

Introduction...

What is the greatest truth in all of the Bible? Many of us would scratch our heads thinking that this is not an easy question to answer but perhaps it's easier than we think.

On April 23, 1962, [Karl Barth \(the renown 20th Century Swiss-German, neo-orthodox theologian\) spoke at Rockefeller Chapel on the campus of the University of Chicago](#). Many have reported that, during the Q & A time, a student asked Barth, if he could summarize his theology in a single sentence. As the story goes, Barth responded by saying, "In the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"¹

The love of Christ for sinners is an amazing truth but the fact that Jesus loves *me*, not as a possibility but as a reality...now that has to be the greatest Biblical truth I will ever discover.

The fact that God knows us intimately and still loves us unconditionally is the greatest news that you will ever hear in your lifetime and when we tease out the details of His love for us it gets even better. He loved us before He made the world (**Eph 1:4**). He loves us with an everlasting love. His love for us moved Him to send us the greatest gift the world has ever seen (**John 3:16**). He loved us while we were still sinners (**Rom 5:8**) and there is nothing in the universe that can cause Him to withdraw His love from us (**Rom 8:31-39**).

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you can be absolutely sure that Jesus loves you and this love should produce two things in our hearts: gratitude for His amazing grace and repentance from the sin that once grieved our Savior's heart. The kindness and love of God should lead us to repentance, to turn away from sin and to seek to bring glory to Him for who He is and for all that He has done.

Transition...

God loves us and when we come to see His love for us in the gospel and we embrace it by faith it brings about a change in our heart that also results in a change in our life. Now, if we get this out of order then we will miss the point of the gospel entirely but if we can keep this in place then we can live our lives with enduring confidence and Christ-like obedience.

With this in mind let's read together our passage for this morning from **Colossians 3:12**.

Col 3:12 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. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sermon Focus...The Rule of Christ in the Lives of His People

¹ <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2016/09/jesus-loves-me-this-i-know.php#sthash.ULOMUWAj.dpuf>

This morning and next week we are going to learn 5 ways the love of Christ impacts our lives as believers. Today we will look at the first 2...

I. The Power of Christ's Love (V. 12)

Col 3:12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

You may not see it at first glance but there is an immeasurable power at work in this verse. Paul's shift from doctrine to practice is still underway. He has spent 2 chapters helping us to get our minds right when it comes to who Jesus is and what He accomplished for us on the cross. But now Paul is working to apply all of that doctrine to our lives. He wants us to know that right-teaching (orthodoxy) necessary leads to right-living (orthopraxy).

And the thing that he wants us to understand is how one motivates the other. What is the mechanism of action between right doctrine and right living...it's the saving love of God. In one sense this passage is very basic and immensely practical. We are being instructed here to put on the character of the Christian life and these characteristics are intended to contrast with the sins that we once walked in (**Col 3:5-8**). **But the simplicity of how are we to live as Christians is rooted in the deep magic of God's love for us.**

Notice that the calling for us to put on the character of Christ is rooted in the fact that we already belong to God. We are God's chosen ones, the eternally elect children of God. How do we know this? Because we believe the gospel. We know because we, "heard the gospel and we understood the grace of God in truth (**Col 1:4-6**)."

1 Peter 1:3 According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

The gospel assures us that our membership within the family of God depends not on our goodness but God's grace, not on our loveableness but on His love.²

By faith we are the chosen ones of God, holy in His sight, and dearly loved by our creator. **THIS** is what motivates us to put on godly character. We are well loved children who long to be more like our loving Father.

(Illus...In the early generations of the Christian church the ceremony of baptism sought to illustrate this in a tangible way. Baptismal candidates would symbolize the radical change of Christian conversion by arriving at the place of their baptism in old and shabby clothes that symbolized their old way of life. Then just before going into the water they would take off those old garments, laying them aside. They would undergo baptism as a symbol of their new life in Christ and as they came up out of the water the church body would gather around them and wrap up in fresh, new and often bright white garments to symbolize the new life in Christ that lay ahead for them.³

The love of Christ is so powerful that it completely changes the course of our life. The gospel is so amazing that it can pry our hands away from a lifetime of sin and rebellion. The good news of God's

² N.T. Wright TNTC Commentary on Colossians and Philemon (pg. 145-6)

³ Douglas Moo The Pillar NT Commentary Series Colossians (pg. 266)

love is so thorough that it can change not only our eternal destination but also our earthly journey. Our identity as the chosen, holy and dearly loved people of God gives rise to a new way of life.

And that new way of life includes “putting on” a deep sensitivity to the needs and cares of others. Our lives are to be filled with **compassion** for others and this flows out of the compassion that Christ has shown us. We didn’t deserve His pity, or love; and yet He came to live and die in order to meet our deepest need. By faith we have received compassion and now we become conduits of compassion to others.

Being compassionate toward others leads us to show **kindness** to them. Kindness is compassion in action. In other words, the love that we have been shown is to affect us deeply and then flow out of us freely. The gifts of God are not intended to terminate on us. They are meant to fill our hearts to the point of overflowing and then burst out of us so that others will experience the kindness and compassion of God for themselves.

Kindness is a Christ like attitude toward others and **humility** is a Christ like attitude toward oneself. Christian humility is to have an accurate view of your importance in light of the cross. Our sin is so great that Jesus had to die to save us, but Christ’s love is so great that He was willing to die to save us. This doesn’t cause us to boast it cause us to worship. The gospel brings us all to our knees.

The supreme act of humility in the history of the world was put on display by Jesus and His act of humility is to fuel our own.

