we want them to pick, when they make decisions that aren't sin but just aren't the decisions we would have made.

c. We forgive when it is an issue of sin.

- i. I love that these two are in here together – something we just need to bear with. They aren't sin – they're weaknesses, annoyances, frustrations. What about when someone really has sinned against us?
  - 1. They gossiped about you. They were harsh with their words. If the context is first about unity in the church body (as the next verse indicates), then you can see the importance of this if you have been part of a church for any period of time.
- ii. What motivates and informs our forgiveness of others? God's forgiveness of us.
  - 1. One thing this crisis has done is show us how close to the edge of life and death that we are. That can sound morbid, but I think it's true. Death has always been certain, it's just been far enough in the future that most of the time we don't think about it. But with daily reports of losses, we can't hide our faces from it.
  - 2. Whether we meet God in 80 years or much sooner, are we ready?
    - a. **Hebrews 9:27** it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,
    - b. Each of us, myself very much included, would receive a guilty verdict at that judgment.
      - i. **Ecclesiastes 7:20** Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins.
    - c. But God extends forgiveness.
      - i. **1 John 1:9-10** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.
      - ii. **Colossians 2:14** having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
- iii. We forgive because we've been forgiven.
- d. On top of all of these virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness we put on love.
  - i. It's like the coat that goes on top of whatever else you wear.
- e. Several years ago I had a friend who used to work for U-haul. They had a policy that you couldn't use the word "problem." You always had to say, "opportunity." So, if a truck breaks down it wasn't a "problem," it was an "opportunity." Angry customer at the desk yelling in your face – opportunity. Coworker caught sleeping in the back of the store behind some boxes instead of working – opportunity.
  - i. Friends, we have an opportunity right now. We didn't ask for it. We didn't anticipate it. But it's here. What will we do with this opportunity? Will we take our anxiety and fear to God our refuge? Will we love our neighbor as ourselves in new and creative ways?



1

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