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The Power Behind Christian Character

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Colossians 3:11-14



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If you're new with us, we're thrilled that you've joined us. I pray this time where we really just ... It's going to build you. It's going to give you faith. It's going to give you courage. And ultimately our hope and prayer is that your eyes of faith will be able to see in Jesus the most consequential, the most remarkable person ever, and what he did for us. And so, I pray this time will be encouraging to us. Even before we get there though, I want to acknowledge something that's true in our church family, and that is that we are a troubled people. My inbox bears witness to our collective concern of what's happening in the world and in our own nation. What's interesting is that as time passes, you can tell what is most concerning to people. At one time, it was really a lot about viruses and masks and things like that.

Now it's about this election. It's about the Supreme court and morality and all that's happening in the world. And so, I want to just share with you just a few thoughts, because I know that you're troubled. If you're not troubled now, you may be in the next few weeks or in the next few months. But there's a good chance that if you're not, somebody else will be near you. And I just want to encourage you to think about a few things. It's important for us to remember a few things when we go through these moments in life. Sometimes a picture helps. When I say that, everyone looks at the screen, I don't have one for you. You're going to have to use your own mind for this one. Okay? But all of us have been to the beach. And so, you just look at the beach and you think of all the sand that's there and you just think of ...

And so, just imagine for a moment, that somebody brings out a little plastic kids' sandbox and places it on the beach and then fills it with sand. What's happening in the world today and in our own nation, is there are two parties within that little sandbox and they're arguing over control. They manipulate people on the basis of fear. If you vote for them that you're going to lose this and that causes everybody to feel a sense of anxiety and unease. And so, there's some things that you need to remember, okay? That is this, is that there is the Lord and sovereign over the whole beach, over every single grain of sand, not only outside of that sandbox, but also within. You need to remember who you are connected to. You need to remember that the Lord is the Lord of all. We read this in the last month, when we were in chapter two and Paul says, Jesus Christ is the head of all rule and authority.

In other words, not only inside the sandbox where it looks like that there's this power control, but without a doubt, outside of the sandbox throughout the entire world, what we are actually living in, is a divine monarchy. This monarchy is never threatened by election or uprising or the presence or reality of mortality. He is going to reign forever and ever, and ever. As a result of that, you do not have to fear anybody, but God. You think about how things are working today. I've already talked to you about the ploys, see fear works. It works. That's why they do it. That's why we do it. You can raise a lot of money and you can do a lot of things by causing other people to be afraid of something. That's exactly what's taking place. But I want you to ... As you go through this month and beyond, I want to just urge you to remember this. There's only one thing. There's only one thing that you cannot lose. There's only one loss that we simply cannot endure in life. That is the loss of the love of God.

And for those of us who are in Christ, that's an impossibility because the Bible says, that there's absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God, that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And so, as faithful stewards of a trust from the Lord and faithful stewards, and absolutely as we seek to be faithful citizens in the world, I want to encourage you to vote as unto the Lord. We worship as unto the Lord, right? What that means, is that we think about things that are true and then we respond in singing to him. That's what life of worship is all about. Well, our voting is simply an aspect of our worship. It's responding to the worth of God, it's expressed in the pages of scripture and responding accordingly.

And so, you open up the Bible and what you find in God's word, is that there's a lot of things that he really cares about. He tells us very clearly what he cares about. He tells us that he really does care that the government, that they command what he says is good. And they punish what he says is evil and that they protect the poor and the weak. God's word tells us very, very clearly that he cares deeply about the sanctity of human life. He cares deeply about the family. He cares deeply about personal responsibility in the marketplace, morality. He cares deeply about poor people. He cares deeply about the immigrants. He cares deeply about the world, the creation, the earth that he created.

