

“Put on the Gentleness of Christ”  
(Colossians 3:12, 13)

Introduction: This morning we considered the special gracious characteristics which the Christian will have as a part of his renewal into the image of Christ, namely, that he will “be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead” (1 Peter 3:8-9). These things are so important for the welfare of the Church, as well as the well-being of the individual Christian, that I wanted to continue this theme somewhat this evening, and examine it even more closely.

God has ordained that His children become like His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was the perfect example of what God wants us to be. True religion consists in, as John put it, walking just as He walked. That is why everywhere in Scripture, you will see certain recurring commandments to put on this kind of behavior, because this, above everything else, is the nature of a true Christian. True grace in the heart will produce these fruits in one degree or another. Now I said that it will produce these fruits, but we must always realize that the degree to which we have these fruits will vary. They will never be perfected in us in this life. Sometimes they will be very small and almost unnoticeable. But for the most part, these things should describe our lives as we continue to grow in Christ-likeness. “And so,” Paul writes, “as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you” (Col. 3:12-13). What we need to learn from this passage this evening is that,

*As Christians we are to put on the gentle, dove-like character of Christ.*

**I. What Paul Lists for Us Here Are the Characteristics of Holiness. They Are the Fruits which the Spirit of Holiness Produces.**

- A. Paul Has Just Exhorted the Colossians to Put Off the Deeds of the Flesh.
1. He challenges them in the first verse of this chapter, that if they have been raised with Christ, then they must continually seek the things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
  2. He reminds them that they have died to themselves in order to live with Christ. And if they are alive to Christ, then Christ will own them on that final day when he appears in glory.
  3. Therefore, he says, consider yourself dead to earthly passions, to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. It is because of these very things that the wrath of God comes upon those who practice them.
  4. And he says we all once walked in these things. But now we must put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech.
  5. We must lay aside the old self with its evil practices. As a matter of fact, if we have come to Christ, we have already laid them aside in repentance. Evangelical repentance, true gracious repentance, turns from every sin to embrace all

righteousness.

- B. Now, He Says, We Must Put on the Deeds of the New Man, Who Is Being Renewed in the Image of Christ. Indeed, He Says that We Already Have.
1. In verses 9 and 10, he writes, “Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”
  2. And since we have already put on the new self, he tells us to put on the characteristics of that new self.
    - a. First, he says, you are “those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved.”
      - (i) To be the chosen of God, means that you have been elect from all eternity.
      - (ii) It means that before there was such a thing as time, God loved you. There was never a time that He did not love you. His love is an eternal love.
      - (iii) And because He has loved you eternally, He has also had the eternal purpose in His heart that you would be holy, because He is holy.
      - (iv) He created you to reflect His glory. The children’s catechism asks the question, “Why should you glorify God?” And the answer is, “Because He made me and takes care of me.”
      - (v) It also asks, “How can you glorify God?” And the answer is, “By loving Him and doing what He commands.”
      - (vi) This evening, He commands us to put on Christ. To become conformed to His image.
    - b. We must therefore clothe ourselves with these virtues.
      - (i) We must put off, or put to death, the old and sinful ways of doing things, and put on the new and holy ways of living.
      - (ii) We must put on a heart of compassion, an affectionate heart of sympathy, mercy and pity towards those in distress.
      - (iii) We must cultivate kindness, those deeds of mercy that a heart of compassion will produce.
      - (iv) We must clothe ourselves with humility, which doesn’t insist on its own way, but rather voluntarily empties itself to lift needs of others up as more important.
      - (v) We must dress ourselves in a spirit of gentleness, which is not weakness, but rather a strength which allows us to accommodate to another’s weakness. It is also called meekness, or considerateness.
      - (vi) We must also put on patience, that ability to bear up with others who are by nature obnoxious, or repulsive, who afflict us with their mouths or with their actions. It is that ability to suffer long without complaining in situations which are not easy.
      - (vii) And we must also bear patiently with our brethren, forgiving them, granting them pardon when they do things against us. In the same way in which the Lord has graciously forgiven us, we must also forgive.

- c. All of these virtues we are to put on. And as a matter of fact, all of them are already present within us in some degree, if God's Spirit is in our hearts.

## II. What I Would Like for Us to Focus on for the Rest of Our Time Together Is that These Characteristics, or Virtues, Are the Preeminent Characteristics of Christ, and So Also of a Truly Christian Spirit.

### A. As I Said in the Introduction, the Scriptures Are Full of Passages Which Commend to Us These Virtues.

1. Remember when Jesus was going to Jerusalem, and He sent some of His disciples ahead of Him to a city of the Samaritans, but they would not receive Him?
  - a. When James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:51-56).
  - b. Christ did not approve of their desire to burn down their city. He wanted mercy and compassion from them instead.
2. Jesus said, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. . . . Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. . . . Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:5, 7, 9).
3. Paul tells us that apart from the fruit of Christian love, even the most glorious spiritual gifts and acts of sacrifice are nothing. He says, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind, *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*" (1 Cor. 13:1-5).
4. He says in Galatians, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23).
5. And James writes, that "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).
6. Love is the premier fruit of the Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there this fruit will also be.

