

Colossians: A Big Jesus for Life's Big Problems
8: Doing Relationships "Kingdom Style"
October 28, 2018

Key Verses: Colossians 3.12-15

Key Words: Put on; chosen, holy, loved, compassion, mercy, kindness, gentleness, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace.

Summary: As citizens of God's kingdom, there are things we put off (vices), and things we put on (virtues). Paul give us a peek at what God-honoring relationships look like.

Remember, one of our goals here at Capital City is to share whatever we can that will make your life better. Well, what I'm going to share here first can make your life better. Giovanna sent me this Public Service Bulletin last week. Here it is:

Ten Tips for Eating Better – How to eat better.

1. Cook bacon at home. Bacon not just a restaurant food!
2. Enjoy your bacon without multitasking (you have to focus!). How you eat is as important as what you eat. Focus!
3. Listen to your body. Eat bacon when you're hungry, and don't stop till you're satisfied.
4. Eat bacon at regular time. Start with 3 meals a day.
5. (Then) Plan bacon snacks.
6. Eat a variety of bacon. You need to expand your world!
7. Don't be afraid of fat. In fact, use bacon fat to flavor your other foods.
8. Wrap just about everything in bacon. It makes everything better!
9. When given the choice of eating broccoli, cauliflower or kale, choose bacon.
10. Never, ever, ever eat turkey bacon.

Okay, if you have a Bible on your phone or your tablet, find Colossians chapter 3. If you don't have a Bible on your phone, I'd suggest you download the YouVersion Bible App from your app store. It's really good, and it'll just take a minute. And if you have one of those old-fashioned paper Bibles, we leave the lights up a bit in the corners so you can read them there. Colossians 3: we'll dig in at verse 12 in a couple minutes.

Any of you guys watch the show “Alone,” on the History Channel? It’s pretty good. They take 10 people – all of them quite skilled – and they let them choose 10 pieces of survival gear, and then drop them into some remote wilderness where each one is completely alone – no partners, no support team, no camera crew. And it’s not just about trying to figure out food and shelter, it’s how to deal with being completely isolated, totally alone ... it messes with their heads. Because ... because we weren’t made to go it alone.

We were made to do life with people – with family, friends, neighbors. We need them, we crave relationship ... and we are flat-out lousy at it. We’re terrible at it! Now listen: if you are smart you will not react to any of the questions I am about to ask. It’ll get you in trouble!

- Question 1: If you are married, how’s it going for you? Is it everything you dreamed it would be? Everything you promised each other? Now if you are newlyweds you might be thinking, “Well yeah!” But if you’re not newlyweds ... ? About half our marriages end in divorce. About half of the rest might as well. You’re just two strangers, or even two combatants living in the same house. And all of our marriages – all of them -- go through some really tough times.
- Question 2: If you have parents (any of you guys have parents?), or if you have kids, how’s that going for you? Do your parents, or your kids ever rub you the wrong way? If you are a parent, have you ever wanted to send them back? If you are a kid, have you ever wanted to make a trade?
- Question 3: How about friends? How are you doing with your friends? Do your friends ever neglect you, disappoint you, maybe use you, or abuse you? It can be painful to have friends, can’t it? The problem is, it can be so lonely when you don’t!
- Question 4: How about your relationships at school, or at work, or with your neighbors? Does they ever get messy? Do you have any neighbors you wish weren’t, or people at school or at work that make you turn around and walk the other way?
- Question 5: How about relationships ... at church ... with your church family ... with other Jesus followers? Do the people around here ever annoy you, or marginalize you, or hurt you? And if you say no, then ... well ... give it time. And sometimes the hurts here hurt worse than the hurts out there.

Bottom line, listen: we were made to do life with people, we were made for relationships; we need them and we crave them ... but we are terrible at them. Do you know why? Because we all stumble and fall a lot, and we all sin a lot – all of us. And our stumbles and all our sins always hurt those we love ... always.