And so, as you vote, I want to encourage you to remember this, is that you answered to nobody but God. But you will answer to God. And so, consider the Lord. I know that it's difficult. I know that there's all kinds of things that are in front of us. I know how serious some of these things are. And if they're not, they certainly look like they are. I know that it feels heavy. Sometimes what we're doing, is we're saying, but I don't have a perfect option. You don't. You don't have a perfect option. And so, what you need to do is this, with an open Bible, you say, God, help me to make a good decision. And then what you do, is you vote and you remember that the only person that you answer to is the Lord. I think the last thing I want to encourage us with is this, is that sometimes I feel like we, as a church, family are like a troupe of anxious gorillas, and we are in desperate need of the alpha standing up, beating his chest to say, everybody just calmed down.

The Bible tells us that the Alpha and Omega stood on this earth, the night before he went to the cross where he conquered death and the grave itself. He looked at his troubled anxious disciples, and he says, "Do not be troubled. Believe in God, and believe also in me." Let me pray for us. Father, I ask that you would be gracious to us and to our world and our country. Help us to be wise, humble. God, the great desire of our hearts, is that Jesus Christ be glorified. We want Jesus to be magnified. We want to see Jesus hallowed to the ends of the earth. God, we desire to see Jesus seen by everyone in the world as utterly consequential and important. We want the world and our country to see that what Jesus accomplished when he died on a cross and rose from the dead, that is the most significant event in all of history and every single person who has ever been born were given an account of their response to that moment.

And so, I pray God that you would be gracious to us as a people. Help us to be wise. And I pray now that as we open up the book of Colossians, that you would speak words of truth to us and encourage our hearts. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen. In your Bible, I would love for you to turn with me to Colossians chapter

three. If you're new with us, we're just working verse by verse through the book. We happen to be up to chapter three, verse 11. As you turn there, and as I just briefly affirm that I see so much Christlike character in your life, which is what we're going to talk about.

I want to go back 15 years. I was in my office and I read an article. Inside that article, there was another article that they were actually quoting. It was from a man named Alan Wolf and Alan Wolf doesn't know the Lord. He doesn't believe in Christ. And so, the article was sort of identifying this stream of thought. Alan said this, and it really cut me to the heart. He said, "Look, dear fellow secular Americans." He says, "I know that you were concerned that Christianity will stymie our social agenda and progress, but fear not. For while Christians claim to believe the Bible, they neither read the Bible nor give heed to it. Put them in a crucible of character." You know what that is, right? It's basically a cauldron, where you put something in, heat it up to extreme temperatures in order to see what's actually there. It's a test, it's a trial.

He says, "Put them in a crucible of character and they prove to be no different than anyone else." In other words, you put a believer in a traffic jam and they respond in terms of their attitude and their temperament, in just the same way as everyone else in that traffic jam as who doesn't know Christ. You put them in a dark room with the absence of accountability in the presence of temptation and their character will be proven to be no more. Their ability to withstand that tension, will be proven to be no more than someone who doesn't know Christ. That's what he's saying. 15 years later, in fact, I remember when I was reading this, it tore me up because I just thought, I just want so badly for people to see Jesus as he is. The sovereign Lord who just creates so much health and vitality to life, who brings joy and who brings peace and who's conquered the grave. I think, how could someone think this? Now 15 years later, I read that same quote and I look around and I said, he was right.

Is that the vast majority of people in America who say that this book is the authority, do not read it. They do not heed it. And when their life is put into that crucible and their character is identified, we're very, very much the same as somebody who doesn't have Christ in their heart. You see, whenever I see the world envisioning Christianity, as it is today, as a trade down, it should tear us up. It's that people should actually right now, they look into the world and they look at people who say, the way is Jesus Christ. And then they look at their life, at our life and they look at the claims of Christ and they conclude, that looks like a trade down. That should crush us. It should humble us. It should honestly cause us to turn off the football game and pray for something that's more significant than our idols that Jesus Christ, the King of all creation is not being worshiped. The people through whom they would see him, they're not worshiping him either. It's real.

There's an entire generation of people. The youngest generation is the most un-Christian generation in terms of their claims at what they believe as any generation, since we've been here. What are we going to do? See, sometimes when I see these realities, I see what's happening in the world, I see that people don't see Jesus as important and they don't see the cross and the resurrection, is the only way to escape the greatest fear we all have, and that is that we're going to die. I think God, if you could just allow Jesus to walk through Raleigh

again, like he did in Galilee. In flesh and blood, he can just walk around in my mind. I can just start a match. I can see the throngs of people, all kinds of people, black people, white people, young people, old people, sick people, well people, all peoples just throwing into him. The reason is because they're so captured and stunned by his love. I get to see Raleigh hanging on his every authoritative word.

