

Abide

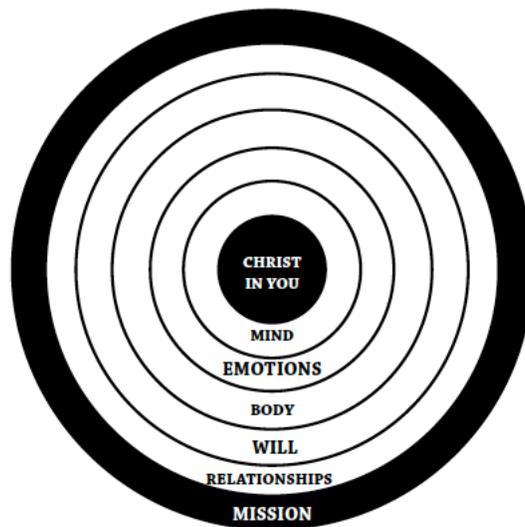
The Disciple's Relationships
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**The Disciple's Relationships
Colossians 3:1-4:1**

Good morning. If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I'm going to invite you to open with me to Colossians 3. We were in Galatians last week, one of Paul's letters. Go a few letters over to the right, and you'll come to Colossians 3. As we come to the last Sunday in this particular series called "Abide: What does it mean to abide in Christ, to be in Christ?"

We started off the first two weeks looking at what it means for us, each of us to be in Christ and Christ to be in us and how that transforms us literally transforms us from the inside out. And we have been looking at how Christ affects the way we think and affects the way we feel and affects the way we act and our bodies and affects our wills, and we see that all of that is aimed toward His mission. I want you to look at the next to last circle there—"Relationships." I want us to think today about how Christ affects our relationships with each other.



Christ In Me For Them...

Everything Christ does in me is intended to affect everyone Christ puts around me.

You see at the top of your notes there, "Christ in me for them." This is the picture that we're going to see in Colossians 3. Everything Christ does in me is intended to affect everyone Christ puts around me. Everything Christ does in me is intended to affect everyone Christ puts around me. So Christ works in me for the sake of others.

Now, we talked about, a few weeks ago, Matthew 9 and 10, we talked about how that affects the laws, it affects those in all nations for the glory of Christ. I want us to camp out

even more so, though, on how this affects our relationships in the church and how the church is a reflection of Christ in each of us.

And we're going to look at Colossians 3, really the whole chapter, and so I want us to get kind of a birds eye view, read through the chapter and then this text, I mean, it preaches itself. And so I'm just going to walk us through it, and I want you to see the truths that unfold that I think have radical implications for the way we live our lives with each other, our social lives. Look at Colossians 3 we'll start in verse 1, Paul says:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven (Col. 3:1-4:1).

Cultivating a Spiritually Transformed Social Life...

Now, here's the picture in Colossians 3. Now remember just a few weeks ago, we studied Colossians 1:27, this picture of Christ in you, the hope of glory. And what Paul is doing throughout this book is he is establishing this incredible truth, this theological foundation that Christ is in us and He is our hope of glory.

But what we see in Colossians 3 is we see a summary of what that means and then implications of what that means for the way we relate to each other and how Christ in us affects our relationships with others. And so I want you to see what Paul is showing us here when it comes down to basically cultivating a spiritually transformed social life, and I want us to think about how Christ affects our social lives, our relationships with each other in a few different ways.

Understand the wholeness you have in Christ.

First of all, in order to cultivate a spiritually transformed social life, we need to understand the wholeness that we have in Christ. Understand the wholeness that you have in Christ. Now, this is Colossians 3:1-4, which is basically a recap of what we've been studying up to this point in this series, this picture of us being raised with Christ, we have our mind set on Christ, we died and our life is now hidden with Christ and God, Christ is our life, that whole picture basically comes down two main truths that we've talked about.

Number one, we died with Christ. We died with Christ. That's what he's talking about in verse 3, he says, "You died." What does that mean? It means exactly what we saw last week, "I've been crucified with Christ." When Christ died, He died to do two things. Number one, He died for the penalty of sin. He died for the penalty of sin. And number two, He died to give power over sin. He died to overcome the penalty of sin and to overcome the power of sin. And so when you trust in Christ and you die with Him that means you no longer have to pay the penalty for sin, and the power of sin is no longer in your lives.

