

Goal #3: Become More Like Christ Every Day (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] And Brett. Ronald Reagan was my favorite president. Of his many strengths, he was the great communicator.

One of my favorite Reagan quotes is this. The most terrifying words of the English language are, I'm from the government and I'm here to help. One of the most needed reminders in election years was Reagan's quote of Thomas Jefferson.

Reagan said, Thomas Jefferson said, a government big enough to give you everything you want is strong enough to take everything you have. And that's a socialistic government.

One of Reagan's, what I think one of his greatest quotes, one of his most admirable quotes, comes from his farewell address at the end of his eight-year presidency.

He said, whatever else history may say about me when I'm gone, I hope it will record that I appealed to your best hopes, not your worst fears, to your confidence rather than your doubts.

[1 : 13] We're going to look at a passage of Scripture this morning where Paul appeals to our best hopes and our confidence, if we are Christians, united to Jesus Christ by faith.

It's found in Colossians chapter 3. If you've been here the last three weeks, you know we've started this new year with a study of Colossians 3, verses 1 through 17.

I'm calling it God's goals for you, not just this year, but this hour, this day, this year, and really every year.

I want us to look at it again. God's ultimate goal, summarized in one verse. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

And what that means is that God is working in the life of every Christian through everything that happens. We did a study in my Sunday school class this morning to point out God is working through your spouse, or put it a different way.

[2 : 26] God is using you in the life of your spouse to help him or her grow in the development of Christlike character. God uses everything, good and bad, strengths and weaknesses, all kinds of people.

But God's goal in your life and mine as his children is to shape and mold us so that we'll be more and more like Jesus in terms of our character.

Now Colossians 3 helps us see some of the ways that God works to accomplish this. We're looking at this passage in terms of three goals that God has for us.

Number one, be mindful of who you are in Christ. We've got to know who we are by virtue of our faith, our union, our oneness with Jesus, what that means for us.

Goal two, don't be who you are apart from Christ. Don't be who you are according to the desires of your sinful nature. We've looked at that for two weeks.

[3 : 29] Let's start now looking at goal three. Become more like Christ every day. I want us to look this morning just at verses 12 through 14 of Colossians 3.

Let's read it together. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive.

And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. What we're going to start looking at today is how this passage shows us why we must cooperate with God as He works to make us more like Jesus every day.

First, we are God's special people. If we're Christians, and that's a big if, if we're Christians, if we are trusting in Him, united to Him, one with Him, by virtue of our union with Jesus, we are God's special people.

Look at how Paul describes it in verse 12. God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. This is the reason why I said this passage appeals to our best hopes and confidence as Christians united to Christ.

[5 : 15] Paul is telling us who we are in Christ to motivate us to put forth the effort to cooperate with the Spirit of God who indwells us and actually develop Christian character.

Let's look at what he's talking about here. We're God's special people. Why? Why would I say that? Well, we're God's chosen people. God's chosen ones in verse 12.

It's translated, we have a lot of different translations every time we gather. Some of you have one that'll say, the elect of God. I want to take a quick look at how Paul describes God's gracious work of election throughout his letters.

You know, Paul does this a lot. Paul emphasizes how God works in us unilaterally. God chooses us.

He regenerates us. He gives us the ability to believe. Faith is a gift from God, Ephesians 2, 8 and 9 tells us. Well, let's think about how God goes about this.

[6 : 26] First, we were chosen before we were ever born. In Ephesians 1 and verse 4, Paul writes, he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

Before we could ever do anything that might possibly make God want to choose us, he already had. Before the foundation of the world, before he created anything, before we were ever even a possibility, God chose us in Christ to be his children.

Charles Spurgeon described what we all know is true. He said, God must have chosen me before I came into the world. He certainly would not have done so afterward.

You know, there's some of us probably might reword that and say that our spouse chose me before I actually lived with him or her because if they had to live with me first, they wouldn't have chosen me.

We were chosen before we ever did or thought anything before the foundation of the world. Number two, we were chosen according to God's grace and purpose, not because of anything we had or would have done.

[7 : 46] Why did God choose who he chose? Why did God choose you? Why did he choose me? Within him, according to his gracious choice, according to his love, according to his purpose or his plan.

Look at how Paul says this to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

It's just within God to do this according to his grace and his purpose. Now, third thing I want us to see, we were chosen and called by God to respond to the gospel.