What you find is this, is that the Bible comes to us and it says, we're not going to do it that way, but it's absolutely possible. In fact, Colossians screams to us. This is absolutely possible, but not in the way that you think. You see, the apostle Paul, when he begins Colossians, if you remember, he begins with a warm greeting and he says, look, we've never met before, but I've heard about your faith. I've heard about your love. I've heard about your hope. I've heard wonderful things. And then all of a sudden, what he does, is he launches into this stunning description of the majesty and the character and the glory and the righteousness and the love and the mercy, the creative power and the sustaining power of Jesus Christ. And then he gets to the theme of the entire book. He says this, this amazing stunning, glorious Jesus lives in you. He lives in us.

Therefore, chapter three and chapter four, the apostle Paul, what he's doing, is simply saying this. The way they're going to see Christ, is that they're going to see him through you. This is what he says. We made it up to verse 11, but I need a running start. Look at verse nine, he says, "Do not lie to one another, saying that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all. 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. Above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Now you notice that throughout the text, he keeps using these words, put off and put on. You see, when we came to faith in Jesus Christ, we came with all of the old attached to us, all the old attitudes and behaviors and motives. And so, Paul in particular loves to use this metaphor of changing clothes. How we came to Christ and we were wearing a certain kind of clothes and he says, you need to take these off. You need to put them off, the old self with its practices. And then he says multiple times, that when we do come to faith in grace, he gives us these new clothes. Notice that the new clothes put on, which is being renewed and knowledge after the image of its creator, these new clothes, they resemble Jesus. They resemble Jesus in the way he treated people and the way that he loved people and the way that he taught and the way that he thought about truth. They resembled Jesus.

And so, he says these old things, you need to put them off. This is what happens, right? Is that even though we're new creations and we get these new clothes, is that we revert back so quickly and easily to those old patterns. And so, we can wake up spiritually speaking in the morning, put on these new clothes, walk out the door, experience something by noon and suddenly, the old clothes, we look down and we're like, man, all the attitudes and all the flesh and all the impatience and all the anger and rage and everything from that

old person that we used to be before Jesus Christ, it is all resurfaced and it's resurfaced in this relationship.

And so what he says is this, he goes, the key to the Christian life, if we're going to display Jesus to a world that doesn't view him as consequential, is we have to put off the old anytime we see it. And every single day or every single hour, we're putting on the new characteristics that we're seeing in Jesus Christ. Now, what I want to show you in these, just these few verses read, starting in verse 11, is how does God help us do this? What are some things that God does to motivate, to teach us, to show us what it really looks like? And how we can do this. The first thing that he teaches us here is this. It says that God calls us to release grip on old identities.

Every one of us has an identity. What he's saying is this, is that before Christ, whatever that identity is, is now not the most important or the truest thing about you. We need to talk about this though, because this is where he really goes and he goes pretty hard. Let me show you this. Okay? Identity, what is it? What's this? If I asked you to come up on stage and say, look, tell us five words that would describe you to people who don't know who you are. You have identified what those five words, those five words would be indicative of your identity, right? This is who I am. Maybe a more important way to ask the question is this, is what five words or phrases would you use to describe your people? When you're in a room and you're with your people, you feel comfortable or where you're in a room and you're not with those people, you don't feel as comfortable. How would you describe your people?

Whatever words we would use to describe either ourselves or our people, that is our identity. I want you to know that this identity is just, it's incredibly powerful. And then let me show you why. Okay? Identity, first of all, what it does, is it shapes behavior. It shapes our behavior. It informs the way that we're supposed to live and treat people. That's what identity does. Let me show you this, first within the scripture and then with a little picture. Okay? In verse nine, that is what it says. It says, "You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self."