Now, someday it's going to be different. Someday Jesus is coming back. And he's going to finish morphing us Jesus followers into what he meant us to be. And no Jesus follower is ever going to feel lonely again. And no one is going to be neglected or used or abused. You're not going to panic when you see that dork coming towards you. You're not going to wince because of what she did to you. What you need, what you crave, what you were built for ... you will live it out. And that will be so cool. And here's the big idea for this morning ... we Jesus followers are supposed to try to start doing relationships Kingdom of God style right here, right now. Right here, right now we are already citizens of the Kingdom of God. So right here, right now, we live by a different set of ... rules ... though that's the wrong word for it. We live out a different set of values. God wants us to start doing heaven right here on earth. And that's going to be really hard ... and really, really healing.

This morning is really part 2 of the sermon I started last week. Do you remember the big idea last week? Remember who you are, and _____ (and what you stand for). Remember who you are and what you stand for. If you are a Jesus follower you are right now a resident alien in this world, because you already, right now, are a citizen of God's Kingdom! So as citizens of God's kingdom, there are things we just don't do – things people around us do all the time; and there are things we do do – things people around us are going to think are strange. But we are different! We are different!

Last week I used this picture as a metaphor, it's called "Born Again," by Dean Kermit Allison. When we accept Jesus as our Savior and make him our Lord, we actually die to this world. And for the rest of our life here on earth we will be trying to strip off the old that is holding us back. And someday when we meet Jesus face to face, he'll finish the job. We will finally be what he made us to be.

Well this morning I am going to change the metaphor. Actually I am going to use the one the apostle Paul uses in this little letter we are studying. He tells us to take off the old, and put on the new – kind of like clothes. Take off the old, and put on the new. There are things we Jesus followers don't wear any more, because they are not consistent with who we are. And there are things we Jesus followers put on now, that sometimes look kind of weird to those who are not Jesus followers. But they are the kind of things that, when perfected, they will make life way better.

The part of Colossians we will unpack this morning is all about relationships: how to do relationships Kingdom of God style ... as opposed to the way we used to do them – and still do them sometimes – world style. You see, when God planted in us this need for relationships, this craving for relationships, he also shows us how to make them work. Fact is, if you were alone, if you were totally isolated, you wouldn't need the stuff we're going to talk about this morning. But all of us are in a plethora of relationships, and we're bad at them. So we are going to talk about doing life with people Kingdom style – with our husbands and wives, with our parents and kids, with our friends and our neighbors and our colleagues, with our church family. This stuff applies to all of them. So here goes. ...

Colossians chapter 3, starting with verse 12, Paul starts with this: "Since God chose you (Since God chose you) to be the holy people he loves" ... Three pieces: #1: God chose you; #2: He chose you to be holy; #3: For some crazy reason, God flat out loves you. Let's just glance at each one.

#1: God chose you. A few years ago some of our kids were being sucked in to the dark side of Calvinism. If you don't know what Calvinism is, it's the idea that God predestines who's in, and who's out. You are not free to choose for God or against him, it's all predetermined. And if he chooses you, once saved, always saved. Well our kids were engaged in one of those stupid social media debates, and they were talking about a messed up kid, and one of them said, "Well he's just not one of God's elect. He's not one of God's chosen. God didn't choose him." And those kids believed that nonsense! They figured that since God didn't choose him, he always going to be a mess. That was God plan for that poor kid. Those kids were wrong on two counts: #1: Even if God chooses some and rejects others, we have no clue. We had no right to try to speak for God. None of

us can make that kind of judgment. #2: God . chooses . every . single . one . of . you! He chose you, and he chose you, and he chose you ... when Jesus went to the cross for all of our sins ... all of them! The Bible says, "God wants everyone (every single one of you) to be saved." (1 Timothy 2.4) It says, "God doesn't want anyone lost." (2 Peter 3.9)

When Paul says, "God chose you to be the holy people he loves," he's telling us that it's all grace. God didn't choose me because I am so worthy; he chose me because he is grace. He didn't choose you because you are so lovable; he chose you because he is grace. I don't care who you are, where you've been, what you've done, what's been done to you – God chooses you. Some of you have been rejected over, and over, and over, till you feel like dirt. ... Well, God chooses you. But he give you the ability to accept or reject his choice.