Some people have a problem with the doctrine of election, but I heard a great theologian say one time, that if you're a Christian, you believe the Bible is the word of God, you have to believe in election.

Rudy Gray said that. I'm serious. And it's true. You can't say, I don't believe anything that the Bible teaches without saying, I reject what the Bible is teaching.

[9 : 19] Now, you may have a different kind of way of looking at it, understanding it, interpreting it, but you've got to believe it. But some people can go to seed, go too far in dwelling on God's sovereignty to the neglect of what the Bible says in many other places about we are responsible to repent of our sin and put our faith in Jesus and call upon Him to save us.

God's choosing and our believing, they're not opposed to one another. There's a lot of mystery in it, but they go hand in hand.

There's no stronger statement in the Bible than Romans chapter 9 on the sovereignty of God, predestination, election, and then the next chapter, Romans 10.

There's no stronger statement in the Bible that whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. And it goes on to say, we have a responsibility to take the gospel to people throughout the world.

And if we don't take the gospel, they won't hear. If they don't hear, how can they believe? How can they be saved if they don't hear? So God is sovereign in salvation. Election is true.

[10 : 35] We are responsible to believe the gospel, to turn from our sin, to trust Jesus, to call upon him to save us. They go together.

And what I want to see here, we were chosen and called by God to respond to the gospel. Look at how Paul says this in 1 Thessalonians 1. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you.

How do you know that? Here's the answer to it. Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction, they were changed by the word of God.

That's how they knew, Paul knew, that they'd been chosen because they believed, they trusted. God did this supernatural work in them and they were never the same.

I want you to think, we are God's chosen people if we're Christians. You are one of God's special people. You are right now.

[11 : 38] God gracious chose you to be his child before the foundation of the world. It had nothing to do with who you are or what you have or ever would do.

It was all of God's grace and God's love. But then God worked in the people that he put in your life. He worked in all the life circumstances to enable you to hear the gospel and then respond to the gospel by being convicted of your sin, changing your mind about how you're living, turning from your sin and trusting Jesus and calling on him to save you.

We're God's chosen special people. But that's not all it says. We're also God's holy people. The basic bare bone definition of holiness is to be set apart.

When God chose us, he also set us apart as his special people. You are in the sight of God right now. Not because of who you are or what you've done, but in spite of who you are or what you've done.

If you're one with Jesus and God looks at you, the penalty for your sin all sin, past, present, and future has been paid, Jesus paid the penalty when he died on the cross.

[13 : 09] When God looks at you, the perfect, righteous life of Jesus is credited to you. You're God's special person, chosen by him, set apart by him to be his.

But, as we're going to see in a little bit, today and next week, God didn't just set us apart to be his special people.

He set us apart to live like, act like, his special people. We'll see that in a moment. Then look at this. We are God's beloved or God's dearly loved people.

If you're a Christian, you're the object of God's special love. Just about every time Paul talks about God's choosing or electing us, he attributes it to God's love or God's grace.

John, the apostle, says that it's because of God's love that we are children of God. Look at how he said this in 1 John 3. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are.

[14 : 25] It is special. We need to understand this. The God who created all that is, almighty God, chose us, set us apart, loves us.

He's made us his children. But God wants us to do, now we need to think about that and let it sink in and think about the privilege that we have.

God wants us to do more than just sit around and think about it. Don't just sit around and think about how special you are.

He wants us to live like his special people every day by becoming more and more like Christ. He wants us to become more and more holy and pure and develop the character qualities we're going to look at in the rest of this passage.

The rest of this passage shows us what it looks like to become more like Jesus every day. Number two, we can live like God's special people. We can, as Christians indwell by the Spirit of God, we can live like God's special people.

[15 : 36] It's a growing process, but we can. Paul describes what it means to live like God's special people. And the rest of this chapter, really, and in on the chapter four, we'll look at verses 12 through 14 now under this heading.

Here's the heading. Let the love of Christ fill you. We can live like God's special people in the first way. We need to let the love of Christ fill us.

Look at verse 14. And above all these, all the things he's been talking about, in verse 12, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another.

And above all this, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. All of these character qualities, these virtues that I just read, verses 12 and 13, they are demonstrations of love.

You really will think, say, that you love your spouse, your child, your friend. You'll be compassionate. You'll bear with them in good times and bad.

