



Colossians 3:12–14

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Reflection

The most attractive thing about the Christian faith is the concept of grace. Unlike every other world religion we don't have to earn, work at or attain our salvation – salvation is God's free gift to us through faith in Jesus. This last part, the gift part, is known as grace. **Gifts received at Christ's expense. God's riches at Christ's expense. God's righteousness at Christ's expense.** Among other helpful acronyms. Grace is God's free and unmerited favour, his gift of salvation. And it is the highpoint of the Christian faith and what sets us apart from all other religions. Amongst other things, grace means that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and nothing we can do to make God love us any less. Just dwell on that thought for a mo-

ment. Grace means that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and nothing we can do to make God love us any less.

And when we truly grasp just how amazing grace is, out of this flows all sorts of life change and good works in our world, as the only natural response to the grace we have received. And so grace shapes the Christian faith. We don't do good to receive grace; because we've received grace the response of our hearts is to do good. We don't do good to earn our salvation; because we've been saved by grace, the natural response of our hearts to our salvation is to live in a manner pleasing to our Saviour, doing good in his world. In true Christian faith, real saving faith, grace always precedes good works.

This is why in Scripture, and in Paul's letters in particular, the imperatives, (that is the commands) always follow the indicatives (that is the facts about God). In Colossians 1 and 2, Paul has laid out the indicatives, his teaching about the nature and purpose of God, and what he has done for us in Jesus Christ. In chapters 3 and 4 Paul moves to the imperatives, our natural response to the grace that we've received in Christ. Other religions would list the rules first and then the supposed rewards, but Christianity holds up our free and unmerited reward given so graciously to us out of the character of our holy and loving God. And only then moves to the natural responses of hearts who have received his grace and want to show our love for him in turn by following his good

guidance for our lives.

And this is what's happening in Colossians chapter 3. Paul's outlining and encouraging the Colossians to respond to the miraculous work that God has performed in their community, and the grace that they have received in Jesus, by living in a manner worthy of their new lives in Christ. Listen to Paul in today's passage, Colossians 3:12–14,

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What beautiful verses! In any other religions, these words would read: 'Be compassionate. Be kind. Be humble. Practice gentleness and patience. You must put up with each other and continually forgive each other when you are wronged. And in every situation love people. And if you manage to do all of this, every day, for the rest of your life, through your hard work, sacrifice and discipline you might just be able to please God enough to gain entrance into heaven.

But in Christianity,

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You are chosen. You are holy. You are dearly loved. So be who you are!

clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And what is so wonderful about Christianity is that not only is our faith given freely to us by God but he even helps us in our response. The virtues that are listed here are fruits of the Holy Spirit which flow naturally and abundantly out of the heart of every believer. These virtues begin to stir inside us the moment we receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and the Holy Spirit enters our heart. He begins to transform our character into the likeness of Jesus and we give ourselves over to him and his work as part of our loving response to what Jesus did for us on the cross. And as we do, the fruits of his work, the fruits of the Holy Spirit become evident in our character and in our lives. Galatians 5:22 lists his fruit. As I read it you'll hear the similarity with today's passage,

the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.

Paul's just listed the characteristics of their old way of life, the characteristics of a life lived out of our fallen human nature and sinful flesh. But a life lived out of our new nature, a life lived by the Spirit of God is completely different. We've put off the old self with all its practices which means any residual sinful tendencies need to be dealt with, put to death. And one of the best ways do to this is to overwhelm them with virtues, to drown out our temptations with good, to

clothe [ourselves] with compassion,

kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

To put up with each other, to forgive each other, just as Jesus has forgiven us, but most importantly,

over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Perhaps Peter says this best in 1 Peter 4:8,

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

In Christian community love covers over a multitude of sins. Love binds us together. But also, at the level of the individual, a

person who is filled with love for God and love for neighbour will find it very difficult to sin. And this is very powerful. It means that instead of concentrating on trying to keep a long list of rules, in reality, just concentrating on one thing will mean that we live lives worthy of the grace we've received. And that one thing is simply being filled with love for God and love for those around us.

Think & Pray

As I read these words now I'd like you to reflect over the degree to which you see yourself reflected in them.

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ness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

You've been chosen by God. You are holy and dearly loved. Therefore, be who you are! Think today how you can give yourself increasingly over to the work of the Holy Spirit and not concentrate so much on clothing yourself in your work clothes, and your activities and your worldly identity. Instead think through clothing your character ever increasingly in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love. Because that

person, the one so like Jesus, is the one who will truly do great things in our world for him. And so pray today that the fruit of the Spirit would overflow in your life and in the life of your Christian community.