And not only did you die with Him, but we live in Christ. And this is the picture he's talking about here, "*Your life is now hidden with Christ in God,*" and "*Christ...is your life*" (Col 3:3-4). This is the beauty of what it means to be a follower of Christ. We are in Christ. Christ is in us. Christ is our life in a couple of different ways.

First of all, He is our life now. You heard Paul, he said, verse 3, "*Your life is now hidden with Christ in God*" (Col. 3:3), that means you have life right now in Him. It's not that we're sitting here as a group of people waiting on eternal life, we are experiencing eternal life now. This is what Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "*For me to live is,*" what? "Christ." "My whole life is summed up in who Christ is now." At the same time, the beauty of it is this is not all there is to it. There's coming a day when our life in Christ will be complete, totally complete.

Christ is our life now and He is our life forever. You see, here's the deal, yes, we have eternal life right now, but at the same time right now, Jesus Christ is seated at the right

hand of God. But there is coming a day, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 18, when He will descend from heaven with a trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will be raised, and we will be caught up with Him, and we will go to live with Him forever. Christ is coming back for you and Christ is coming back for me. He's coming back for us as followers of His, and we will live with Him forever.

This is what he said in Romans 8:30, "*Those [God] predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*" I love that verse because it literally says if you've been justified, you've been called by God, you can consider yourself glorified, it's a done deal, you don't have to worry about what's coming ahead.

Now, I want you to think about this with me, how huge this is. The wholeness we have in Christ, if Christ is our lives, and how that affects the way we relate to other people.

Let's be honest, all of us without exception, when it comes to human relationships, all of us have hurts and pain and wounds from human relationships on this earth, we all do. Whenever we come to a relationship with somebody else, we bring the hurts and wounds and pain of past relationships. And it doesn't mean that those relationships in the past were bad, maybe those relationships in the past were so wonderful, and then they were taken away from us, whether it's through death or divorce, whatever it might've been. And we bring to the table in any relationship all kinds of hurts and pains and wounds from relationships.

But the beauty of Colossians 3 is that when you trust in Christ and you die with Christ and now you live in Christ then He makes us whole and He frees us, He frees us from finding our sufficiency in relationships with others. He frees us to find our sufficiency in a relationship with Him. We have entered into the beauty of a relationship with Christ where He is literally our everything. He frees us from the wounds of the past and even the wounds of the future. He is our everything. He is our total sufficiency.

Now, this doesn't mean that all we need is Christ, we don't need each other. We've seen in our study of small groups and biblical community that God has designed us to rely on each other and depend on each other. At the same time, when we come to a relationship with each other, we have this picture of being whole, completely whole in Christ, and I don't need you to make me whole and you don't need me to make you whole, the beauty of it is Christ makes us whole, and I hope that's good news to people sitting across this room, maybe even who today are sitting with some deep wounds and deep hurts and deep pain in relationships. I want to remind you that Christ makes you whole. Christ makes you whole. It doesn't seem like it sometimes, but the beauty of Colossians 3 is that Christ makes you whole.

And this is exactly what he's talking about here. You get over to Colossians 3:11 and you see one of the summation verses of this whole chapter. And he starts talking about how there's no Greek or Jew in this picture, there's no circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, and then he says this phrase, it's a great phrase, you might underline it in your Bible, right at the end of Colossians 3:11, he says, "Christ is all," in other words, Christ is everything, and "He is in all." Talking about the church especially, He is in each of us.

So this is the picture of the Church. Each of us in the Church has Christ our everything in us. He is everything, and He is in each of us. And this frees us up to relate to each other based on the wholeness we have in Christ as individuals.

This is what a guy named Dietrich Bonhoeffer—an incredible guy who lived in Nazi Germany who wrote one of the best books I know of on Christian community called *Life Together*. It's an incredible book. Listen to what he said, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it's a brief single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this, we belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."

And basically what he goes on to talk about is an incredible picture of whatever you and I relate to each other as brothers and sisters, as a part of the family of God, we relate to each other through Christ that between you and me, I have Christ in me, you have Christ in you, we relate to each other through Christ for the sake of Christ. Our entire relationship is permeated by Christ.