### B. Who Was More Perfect in Love than Our Savior? And Yet Who Also Possessed This Virtue Above All?

1. The prophet Zechariah wrote, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a

- colt, the foal of a donkey” (9:9).
2. Jesus said of Himself, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS” (Matt. 11:29).
  3. Christ is even called the Lamb of God, a name which conjures in our minds the idea of a meek and gentle person.
- C. And Since We Have Been Predestined to Become Conformed to His Image, Paul Is Saying that These Things Must Be True of Us As Well.
1. As Paul already told us in Colossians 3:10, you “have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”
  2. He also writes in 2 Cor. 3:18, “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”
  3. The elect of God are all predestined to become conformed to the image of God’s Son, so that He might be the first-born among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). As we have borne the image of the earthly, so we will also bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:47-49).
  4. Everything that is true of Christ will also be true of us in some measure. Though these virtues may be very imperfect in their strength, yet they will all be there in some measure. The branches will be of the same nature as the vine. The lamp which is set on fire by heaven, will glow with the same fire from heaven. We are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. He has put upon us the seal of His Spirit.
  5. When Christ said, “Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), we will obey, and put on the same meekness and lowliness of our Lord.
  6. And that is why Christians in Scripture are also called lambs. Jesus said to Peter, “Feed My lambs” (John 21:15), and He said to His disciples, “Behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves” (Luke 10:3).
  7. The Spirit of God Himself is represented in Scripture as a dove, and dove-like qualities are what He produces in the lives of those whom He indwells.
  8. But if we are to meek and gentle as lambs and doves, how are we to fight as soldiers in Christ’s army.
    - a. The best soldiers in Christ’s army are certainly also the best Christians. They are the ones who are endowed with the greatest degree of the Lord’s strength.
    - b. And it is certainly the duty of every Christian to vigorously oppose the attacks against Christ’s kingdom and the interests of religion.
    - c. But how can these two spirits be harmonized?
    - d. First we must understand that Christian boldness is not an ungodly fierceness, such as the uncontrolled rage of animals.
    - e. It is a strength of mind, through the power of grace, which conquers the evil passions and affections of the mind, and which promotes instead a godly love which is not hindered by sinful fear or the opposition of the enemy.
    - f. It opposes both the enemy without, and the enemy within. Within, it restrains and conquers sin. Without, it stands firmly against all the attacks of the

enemy with holy calmness, meekness and good-will.

- g. Again, the same thing can be seen in Christ when He was engaged in the greatest battle that was ever fought against the powers of darkness, when there were none to stand with Him. During the time of His last sufferings, His enemies on earth and hell made their greatest attack, while He fought His finest battle.
  - h. And how did He fight? Not in fiery passion. Not in accusing them for their evil. But in not opening His mouth, but in going as a lamb to the slaughter, praying that the Father would forgive His cruel enemies because they were ignorant of what they were doing. It was not in shedding the blood of others, but in shedding His own blood.
  - i. When one man stood up to fight for Him and cut off another man's ear, Christ rebuked him and healed the man's wound. Never did Christ appear so much as a lamb, and as a dove.
  - j. Those who loose their temper and lash out with their words and their fists only show their weakness and not their strength. It may show spiritual pride, while they try and look good in the eyes of others, but it lacks true strength.
  - k. True holy boldness is a sweet flame of fire, whose heat is nothing other than Christian love. Bitterness and hatred are just the opposite. It is a spirit of meekness, gentleness and love, as Christ said, the spirit of a little humble child, of a lamb and of a dove, which promote the glory of God.
9. To sum it all up, the true gracious spirit of a Christian bears predominantly three kinds of fruit: forgiveness, love and mercy.
- a. As we see in our text tonight, and as we saw this morning, if we have the Spirit of God, we will have a disposition to forgive, and it serves as a sign that we have been forgiven ourselves. Jesus said, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14-15). Remember, we do not gain forgiveness by forgiving, but if we have experienced the forgiveness of God in our great debt to Him, we will not refuse to forgive those who have committed much smaller offenses against us.
  - b. We will also have the spirit of Christian love.
    - (i) Without it, even the very best of our works will be worth nothing (1 Cor. 13).
    - (ii) Jesus said that it is by this that all men will know that we are Christ's disciples: by our love for one another.
    - (iii) Christ said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).
    - (iv) And John tells us that if we have this love, we have truly come to know God, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death" (1 John 3:14), "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

- c. And lastly, we will have a spirit of mercy.
- (i) The psalmist writes, “The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives” (Psalm 37:21), “All day long he is gracious and lends; and his descendants are a blessing” (v. 26), “It is well with the man who is gracious and lends; he will maintain his cause in judgment” (Psalm 112:5).
  - (ii) Solomon writes, “The righteous gives and does not hold back” (Prov. 21:26).
  - (ii) James writes, “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world” (1:27).
  - (iii) And Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt. 5:7).
  - (iv) In the sheep and goat judgment of Matthew 25, this is the one thing which distinguishes the two groups.
  - (v) When Christ saves us, He puts within us a new nature. This becomes our new inclination and bent in life. It inclines us toward forgiveness, love, and mercy. As a matter of fact, these could all be reduced to one thing, namely love. Love will produce forgiveness and mercy. Love is the essence of true holiness.
  - (vi) Now we will continue to wrestle with sin until we leave the world.
  - (vii) But this should remind us that God has put within us a new nature, a nature which has definite leanings toward holiness, and we need to be cultivating these fruits to the honor and glory of Christ. We have put on the new man, therefore we should be putting on Christ’s likeness more and more.
  - (viii) If you have not put Christ on through faith in His name this evening, I would invite you on behalf of Christ to come to Him now. Reach out and take hold of His offer by faith. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh with regard to its lusts. And then these fruits of holiness will appear in you. And then you will have a well-grounded assurance that heaven is yours.
  - (ix) May the Lord give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Amen.