Now, let's just look at this first clause. It says, "You have put off the old self with its practices." Now you see the word it's, it's the pronoun, it's possessive. It means this, is that this old self, it possesses a certain kind of practice. In other words, when you're practicing this, you're living out of the identity of your old self. There's a connection between the two. Or maybe a little picture would help. Every single one of our behavior, is like a doll that has strings. Those strings when they're pulled, we move. And so, if you, right? One of your words, let's just say, as leader and you're in a group of people and nobody can decide where you're going to go to eat. Oh, I don't care. Where do you want to go? I don't care. Where do you want to?

Well, if you identify yourself, I'm the leader. Then what happens is this, is that identity moves the string, puts your foot out and says, let's go eat here. You lead. Identity moves you to behave in a way that's according to that identity. But here's the problem. Sometimes the identity that we hold the tightest or that is holding us, is not the truest thing about us. And yet, it continues to pull all the strings. The second thing that's true about identity. And then we're going to wrap these up, is identity forms groups. It has to. Identity says, I'm this. And

then we look out and we go, you're not this. You're not in that people. It starts early, doesn't it? Right? We're on the playground or we're at lunch at school, this is the boys table. This is the girl's table. Suddenly we're like, Whoa, wait, okay. So this is not for me. This is for me. And so, what happens is identity instinctively, it creates these silos where we're in something or out of something.

You see this in Luke chapter four. In Luke four, Jesus, he's left hometown. He's gone through Galilee and he's starting his ministry. He's starting his miracles and his teaching and the people hear. Suddenly, he comes back to Nazareth. When he comes back to Nazareth, he goes to the synagogue. And when he gets to the synagogue, he pulls out an Old Testament or for him a Bible, and he turns to Isaiah 61, which is a passage that speaks about the Messiah's ministry to the people, as one that he's going to teach the people. He's going to heal people. He's going to give light to people who are in darkness. He reads Isaiah 61 to his family people, his people. And then he sits down and everyone's eyes are looking at him. He says, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your presence." You know what they did? It says that they spoke well of him. Like, Oh, so good. Jesus. You read that so nice. Your miracle ministry is really coming along so well.

And so, what does he do next? He does something that's remarkable. Without them asking for such, he tells them two stories in the Old Testament. He makes the hero of the story, the person who's coming into the kingdom, not a Jewish person, but a Gentile person. And you know what happens next? There's a riot. They actually tried, they attempted to throw him off a cliff. Now, why would they do that? This is why, because our old nature wants a kingdom that's filled with people who share our old identities. We just assumed heaven be populated with people, in my people, in my group. We just assumed the church be populated with people who are like me. That's what our old nature does.

And so, what's happening in Colossae? Well, the church, they were dividing around their old identities. You can see it in verse 11. You had the Greeks over there and they're like, we had the sophistication of our intellect and of our architecture and yeah, we're Christians and all, but we, the Greeks, we have that for us. The Jews over here were like, well, look, you may have some old buildings, but we're the chosen people of God. I mean, we've been circumcised. You haven't. So yeah, we got that. Right? And then they both are going, those barbarians over there, you can hardly speak, at least we're better than them. See those Scythians over there, those nomad people, that just travel around and live intense, exceptionally poor. Well, at least we're better than those people.

And so, what was happening was this, there and the church of Corinth, of the city, they're dividing around their old identities. As a result, it was making it very difficult for the people living in Colossae to actually see Christ. And so, he says to them, look, "Here, here, there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised, or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, and slave, free, but Christ is all and in all. He is everything to us and he is in all of us, who know Christ." Now, you need to understand what he's not doing here. He's not eliminating ethnic or racial identity. Our skin color, where we came from, American, Asian, wherever it is, right? He chose to give you that skin. He chose for you to be born in those places. That's a part of who you are.