Now, that is a theological foundation that we're about to see the practical implications of, but we've got to get our arms and our hearts around this. Christ is everything and He is in each of us, so we have wholeness in Him. That is a huge starting point for any relationship we have with any other human being. Understand the wholeness that we have in a relationship with Christ.

Now, based on that foundation, we dive into the rest of this passage. And what we see is in Colossians 3:9 and 10, you kind of see at the end of verse 9 and beginning of verse 10, you see an image that pervades this entire chapter. He's talking about don't lie to each other, and then he says this, "*since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self*" (Col. 3:9-10), the language here is literally, "you've changed clothes." You've taken off this set of clothes, and you've put on a whole new set of clothes. You've taken off the old self and you've put on a new self. We have taken off the old man and we've put on the new man, that's the picture here; there's been a fundamental change at the core of who we are.

And so basically from this point, he talks about how as followers of Christ who have, the new men who have Christ in us, this affects the way we live among each other.

Leave behind the habits you had before Christ.

And so it leads us to the second facet of how we cultivate a spiritually transformed social life, and it starts with leaving behind the habits that you had before Christ. He says, "You put off the old self," put off the habits you had before Christ. And what he does is, Paul, in Colossians 3:5 all the way to Colossians 3:9, he gives us two different lists, basically two different lists of habits, characteristics that are associated with the old self that we have put off, and he says you've put them off, literally he says, "We put them to death," in verse 5. It means we died to these things. We died to them completely.

And so I want us to think through some of the specifics. These lists are not exhaustive by any means, but they do give a representation of what we've put off, and I want us to think about how each of these things relates to our social lives. What I've done is tried to fill this study this morning in God's Word with questions for us to really think through in our own lives—is this prevalent in my life?

So let's look at what he says first to put to death. He says we put to death sins that destroy us. Verse 5, "*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature*" (Col. 3:5). And then he begins to list them, "*sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry*" (Col. 3:5). Now, we're not going to camp out too long here because we talked about a good number of these things a couple of weeks ago when we're talking about the disciple's body, but I do want us to see how this list that Paul gives us right here

really is a reflection of everything we've been studying, and it's a reflection of how our mind and our desires and our bodies all are affected by our spiritual lives.

The first thing he lists is sexual immorality. So what we put to death, sins that destroy us, the question I would encourage you to continually ask is, "Is my body consecrated to God?" This is the first thing Paul always lists when he's talking about sexual sin, he says sexual immorality, the picture of fornication basically, involving your body and that which does not honor God. So the question we need to constantly come back to as followers of Christ who have Christ dwelling in us is, "Is our body consecrated to God?"

And the next thing he says is impurity, "Is my mind clean before God?" Now, I want you to see how these are relating to each other. An impure mind, the picture of impurity in the way we think, is it pure, is it holy?

And then, that's the mind and the body, then we got the desires. He's got lust and evil desires back to back there, "Are my desires controlled by God?" The picture we've got here in Colossians 3:5 is desires that are out of control, desires that are running after the things in this world instead of after Christ that's the picture we've got right here. "Are my desires controlled by God or am I controlled by my lust? Am I controlled by my desire for this or that?"

And that leads to this last one, greed, which is idolatry. And the question we ask ourselves there, "Is my heart content in God?" What he's talking about in this picture of greed is you're wanting things that God has not designed for you, but you want them and you go after them, and he says that's idolatry. Our satisfaction, our joy, our desires, our minds, they are pleased with God and God alone. This is what it means for Him to be our Lord. This is what it means for Him to be the object of our worship.

And so when you see those things listed, I challenge you to think through in your life, "Is your body consecrated to God?" Is your mind pure? Is your mind holy? Are your desires under control by God? And is your heart content in God? Is He the source of your satisfaction where you're not seeking after the things of this world, you don't need the things of this world to satisfy you? Is your heart content in God? Sins that destroy us when our bodies are not used for God, when our minds become impure, when our desires our out of control and when our heart is not content in God. So that's what Paul addresses here in that first list.

But then he goes on to sins not only that destroy us but sins that damage others. And what we see is the shift in this next list to sins that affect our relationship with others directly. I want you to listen to what he lists there. He says in verse 8 - we'll come back to verse 6 and 7 in just a second. He says, "*Now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other*" (Col. 3:8-9). So he gives us a list there of things that we need to put off, literally, "put to death." We need to kill these things in our lives. What are they? Well, let's ask these questions.