He chose you ... #2: To be the holy people he loves. He chose you to be holy. "Holy": a lot of people misunderstand what that means. They think it's all about being some kind of do-gooder. You're just a little better than all the other sinners out there – kind of like me, a "holy man," right? (By the way, that's humor!) Well, that's not the root meaning of the word. To be holy means to be set apart, to be given over to God. That means you are God's now; you do life for God now, you do life God's way now. You're different. If you are a Jesus follower, you were chosen by God to be the holy people he loves. You are special to God, you are treasured by God, you are precious to God, he has set you apart. So remember who you are, and what you stand for. Some of you guys have been marginalized, some of you guys have been treated as insignificant, and worthless for so long that you actually believe it. That's a myth! God himself, your creator chose you to be holy, to be his, to be different, to be special.

Because #3: God chose you to be the holy people ... he loves. Because he ... loves you! Do you believe God actually loves you? Most of us have a terrible time believing that. Maybe we're the people God tolerates, for a while, till he finally fixes us. But that he actually loves us? I mean, there are just some people you know too well, and they are just not lovable! How could God really love them? And I know me way to well to dare think that God actually "loves me," right? But wouldn't that be cool?! To actually be loved by God? Not just tolerated by God, but to be loved by God?! And guys, if it weren't for the cross, I wouldn't buy it! I'd just blow it off as

preacher talk. But God ... so loved the world (which includes most of you) ... that he gave his only son ... that whoever believes in him ... whoever ... You see, if it weren't for the cross you'd be crazy to believe that God actually loves you; but because of the cross, you're even crazier not to.

So, remember who you are – you are chosen, you are holy, and you are loved. Remember who you are ... and what you stand for ... and that's where Paul goes next. He says, because you are chosen, holy, and loved, because you are a Jesus follower, "You must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. (You must) Make allowance for each other's faults, and (you must) forgive anyone who offends you." (Colossians 3.12-13) Holy cow! What a list! Mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. But ... what if ...? What if we actually lived that stuff out?

Do you know why God tells us to do this stuff? Because God is a realist! He knows we are going to mess up. He knows we are going to sin. He knows we are going to hurt each other. And he knows that any relationship between two messy people is going to require mercy, and kindness, and humility, and gentleness, and patience, and forbearance, and forgiveness. This is the stuff we need when the people we are doing life with mess up. This is the stuff the people you are doing life with need when you mess up. And we always do! This is the stuff that is required to restore equilibrium, to restore peace, to restore joy. This is the stuff that is mandatory to eliminate the frictions every one of our relationships will work up. This is what it looks like to relationships "Kingdom Style." Now I'm going to fly through these ... virtues. You pick out the 2, or 3, or 4 you need to work on.

"Tenderhearted mercy." Some Bibles translate it compassion. Most of us are pretty good at a little bit of mercy, a little bit of compassion. But for most of us, our compassion wears thin. Our hearts can grow calloused.

- Sometimes because there is so much pain, and we just kind of harden to it. I get tired of seeing it, and hearing it, so I block it out.
- Sometimes because we just get so self-absorbed. "I have my own issues, I can't deal with yours."

I know it's hard, guys, but I think God wants our compassion to last as long as his does. How long do you want God to show tenderhearted mercy to

you? So if we are going to do relationships his way – Kingdom Style -- we have to dig deeper.

- Maybe your husband or your wife was sharp with you. Instead of bristling, maybe you can try to understand the pain or her words? Can you feel her pain? That's tenderhearted mercy.
- Maybe a friend seems withdrawn. Do you know about the fight they just had at home, or the diagnosis they just got at the doctor's office, or the bill they just got in the mail? And if you did, would that soften your heart? That's tenderhearted mercy. Do you let yourself feel their hurt, their frustration, their depression?

It is so powerful ... so powerful! I'm going to try to be there for you as long as you are hurting, as long as you are broken, as long as you are overwhelmed. And that's hard to do! I'm not going to enable you, but I'll never stop caring. That's tenderhearted mercy.

And then, "kindness." Which I think kind of takes mercy a step further. Recently we heard Andy Stanley define kindness like this. He says, Instead of reminding you of your weakness, kindness is loaning you my strength. It's not just empathy, it's action. You see, some people feel mercy-full, and compassionate – they really do feel it -- but they never do anything about it. Do you ever feel compassion for someone, they move you, but you do nothing? I know there is way more pain out there than you can fix. But are you trying to do anything about it ... especially when those close to you who are hurting – a husband, a wife, a kid, a parent, a friend, a colleague, the person who sits near you in church?