The Bible says, even in heaven, that those distinctions will actually still be there. We'll just appreciate them and we'll be in a harmony about those things. He's not saying that we lose those things and we're not those things. What he's saying is this, instead of eliminating racial and ethnic identity, he's prioritizing all identities underneath our Christian identity. He's saying, let Christ and not your gender, not your race, not your ethnicity, not your political perspective, pull the strings of your behavior, so that Jesus can be seen by your culture. Do you know why? Verse three and four, it says, "For you have died." You've died with Christ. Not only that, your life is hidden with Christ and God. That means, if your life is like a box and you put it into a bigger box, so that once you put the top on that bigger box, you no longer see your box, that's what it means to be hidden.

Our very identity is wrapped up in Jesus. Our righteousness is wrapped up in Jesus. Everything is wrapped up in Jesus. Not only that, he says, "That when Christ, who is your life ... " He's not a part of your life. He's not a throw pillow that you accent a room with. He is your whole life. And not only that, "When he appears, when he appears, you're going to appear with him in glory." You see this is the dominant identity of your life and when it is, what happens, is it has particular kinds of behaviors that are associated with that identity. The idea here is simply this, it's every one of us before Christ, we had some identities, some of them were noble and some of them were not so much. We grip them very tightly. And then we came to faith in Jesus Christ. And he says, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come.

Now, that doesn't change where we were born. It doesn't change our skin color. It doesn't change, this is really how we think about every single thing. But this is what he's saying. He's saying, now on, we used to grip this so tightly, now you just appreciate it. You hold it loosely. But now what we hold the tightest, is our new identity in Jesus Christ. And so, as the people, Providence, let's unify around Jesus. You think about the world today, it's so desperate to find a solution for racial problems, racial hatred, indifference suspicions but the race problem is a sin problem. That's why the race problem is a problem. It's because we are sinners and we take that race and we divide over it.

Our culture is never going to be able to see Christ as he is until they see the church as diverse and unified as it can be. You think, how is this possible? The world wants to see this. How is this possible? How is this even a possibility in life? Well, revelation chapter five says it this way, "By your blood, you ransomed people for God, from every tribe and language and people and nation." By your blood. You look at this word, people here, and what you need to understand is this. If you are in Christ and you're asked to stand up and describe your people, these are the words that you now use. This is the privilege of our life. This is our new identity in Christ. And you say, but wait a minute, Christianity is the same like everything else, there's an in and out. There's siloed. It's true. There is.

But Christianity is the only people that everyone is welcomed to be a part of. It's the only group that connects you to your creator, the point of life. And so, let me encourage us as a church to loosen our grip on what is not for everyone and help people see Jesus, who is for anyone who would believe in him. The second thing

that he helps us to do, is he reminds us of our new identity in Christ. It's so clear to me that Paul understood the impact of identity. Because when you look at verse 12, he says this, he says, "Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved."

And then he lists out all of these characteristics. In other words, Paul is about to launch into a new description. In verse five, eight and nine, he listed out all of these sins that were a part of behaviors associated with that old nature, that old identity. Now notice what he does. He's about to say, okay, so this is what you put on. And mid-sentence, as he's writing, he's like, wait a minute. I should probably say one more thing about identity. I've told you how to release your grip on old identities, but I've not told you what your identity actually is.

And so he says, look, "As God's chosen people, holy and beloved ..." As means that you are that. In other words, these are characteristics you don't put on. We do not achieve these. We receive these when we trust Jesus Christ. We become his chosen people, his holy people, his beloved people. This is our identity. You look through the New Testament and you find all kinds of different characteristics of what's true of those who are in Christ. He calls us more than conquerors, sons and daughters of the King, heirs of God, Co-heirs with Christ, all of these remarkable traits. But here in Colossians, verse 12, he says, let me just limit it right now to three. He says, "You're chosen."

Sometimes we look at that and we think, Oh, that makes us uncomfortable. You know what chosen means? I go to the fridge, open it up and I choose I'm going to eat that instead of that. That's what it means to be chosen. It's not rocket science. God came to you and he says, I want you to be close to me. That's amazing. The same three, chosen, holy and loved. All right? They actually find themselves in Ephesians chapter one, when he says, "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption." See, when he says that we're chosen, it's like a couple that goes and adopts a child, chooses the child, adopts the child and shares all they have with that child even though the child has not done anything to deserve that love.