First, "Do I harbor bitterness?" First thing he lists is anger. And the picture there in the original language in the New Testament is basically this deep seeded anger that's often below the surface that we just have an attitude of anger. And it's not talking about - we're about to get to the next one, rage, which talks about outbursts of anger, but basically this is something that happens below the surface that when we do get in certain situations, it comes out and it basically kind of rears its head, but it's this attitude of anger in us. So, "Do I harbor bitterness," I think is a question we need to ask ourselves.

Then second, based on that, “Am I quick to anger?” The word here for rage is literally sudden bursts of anger, to have short temper where anger comes up quickly in me, that's the picture of rage. Don't think it too extreme as to be beyond the bounds of where you might be, this is exactly where many of us are. “Am I quick to anger?”

Third question, “Do I have hostility toward anyone?” The word he uses is malice, literally, “ill will” toward someone that you don't want the best for other people. I'm guessing many if not all of us are familiar with the temptation sometimes in a relationship to actually want someone else not to succeed, to be happy when they don't succeed and to almost be a little disappointed when they do. The Bible has a word for this, it's called sin, and it is extremely destructive in the church—extremely destructive. “Do I have hostility toward anyone or do I want the best for the people around me?” Is there anyone in your life this morning that you have hostility toward? This is not the fruit of Christ in you. This is not the fruit of Christ in you.

Next, “Do I ever speak negatively about anyone?” Slander, literally saying that which does not build up others' character. The word is actually “blasphemy,” and we think about blasphemy as dishonoring the name of God, but what happens when we dishonor the names of others around us? It's blasphemy is what he says, it's slander. It's using your words and your tongue to not build up others' character. “Do I ever speak negatively about anyone?” The danger with this question is this picture of slander that is so serious in the word is masqueraded in the church in the form of, “I want to share this with you because I know you'll want to pray for this person.” On the contrary, do not let anything come out of your mouth that is not useful for building up others according to their needs in Christ Jesus that's a command in Ephesians 4. Let's not justify gossip in the church by spiritual prayer requests. It misses the whole point. Don't miss the danger here.

We talked about sexual immorality, lust, evil desires, impurity, we know those are sin. One of my favorite preachers from the past, a guy named G. Campbell Morgan said, “This list right here is called sins in good standing.” And what he meant by that is we are easily outraged at the other sins, much like we were a couple weeks ago, I shared statistics with you and you think, “Oh, I cannot believe that sexual immorality is so rampant in the church,” but somewhere along the way, I'm concerned that we have become almost unsurprised by bad attitude in the church, by gossip in the church, by tempers in the church. Someone can raise their temper in a church business meeting and we call it righteous indignation; these are sins in good standing, so to speak. And we need to realize, yes, sexual sin - and we saw this a couple weeks ago - it is different, it is particularly severe, but at the same time, we cannot get to the point where we become casual with sin in the church especially in our relationships with each other. We've got to guard this. “Do I ever speak negatively about anyone?”

Next, “Are my words ever offensive to others?” He says, “Filthy language from your lips.” Filthy language from your lips, are your words offensive? Literally, “coarse humor,” filth in your communication, are our words offensive to others? I remind you, James 3,

The tongue...is...a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out

of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be (Jas. 3:6-10).

That is a stern picture of the power of the tongue. Is what we say offensive to others? I remind you, Matthew 12:36, every careless word that men speak, they will render account for it in the day of judgment. I don't know if that's you, but that keeps me quiet right there. "Every careless word that men speak, they will render account for it in the day of judgment," Matthew 12:36. "Are my words ever offensive to others?"

And finally, "Do I ever misrepresent the truth?" "Do I ever misrepresent the truth?" He says, "Do not lie to each other." Do not deceive each other. Don't even use true words in a way that you twist to deceive, to hide, something else. He says, "Do not lie to each other." We see all over the New Testament, Satan is the author of lies, that Satan is the author of deception. The Spirit of God who now lives in us is the Spirit of what? Spirit of truth. So he says, "When you lie, you are cooperating with Satan. When you tell the truth, you are cooperating with the Spirit." And the question we've got to ask each other this morning is who are we cooperating with? "Do I ever misrepresent the truth?"