The Greek word that Paul uses for kindness is a great word. It's from the same root as "grace." And grace isn't just something you feel, it's something you do. It's actually trying to be there for someone. It's putting hands and feet on your compassion. Which is hard for a lot of people, in this age of selfies. We get so self-absorbed. It's all about me, what I feel. My pain, my happiness. You've got to take care of yourself first, right?

But that's not how you do relationships kingdom style. Someone near me is hurting, so I care. And if I can, if God opens a door, I try to do something about it. Whether it's family, a friend, a neighbor, someone at school or work. That's doing relationships kingdom style .

The next one is so hard. Paul says, put on ... humility. Put it on! Did you know that humility is a choice? You can choose to be humble, or not. And choosing humility is incredibly countercultural. You see, humility is almost a vice in our world, not a virtue, it's not something most people want to choose. To renounce your rights, to renounce your status, so you can serve someone else. That's weird in our world. We're all about "my rights," and "my status." We're all about "me"! Which is pretty much the opposite of humility. To renounce my rights, to renounce my status, to serve someone else.

In other words, Paul says, be like Jesus. Do you think Jesus was humble? Over in another of his letters the apostle Paul put it like this. He says, "Don't be selfish (which pretty much defines most people in our world; in fact it pretty much defines most of us; don't be selfish); don't try to impress others (which pretty much defines how we live. Instead). Be humble (Be humble! How? By ...), thinking of others as better than yourselves. (Really?! But they are not! And he doesn't say they are; he says, "Treat them that way." That's what humble does. He says,) Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. (Be serious about what your wife thinks and needs; be serious about what your friends think and need; about what your neighbors, your classmates, your colleagues think and need. Be humble! In other words, he says – this is huge:) You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had (Because he was humble: that's who he was; and that's what he did. In fact,) Though (Jesus) he was (actually) God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he (actually) gave up his divine privileges (for us – he renounced his rights); he (actually) took the humble position of a slave (for us – he renounced his status) and was born as a human being (like us. And). When he appeared in human form, he (chose to) humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." (Philippians 2.3-8) He renounced his rights, and his status, to serve us. That's what humility does. Well, you do that, Paul says. And he means it!

I'll bet, in your whole life, you have never seen a fight between two genuinely humble people. "Did you hear about the fight in the parking lot? Humble Vern and Humble Steve just lit each other up over a parking spot!" "Did you hear about the fight at the store? Humble Lisa and Humble

Jessica almost came to blows over the last package of bacon in the store!” Seriously, how do you think some genuine humility would heal some of your relationships?

And if you think humility sounds bad, how about the next one: Gentleness; some translations actually translate it “meekness.” That doesn’t sound like fun. Gentleness is bad enough for some folks in our culture; meekness sounds downright wussy. We think of meekness as weakness. People are just going to run right over you. They are going to use you, and abuse you, then toss you aside, right? Well, that’s because we don’t have a clue about what real gentleness is.

You see, we think some people are ... “gentle” because they are weak, or they are afraid. But that’s not biblical gentleness. It’s not biblical gentleness if you are just a wuss. Gentleness is strength under control. It’s ... restraint. I could cut you, I could crush you, I could humiliate you ... but I choose instead ... mercy, kindness, humility, love. A Navy seal playing with his kids ... that’s gentleness. Jesus, going to the cross to die, capable of calling down an army of angels to protect him ... that’s gentleness. When you have the power to hurt, to retaliate, to undermine, to embarrass, to humiliate, and you chose tenderness and kindness and love ... that’s gentleness. If we actually lived that out ... if you actually did that at home, at school, at work, at church ... do you think that would heal some broken relationships?

I’ve got to pick up the pace, because our worship team whines when I go a little long. They’d rather have people go home hungry than give me the time to feed them. (That’s humor.) Tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness ... and my personal favorite: patience. Don’t you hate that one! We talk about people being short tempered, having a short fuse, irritable, touchy, wounds waiting to be picked. Well the Greek word Paul uses is a compound word that means, literally, long tempered, long suffering. Which means, it takes quite a bit to rile you up. It means, you don’t always think the worst. You don’t always assume the worst. It means you are not easily provoked, and that, when necessary you can slow down to whatever speed is necessary to love on someone.