In the same way, God chose us. He's not minimizing our faith in Jesus here, he's showing us what precedes our faith in Jesus here. He says, I want to be with you. And he says, you're holy. You say, well, if you looked at my life, you'd know I'm not holy. But God looks at your life, and if you're in Christ, you have to understand that when you trusted Jesus Christ, he took away your sin and he gave you his righteousness. And so, in his eyes, you're holy to him. He says that you're loved. You're loved. You're a loved one to the Lord.

Now, you have to understand something. If you understand, if you grasp these three realities, that these are things that you receive instead of the things that you achieve. If you see these as your identity, then what happens, is it creates an all new set of behaviors. These become the strings that begin to move your feet and your hands to behave in a particular kind of way. If we are certain of these things, what happens is, we live out of this identity instead of trying to earn this identity. It's like when I go home to my parents' house, there was a time not too long ago, that they moved out of the house that I grew up in. They moved to a completely

different house. When we went to go visit them in Oklahoma, I walked in the house and sat down in the chairs and I didn't ask. I just looked around and said, so this is my house.

Instead of behaving in a way to try to earn a place where I can feel comfortable on the couch, I was able to walk in and simply sit comfortably on the couch. This is the difference between somebody who knows that they're chosen, holy and beloved and someone who doesn't. And so, where do we find this kind of certainty and this kind of confidence? Well, certainly we don't look at ourselves because all you're going to find there, are reasons why someone shouldn't choose you and probably shouldn't love you and why you're not holy. We probably shouldn't look to our friends to say, Hey, size me up and tell me what you think. Because there's a good chance that they're going to say, well, given what I see about you, I'm as confused as anyone else as to why he would love you, why he would choose you, why he would call you holy. Where do we look then? We look to the cross.

For there on the cross, is Jesus' hanging, we find him saying, I love you this much. I was this committed to your holiness. This is how desperate my love is for you, to bring you near me. And so, let me encourage in particular, those who have yet to do so, to trust Jesus. And once you have put your faith and trust in him, then go on and believe what you have received in Christ. The last thing I want you to see, which is really a list of things, is that God commands us to put on the character of Christ. When I say the word command, it really, it's a strong word. Isn't it? He commands. And yet, the word there, put on, this is not a suggestion. It's an imperative. He's saying, you must do this.

As believers in Christ, this is so critically important, that you actually do put these things on in your life. And what he does, is he begins with compassion. He says, put on a compassionate heart. Compassion is simply sympathy, it welds up with our heart when we see a need far away. It causes us to move and close the gap to move closer to them. This is so important, you understand what compassion is because it's different than kindness. Compassion doesn't necessarily act in a way towards them once you get there, it only moves you into their presence. That's what compassion does. If I look over here and I see people who have never trusted Christ, because they've never heard the gospel, or if I see someone who is cold and they don't have a coat, or if there's a kid who doesn't have food and water, compassion welds, sympathy welds up in the heart and sympathy moves me closer to them, so that I can behave in a particular kind of way.

You have to understand something Providence, is for the world to be able to see that Christ is consequential. They have to see compassion, that he demonstrated toward us. He's in heaven. He looks down and he goes, look at the people who are so far away from me. It's compassion, created sympathy that moved him close. What happens when we get close? Well, the next thing he says is put on kindness. In other words, once compassion moves you into the presence of somebody with a need. Now, all of a sudden we're going to be kind to them by doing them good once we get there. And this is precisely what Jesus did for us. The next one is humility. He says, put on humility. Humility is simply the ability to take the low place, to serve other people at the point of their need, just as Jesus did with us.

To remind you once again of the importance of your identity, you know who you are, look what it says in John chapter 13. This is the passage where Jesus is about to wash the feet of his disciples. Something that an insecure person cannot do. This is what it says. "Jesus, knowing that the father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going back to God, he rose from supper." And then he goes on. He says, "He took off his outer garment and he had a towel and a basin and he washed their feet." But notice something had to precede him rising from supper and going and doing that. And it was, he knew something. And you notice that the three things that he knew were his identity. He says, look, he knew that the father had given all things into his hands. He knew where he had come from and he knew where he was going. Because of that, there is freedom to be able to serve people at their need.