You see how these things that don't seem like near as big a deal as sexual immorality creep in. And Paul says, "Put them off. Put them to death." And here's why we put them to death. Number one - and this goes back to verses 6 and 7 - because they bring God's judgment. Listen to what he said in verse 6, "*Because of these, the wrath of God is coming*" (Col. 3:6). If that's not motivation to really get serious about sins, I'm not sure what is. The wrath of God is coming. God hates these things. God has said Himself in His holy character; He is set against these things. Arthur Pink said, "God's wrath is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It's the displeasure and indignation of divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin."

God takes these things very seriously, and so He says in the church you do too because they bring God's judgment and second, because they betray God's salvation, and this is really the crux of what Paul is saying. He says in verse 7, "*You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived*" (Col. 3:7), "but now things are different." What Paul is saying is, "This is the way you used to live, but Christ came in you, Christ redeemed you, He's freed you from these things, why are you still living in them?"

And I think this part is particularly important for us to hear. For Paul, he goes on, he says, "You are being renewed in knowledge in the image of your Creator. You died to these things, you put them off, that's the way you used to live. You've been saved from those things." And I cringe whenever I hear people in the church look at these different things, whether it's lying or deception or whether it's gossip or whether it's anger or whether it's tempers, whatever it may be, and we say words like, "Well, that's just the way I am." I just used to always struggle with that, "It's just the way I am." And I know that different ones of us in this room, we all struggle with different things, and you may struggle with things I don't struggle with and vice versa. But the beauty of the gospel is that we have been set free from the old man, we are not that way, we died with Christ, now we live with Him.

"*Don't you know,*" Romans 6, "*that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead...[you] too may live a new life*" (Rom. 6:3-4). God help us not to give Satan so much credit as to start to believe him when he says, "We are just that way." You are not that way anymore. You are in Christ, Christ is in you, He transforms who we are.

So we can't become at any point content with not letting these things be put to death and not working to say, "Christ, I want you to enable me to put these things to death." He has. It goes back to the beginning, "He has died to pay the penalty of our sin and to give you power over sin." Let's let Christ do what He has intended to do in us in the way we relate to other people.

And so I challenge you to go back and to look at those questions. What needs to be put to death in your life when it comes to the habits of the old man that we still hold on to? I'm not at all saying this is easy, but I am saying this is God's glorious design for renewing us into the image of Christ. We put off those habits. So we understand the wholeness we have in Christ and leave behind those habits.

Live in the character you received from Christ.

And then we live in the character that we received from Christ. Christ did not put off the old man in us and then just kind of leave us hanging over here, He put the new man in us and He now lives in us. And that's what Paul's talking about when you get to Colossians 3:12. Listen to these words, "*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with*" (Col. 3:12), and he starts to give another list now. So he says, "You put off those clothes and you put on these clothes." And the words he uses to describe us are amazing. Did you hear that? "Chosen, wholly, dearly loved." This picture of the fact that God has called your name, the follower of Christ not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you or right where you're sitting, the God of the universe has called you by name. Holy, literally, He has "set you apart for Himself."

I mentioned being at a wedding yesterday and seeing the bride and groom unite their life, they are set apart from the world for each other, that's the picture here. Holiness, being set apart for God.

Now, what would we think if we were ever at a wedding, we see this set apart for each other and then the groom goes off and leaves the wedding with the maid of honor, would that make sense? Absolutely not. Then how can we who are set apart for God Himself continue to live with the things of this world. Paul says, "You are set apart for Him. You belong to Him. You're holy and dearly loved. He pours out His love on you." This is a picture of absolute and total grace. We are permeated by the grace of Christ.

But here's what's really exciting, not only are we permeated by God's grace and the grace of Christ, but what's interesting is you look in the Gospels and all three of these different terms, chosen, holy and beloved, all three of them are used to describe Christ. We don't have time to go look at each of them, but Luke 23:35, "He is the chosen one." Mark 1:24 and Luke 4:34, "He's the holy one." Matthew 3:17, "He is my Son whom I love." These are terms that are used to describe Christ and now they're used to describe us, isn't that incredible that Christ's grace so fills us that we do become hidden with Christ in God, that he really is our life?

And what this means is, what this means is that His character is put in us and that affects the way we relate to each other. So not only are we recipients of His grace, but we are reproducers of His grace. And now you and I are channels of the grace of Christ, demonstrators of the character of Christ in the way we relate to each other.