The next two are so powerful, and they go together. “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.” (13) Make

allowance for each other's faults, and when that's not enough, forgive them ... anyone ... who offends you. God is such a realist! Go figure! He knows we're quirky, and he knows we're stupid sometimes, and he knows we are going to hurt each other – sometimes by accident, sometimes on purpose. If it's an accident – make allowance for each other's faults. Not everything requires an apology. He does something that hurts your feelings, but he didn't mean to – just get over it, make allowance for each other's faults. She's had a bad day and neglects you, or maybe snips at you – just get over it, not everything requires an apology. Make allowance for each other's faults. Don't be such snowflakes. Cut each other some slack. Don't be such babies! Some things don't require forgiveness. Doing relationships Kingdom Style requires a bearing with ... sometimes. Do you think some bearing with would heal some of your relationships?

And if the provocation really does go beyond bearing with, that's when forgiveness kicks in. That's the big gun! And it is hard ... maybe the hardest. C. S. Lewis is one of my heroes. He said, "Forgiveness is a lovely idea until you have someone to forgive." No kidding. Learning to forgive is one of the hardest lessons I have ever struggled with. And I'm still not very good at it. But it's God's way; it's doing relationships Kingdom Style. Letting it go. Surrendering my right to get even. Leaving it to God to sort it all out.

Have you ever heard someone say, "God may forgive you, but I can't!" Maybe you've said, or felt that ... blasphemy. It's not only sheer disobedience for us Jesus followers, it's such arrogance – "My standards are higher than God's!" And when we go there ... and we do ... what we're actually telling God is this: "My anger at them is more important to me than peace with you." And you don't want to go there.

To drive it home Paul adds this. He says, "Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." (13) Listen guys, you will never be asked to forgive more than God has already forgiven you. ... Making allowance for each other's faults, and forgiving anyone who offends you. That's doing relationships Kingdom Style. And if we could live this stuff out ...

Verse 14: "Above all," he says, "clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony." Because that's what all this stuff is

about. Paul could have just said, “Just love and honor God, and just love and honor those God loves,” and all this stuff would work itself out. But this stuff is what loving each other God’s way looks like, guys. And it is ... so healing, and so exhilarating ... when we actually do it.

One more idea, and I’ll wrap up with this. Verse 15, Paul says, “And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace.” Let the peace of Christ ... rule ... in your hearts. Believe it or not that was a sports term. How many of you guys are, or used to be jocks? How many of you have kids playing different sports? Have you even been to a game where the fans got all worked up? Dumb question, huh! Even played in a game where the players got all worked up? If you’re a jock, you know that’s a dumb question too.

There are always these contested calls. Our side saw what really happened, and their side is all blind or brain-dead. The kids are getting hot, the coaches start yelling, the parents are getting all worked up. And if there was no umpire, no referee, someone would probably die, right? After all, he was safe! His foot was on the line! She was offside! How would the game go without refs? It would probably look like hockey! Some of you guys would probably pay double to see it; but it wouldn’t be good ... it wouldn’t be godly. The ref steps in, he makes a call ... and the game goes on. Some of the fans are great, some of them are grumpy ... but the game goes on.

Paul says, “Let the peace that comes from Christ ... let that rule ... in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace.” You were called to do relationships in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ – through things like mercy, and kindness, and humility, and gentleness, and patience, and forbearance, and forgiveness. Let that stuff arbitrate your disagreements. And see what magic happens.

You’re going to need this stuff! You see, we do life in relationships, and we’re lousy at them. So let the peace of Christ be the umpire, the referee. And if you don’t let Jesus sort things out, Satan will.

So what’s it going to be ...

- Compassion ... or a calloused indifference?

- Kindness ... or animosity?
- Humility ... or self-absorption?
- Gentleness ... or harshness?
- Patience ... or frustration?
- Bearing with ... or touchiness?
- Forgiveness ... or bitterness?
- Love ... or ... what?!

Let's pray ...