That moves to meekness. He says, put on meekness. Sometimes we mistaken meekness for weakness, but meekness is simply strength under control. It can look weak, but it's not weak. It's like a soldier that goes and fights a war and then comes home and he wrestles with his three-year-old and the three-year-old is allowed to pin him to the ground. This is meekness. This is what Jesus did for us. with all of his strength. He went to the cross and on that cross, he looked so weak. Didn't he? I mean, if you didn't know better, if you were just under the cross looking up, you wouldn't go strength, power authority. You would think fragile, weak. And yet, in that very moment, Jesus was leading multitudes of people to glory. He moves on and he says, put on patience.

This is where you restrain yourself as you suffer along. This is what Jesus did for us. For as he was suffering, he looked and he said, father, would you forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing. The fruit of patience is bearing with one another. This is patience put into relational form. Okay? That's bearing with one another. This is where you put up with discomfort in order to determine the best response to build somebody up. Let me show you an example of this. First Thessalonians 5:14, it says, "Admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak." Three instructions, admonish, encourage, help. Three kinds of people, idle people, fainthearted people, weak people. Now, you get a bunch of weak people faint-hearted and idle people in a room, and what you have is a problem. Okay?

But if you don't have the patience and the forbearance, what happens is this, is indiscriminately, we throw them all into the same problem and we don't take the time to figure out what's the best response for their need. And so, we start mixing up the applications with the people. Let's just say that there's a little kid has never jumped into the pool in his entire life and he's afraid. He's standing at the edge of the pool. He's faint-hearted, he's nervous. In that moment, if you're quick with people, you may admonish your son or your daughter. Come on, don't be a wimp, jump. Or you could encourage, I know you can do this. I'm going to catch you. What about a kid though that is weak?

Let's just say that it's somebody that can't walk. What if somebody can't walk, but they want to jump in. Not only would it be inappropriate to admonish that person, it would also be inappropriate to encourage that person to jump. Come on, I know you can do it. No, they need somebody to help them in the pool. This is

what forbearance does, it identifies a person as significant. And then it patiently works with them to identify what that need is. And then it employs the right response for the right need, in order to build them up. Now, it get to the last or the second to the last, is forgiveness. If one has a complaint against another forgiving each other, for as we forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. Forgiveness simply means to send it away.

That gets to the last one, verse 14, "Above all these things put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Sometimes when I read a list like this, I think, God, how am I going to remember all this? It's really great here. I guess in this fun, old study, I can take notes on each one of them. But what happens tomorrow? When I'm not going to have the list in front of me and I got a person in front of me, I'm like, wait a minute, patience, let's see ... What was that next one? This is why I think in the end, he goes, all right, look, above all things, put on love. You know why?

Because in First Corinthians 13 ... You know why. First Corinthians 13, verses four through seven, he describes what love is. And what he does, is he describes with the words that we just went through. He says, love is kind and love is patient. Love is forgiving. It's forbearing. This is what love is. In other words, I just love what God does. He goes, if you forget what to do at all, [inaudible 00:41:39]. Humility, what? Just love. Because Jesus said, by this, all people are going to know that you're my disciples, if you love one another. Love. And so, let's make it our ambition to display the love of Christ. Let me pray for us.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your grace. The grace that comes to us, in spite of ourself. We thank you for your kindness, that leads us to repentance. We thank you for your promise, that gives us hope. We thank you that for those of us in Christ, you've opened up our eyes and helped us to believe in Christ. We've received a brand new identity and now, it's the privilege of our life to display the character of Christ. I ask that you would help us to do that.

I pray for those in the room who are considering trusting Christ, who are considering what it looks like and who may be confused, maybe confused what they've seen in the past, from people who claim Christ as their savior and Lord, God, would you help them to see that Jesus is consequential and that we are broken. Would you help them to trust Christ. And so, God, it's a joy to sing and as we sing to you now, we pray that you would give us full hearts, that you would give us passion to sing to you with all of our hearts. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.



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