Live in the character you receive from Christ, first we extend the grace of Christ to others. The grace of Christ flows from us through others. And then he gives us this list of what we clothe ourselves with—compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with each other, forgiving each other (Col. 3:12-13).

And so let's ask ourselves these questions. Number one, "Do I show great mercy to others?" This picture of compassion, heart of compassion, tenderness, those are all summed up in that word in the original language of the New Testament. "Do I show His mercy to others?" "Do I have," can you describe your heart as a heart of compassion for people around you?

Second question based on this word kindness, "Does my kindness spur others towards Christ?" "Does my kindness spur others towards Christ?" The picture is the grace of Christ literally just infiltrating your entire being so that you don't have these harsh feelings and you don't have these roots of bitterness that the grace of Christ flows from you.

Third question, "Am I selfless in my relationships with others?" The word is "humility," which is really interesting when you look at pagan literature during this particular time period. Humility was not seen as an admirable virtue; instead, everything revolved around pride and domination. I think if we were honest, we live in a culture that's very similar to that today. We exalt those who beat out the other guy, and we have this desire to beat out the next person, the next family, whatever that may be. And he says in the middle of a culture of pride and domination, you put on humility. This is what you do, you put yourself - let yourself down for the sake of others and for the advancement of others. "Am I selfless in my relationship with others?"

Next question, "Do I relate to others gently?" "Do I relate to others gently?" And he talks about gentleness, which I hope we will not mistake for weakness. This is not weakness, this is strength and control. I was preaching this week and a guy came up to me that I had known for a long time and haven't seen in at least a year, maybe a couple of years. And he's one of those guys that as soon as he walks in a room, things just change. This guy is so gentle. He is strong. He is one of the sharpest guys I know in the Word, and in the ministry, he is so sharp, but he just displays gentleness. "Do I relate to others gently?"

Next, "Am I patient with others?" This word right here literally means, "a long temper;" instead of a short temper, a long temper. You bear through even being provoked without responding. "Am I patient with others?"

And related to that, the next question, "Do I endure a hardship in relationships with others?" Do I endure a hardship? Literally, Paul says, "Bear with each other. Put up with each other." When things don't work out quite like you expected in a relationship with this person then bear with that, endure that. It's what Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 4:12. He says, "When I'm persecuted, we endure." We bear that. We walk through that. "Do I endure hardship in relationships with others?"

Next question, "Do I forgive others completely?" In other words, not only are we not supposed to retaliate, but we're supposed to remove any root of bitterness and forgive those who offended us and forgive them completely just as we desire Christ and just as Christ does forgive us. Is there any root of unforgiveness in your life this morning in a relationship with someone else? Paul says that's not the character of Christ; forgive as you have been forgiven.

You see, I mean, these things sound simple on the surface, but they are thick, they are not easy. They are radically different from the culture we live in, and they can only be the products of Christ in us.

Which leads to this last one, "Does genuine love permeate my relationships with others?" He says in verse 14, "*Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity*" (Col. 3:14). He basically sums things up and says it all revolves around love.

If you try to do all of these things without love then you'll just be legalistic in your relationships with others and you'll be trying to do these things. It's love that permeates them all. It's love that's the foundation of them all.

It's why Paul in the middle of his discussion of the divisions among spiritual gifts and people in the church in 1 Corinthians 12-14 gives us that chapter in the middle, and he says, "The greatest of these is love." Love sums up the whole picture.

So Christ is in us and pours out His grace on us to extend His grace through us. Are we channels of His grace? Are you and I channels of His grace this morning in these ways? We extend the grace of Christ. Then he goes on, verse 15, "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace*" (Col. 3:15). We promote the peace of Christ among others. We want to build up others in a way that shows His peace and displays His peace. We want His peace to rule the church is what Paul is saying, that Christ's peace should rule His body, that it should guide His body.

I think we all know the danger of missing out on this, and I'm guessing many of us who have maybe grown up in church, have been a part of times in church where the peace of Christ was not ruling. He says, "You let the peace of Christ rule. Let Christ in each of you affect the peace you have with each other and as you walk through this life together." We promote the peace of Christ among others.