Phil 2:5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Meekness does not mean weak in fact it means the opposite. This word refers to a person that is so strong in their character that they master themselves and willingly assume the role of a servant to others. Isn’t this exactly how Jesus treated us. He was and is the eternal Son of God but He willingly laid down His life for us and **He calls us to follow Him**.

The last trait in this list is **patience**. God calls us to be patient, slow to anger, understanding, and willing to wait on the Lord. But there is another application to this and it has to do with how we treat those within the church. The main verb in this verse is a 2nd person plural verb which means that these character traits are to be employed within the context of the church. God wants us to live in this way all the time but especially in our relationship with other believers.

The power of Christ’s love is so strong that it transforms our individual lives and begins to spread out to transform the community that we belong to. But the next question is how do we put these into action?

II. The Function of Christ’s Love (V. 13-14)

13 bearing with one another...

The newfound compassion in our hearts functions to impact our relationships with one another. Jesus calls us to bear with one another, to be patient with each other, even to put up with one

another. This is the same word that Jesus used when he said to the disciples, "O faithless generation, how long am I to bear with you?" IOW, how long do I have to put up with your spiritual ignorance and immaturity.

But it's more than mere tolerance, it's **love** that binds us to others no matter what. Our love for one another is to be so strong that it causes us to overcome that frustration.

(**Illus...**Mark Dever tells a story in his book *The 9 marks of a Healthy Church* and in the story he is talking with a friend. The friend has gotten into the habit of coming to church only for a portion of the worship service (the sermon) and then he quickly ducks out to go on about his business. He wouldn't stay around to meet people, to build relationships with people, to share with people or to help people. He simply came in to get what he wanted and then he would leave. Mark asked him about this and the friends responded by saying that he could get everything he needed from the sermon and then by leaving he was making sure that other people weren't holding him back from his growth in the Lord.

In his mind, hanging around and investing in the lives of other people would be a frustrating waste of his time. He might have to hear their stories, they might request his counsel, and that would require him to bear with them to help them grow in Christ, but he really didn't want anything to do with that.

Now let's contrast this with how Jesus treats us. Jesus never hears us praying and thinks, "I really don't have time for you today." He never sees us coming and says, "Oh no, not this guy again." He never loses focus when I ramble on about my problems, He never rolls His eyes when I confess the same old sins, He never looks at His watch as a signal that I need to move on.

Jesus bears with me, He bears with you and He calls us to bear with one another. To be patiently present to listen, to encourage, to offer counsel, to rebuke when necessary, to share scripture often...this is what it means to bear with one another.

V. 13...and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

If you spend even a short amount of time in the church you are going to learn a very important lesson and it is that we are not perfect people. Your brothers and sister in this church are not perfect people. We will let one another down, we will let slip something that was shared in confidence, we will offend one another and when these things happen **we need to remember the gospel**. The ultimate offense is not what someone has done to us but what we have done to God.

The deepest and most egregious offense in our lives is not that someone let us down but that we sinned against our God. **And yet the Lord has forgiven us. He forgave and He forgives and He calls us to follow Him by forgiving one another.** There is not a time when we are more like our Heavenly Father than when we forgive those who have betrayed, hurt or offended us.

As Christians we know the joy and comfort of being forgiven and Jesus is calling us to extend that joy and comfort to others. When we forgive one another in the church we are echoing the forgiveness that each of us has already received from the Lord.

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

Paul goes back to the clothing metaphor here and he paints the picture of us taking a large cloak that covers over everything and he tells us to fasten it tightly around our shoulders. **The one**

garment that pulls everything together is love. If we try to pursue the other virtues and we forget that they flow from a heart of love then either we will fail or those virtues will become distorted. Rather than bearing with one another we will become manipulative and controlling. Rather than forgiving one another we will hold grudges that will eventually burst out and ruin our friendship, or cause us to pull away altogether.

But when love is the motivation for our care for one another it covers a multitude of sins. We can look at one another and think the best rather than the worst. Love makes the commands of God a delight rather than a duty, it makes us *want* to listen to one another rather than *have* to listen to another.

1 Cor 13:4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This is the function of Christ's love.

Conclusion...

(**Illus...** Many of the battles that we see in the church don't come down to doctrine at all they come down to one person's preference over another. One person wants this while another person wants that. One person likes this style while another person likes that style. One person agrees with this presidential candidate while another person agrees with that presidential candidate.

Personal opinions and preferences are a natural part of life and we aren't always going to agree on some things. **But there must be something or someone holding us together that is greater than our personal preferences.** That person is Christ and our unity in Him is far more important than our differences.

The default mode of the human heart is pride and pride rails against the idea of someone having authority over you or getting preference over you. Pride looks upon another person and desires to dominate them. Pride causes us to compare ourselves to others and to think that we are better or more important than them. Pride seeks power. It seeks to be superior to everyone else.

But the gospel comes in and it not only chips away at our pride, it destroys it. The gospel obliterates the idea that we are better than the next guy by telling us that we are just like the next guy. Sure, we may have more education or experience but those are only external things. You see the gospel gets at the heart of who we are and lets us know that we are not as awesome as we think.

The gospel attacks the default mode of the human heart and in the place of pride it inserts humility. And the fruits that flow out of this gospel humility are gentleness, patience, bearing with one another and an eagerness, a zeal, to maintain unity and peace in the church.

In the world pride fuels competition but in the church humility fuels community and that is what God is building. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ God is creating a new counter-cultural community. He is building a city on a hill and the only way that we can be brought together as a city that displays the love and grace of God is if the pride in our hearts that would cause us to compete with one another gives way to humility before God that would have us embrace one another.