And what's really interesting, he says, "And be thankful." And this verse - and you might even circle it - at the end of verse 15, he says, "Be thankful." Into verse 16 he says, "We sing spiritual songs with gratitude," you know, I'd circle it there, and at the end of verse 17, he says, "*giving thanks to God the Father through him*" (Col. 3:17). What we've got is an emphasis on a heart of gratitude, a heart of thanks, a heart that's overwhelmed with thanks to God for all He has given. When that is there, it has a huge affect on how we relate to each other when we're thankful. It's a big truth that we need to see, that thankfulness and gratitude to God is very much intertwined with the peace we have with each other. Promote the peace of Christ among others.

We share the Word of Christ with others. Verse 16—not just let the peace of Christ rule—"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). "The Word of Christ fills the church," he said. You share the Word, let the Word permeate your relationships with each other. "You teach the Word," he says. "You admonish with the Word," which literally means sometimes, "to correct" each other with the Word, to let the Word be the basis of your relationship with each other and then you sing the Word. This is the theology of singing here, sing the Word, sing about God's goodness and His greatness as revealed in His word, you do this together. You share the Word of Christ with others.

And then we honor the name of Christ before others. He says, "*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*" (Col. 3:17). And the picture here is that because we are united with Christ, because we died with Him and live with Him and Christ is our life that means His name is on us, we belong to Him, and His reputation is shown in us. And the picture here is what you do; you represent the name of Christ. That's what he talks about in 1 Peter 2:12, he says, "Show the honor of the name of Christ among the Gentiles." It's what he says in Romans 2, "Because of your disobedience, God's name is being blasphemed among the nations because of you." We've got to realize what's at stake here. We carry the name of Jesus Christ and the way we relate to others.

And this is why - we're about to talk about wives, husbands, children, parents and the way we interact in specific relationships. This is why, to connect the dots here... Between our relationships with each other, our marriages, our families and our relationships with each other have a huge affect on the mission, to get question after question after question in the Middle East about marriage and abortion and sexual immorality and all of these things that are so prevalent in relationships in our culture, and they say, "Is this what Christianity represents?"

We need to look deeply at what it means for Christ to affect our relationships with each other and our marriages and our homes and this whole picture because the name of Christ is being displayed to the nations through His people; that's the way He's designed it. And if we take this lightly, that it may be said at us, Romans 2, that "God's name is blasphemed among the nations because of you." We've got to look at this. We honor the name of Christ before the world. We honor the name of Christ in Birmingham. We honor the name of Christ in all nations.

And what Paul does is he goes and he starts to talk about individual relationships. And what you'll notice is throughout these verses that follow, he always talks about how everything is couched in the Lord. Everything in submission to His name, everything under the authority of His name. That every relationship that I have, my relationship with my wife, my relationship with my son and son to be, my relationship with you, my relationship with those who don't know Christ, my relationship with people who work on staff at Brook Hills, the whole picture, it's all dominated by the Lordship of Christ. Every relationship is under the Lordship of Christ.

So how does that affect those specific relationships? Paul dives into them, and he says, "*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*" (Col. 3:18). The picture is wives love submissively. Love submissively. Now, we don't have time to unpack this completely, but just suffice to say at this point, this is not a picture of inferiority between women and men; that's not even implied at all. The picture we see all over the New Testament is the gospel giving much freedom to women that they did not necessarily have in that culture.

The picture is a wife who is united in a relationship with a husband, an intimate relationship with him where she honors and follows his leadership. It's the same word that's used to describe how Christ is in submission to the Father. It's the same word that describes how members in the body are in submission to each other; it's a beautiful picture here.

And it's the picture we've got, "*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*" (Col. 3:18). It's still under the Lordship of Christ. It's not that your husband leads you to dishonor God that you have that obligation to follow, it's all under His Lordship, but this is the way God has designed this picture that wives love submissively.

But that really counts on the fact that husbands love sacrificially. And this is really the revolutionary part of Colossians 3; it's the revolutionary part of Ephesians 5. It was no surprise for anybody to hear the words, "Wives submit to your husbands." It was shocking to hear the words, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" (Eph. 5:25). "Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them" (Col. 3:19). "You lead them not by dictatorship or your lordship over them, you lead them by serving. You lead them by giving your life for them just as Christ gave His life to the church," that's the comparison.

Husbands, the bar is raised very high here to love our wives in such a way that they would want to submit, not being harsh but being loving, being caring, always looking out for their

best interests, looking for their ultimate good, living completely unselfishly, that's the picture. You love sacrificially, and they go together. They go together this picture of love between a husband and a wife. The picture of a husband who is laying down his life for his wife, and a wife who is submitting to his leadership in that picture, what an incredible, beautiful picture here in Colossians 3.

People have a tendency to say, "Well, that verse 18 about wives, that's just cultural, that was for them, it's not for us." Well, if we're going to say verse 18 is cultural, we have to say verse 19 is cultural, which I don't think we want to do that. I don't think it's a cultural thing for husbands to love their lives. So let's look at what Christ has designed for families, let's give ourselves to that picture.

Before we go to the next one, children and parenting, I just want to pause for a second. I know there are married couples all across this room. I think there's a reason husbands and wives are mentioned before children and parents, it seems kind of natural when you think about it. I'm convinced one of the greatest needs for kids in our culture today is not so much a good mom or a good dad, I think maybe a greater need for kids in our culture today is to see good husbands and good wives, and we can't try to separate the two. We need to work to be good husbands, to be good wives, for the sake of kids, which come next.

Children: obey completely. Children: obey completely. Parents are loving this verse, "*Obey your parents in everything*" (Col. 3:20). It doesn't leave room for much, everything. Some of you are going to use that at lunch today. "*Obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord*" (Col. 3:20). Again, all of this in submission of the Lord. There are certainly situations where parents do lead their kids to do things that dishonor God, and there's not an obligation there to do things that don't fall under the Lordship of Christ, but the picture is children obey completely.

And then it says, "*Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged*" (Col. 3:21). And the word there can be translated parents; it's a picture to parents. Parents: encourage continually. Encourage continually. The picture is don't discourage your child so they are embittered. The home is not a place of discouragement and battle, the home is a refuge from the discouragement and battle of this world.

And I would just pause at this point to say, you know, a couple of weeks ago it would've been my mom and dad's anniversary. And I called mom on a Sunday morning at my office before I came down here and just kind of wept anew with her as we thought about how dad affected my life and affected her life, and I can say with confidence that my dad was by far my biggest fan. And I am indebted to him for being my biggest fan. The greatest joys that I now experience in life have that little tinge of emptiness simply because my biggest fan is not there to see them with me. Encourage your kids continually.

And then he goes to talk about slaves and masters. Again, we don't have time to get into this whole picture. If you really want to look at how the gospel addresses slavery look at the book of Philemon, which is actually a book about a runaway slave and it's really interesting. And we're not going to dive into all that this morning, but the picture here is really a theology of work that in light of the fact that that's not the cultural picture here today, I think there's a lot to be said here about what it means for employees first to work wholeheartedly, to know that your work is for Christ, to know that you honor Christ and it's Christ who gives ultimate reward. It's Christ who is just even when you are treated unjustly at work. It's Christ who is just. And for employers to lead humbly, to remember that you have a Master, too. Remember that there is one to whom you will stand accountable to for your work.

So What Now?

This is the picture of how Christ infuses our relationships. I want to invite you to look through this Word that we have studied this morning, and I want to invite you to look at these questions. "So what now? Identify two to four facets of your social life that you need Christ to transform." And just identify some of those things and then somebody who you can ask to pray with you this week for spiritual transformation in these areas.

And then I want to invite you to spend some time in prayer, asking God to empower you, to leave behind the old habits and to put on the new man and to live in the character of Christ that is in you. None of these things are unattainable, they are all attainable. And they're not attainable by your effort; they're attainable by the effort of Christ in you and the character of Christ in you. And so I want to invite you to spend some time reflecting and praying through these facets very specifically in each of your lives.

And let me say this one more thing before we begin to reflect, I know there are people in this room this morning who have come here and you have never experienced wholeness in Christ, the kind of wholeness that comes in dying to sin and living in Christ. And if that's the case then during the time, I would invite you to, in your heart, to say, "Christ, I need you to forgive me of my sins, and I want to enter into the wholeness of a relationship with you. I want to take that faith step," the most important faith step we will ever make in our lives. I want to invite you to do that during this time, while others are thinking through these different facets of their lives. Maybe the picture for many of you this morning is to think, "My entire life for the first time, I give to Christ." You spend time reflecting and praying and then we'll close out our time.

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