[16 : 50] You'll forgive. Love is what holds them all together. Paul says that love binds them together in perfect harmony.

They all go together. You can't pick and choose. It's like when Paul talks along this same line in his letter to the Galatians, he describes Christian character in terms of the fruit of the Spirit.

Well, fruit of the Spirit is singular. But he says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They all go together. You can't pick and choose which one you'll focus on, try to develop to the neglect of the other.

Let me give you an example. If Lisa is sick or when she's sick, I do show her compassion. And I brought that out in the first service when she was sitting right there and I asked her, am I not compassionate when you are sick?

She said I was. If she's sick enough to be in the bed, I'll get whatever she needs to drink, medicine, put it on the nightstand there. If you need anything, let me know I am compassionate.

[18 : 09] But after a day or two, I'm not very patient. And what started off being very kind, when are you going to do it yourself?

You know, you got to get stronger, you know, suck it up, it's time, you know. You see, honestly, you're everybody here is like me in your own way.

Honestly, there are times I can pat myself on the back about one quality, two, some situations, but not really care that I'm not all that kind in another situation.

Or not really be concerned and work on developing more patience. And what Paul wants us to understand is that is not acceptable.

You can't be a godly person on one hand and a jerk on the other. We're supposed, as Christians, indwelt by the Spirit of God, develop, work on, becoming like Jesus in all of these qualities that he perfectly embodies, that we see him demonstrating in his earthly life in the Gospels.

[19 : 41] I want us to start looking at what it looks like for the love of Christ to fill us. We're not going to finish it today, but we're talking about we can live like God's special people. The first thing, we need to let the love of Christ fill us, which means it will control us and have an effect in a lot of different ways.

Here's how it's going to have an effect in the first way. Love will unite us with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Now look at verse 11. If you've been very careful to follow along in this whole section of Colossians, you've thought to yourself, he skipped verse 11.

We're coming to it now. Verse 11. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, a lowly, despised, godless people, slave free, but Christ is all and in all.

The groups mentioned here, here's the point. They were different in race, in class, social class, and in culture, in nationality, in religion.

We understand such differences, don't we? We live in a very diverse world, country, community even. All kinds of different people we rub shoulders with, work with, live near all the time.

[21 : 17] There's much racial tension in this country today. We're aware of it. I sometimes think, and others do, who comment on this kind of stuff, that there's even more tension between social classes in this country.

Now, during election years, many politicians seem to try to make these tensions worse by focusing on every single thing that divides us to the neglect of any good thing that unites us.

But among God's people, we are called to focus on, major on things that unite us with the different kinds of races, cultures, and social classes of people that are around us.

We as Christians, we have two major points of unity that we need to understand, be aware of, and then live out. Number one, we are really all members of one race, the human race.

We are all people, red, yellow, black, and white. We are all created in the image of God. And we are all descendants of the original couple, Adam and Eve.

[22 : 48] That makes us not so different in the big scheme of things. And then that's just general. That's just living life in this world.

Everybody you see, we're a part of one big race, the human race. We are all, every one, created in the image of God, which makes us of all equal worth and value and so forth.

We all descend from the same original couple, Adam and Eve. There is a basic human unifying factor that we ought to understand, embrace, and make as much of as we can in the world in general.

But in the church, among God's people, as Christians, we're all members of one family, God's family. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we, with every other Christian, we became brothers and sisters, spiritually speaking.

God is our Father. We are His children. All Christians in this world. Now, let's try to think about a unifying factor or force.

[24 : 05] One of the most unifying forces in this world today is sports. I am amazed at the power of sports teams, what it does to bring diverse people together.

I often read about college football, my favorite sport to watch and read about and know something about. I read a lot of things, articles and so forth that talks about the inner workings of teams, not just Clemson.

We'll talk about Clemson. What amazes me is all that different group of guys, different races, different socioeconomic backgrounds, different cultural stuff they bring.

But when they come to that team and they become one, they become a Clemson Tiger, everything that you read and observe, they talk about being brothers.

These grown, athletic men talk about loving one another. They talk about having one another's back.

[25 : 26] If you look at that whole team, they're just so different. They look, think, different. They come from different backgrounds. But they are a great example, models of unity in diversity.

diversity. If that could happen in a sport, on a team, shouldn't we as Christians in the church, shouldn't we be able to do better with the Spirit of God indwelling all of us?

The church should be the greatest model of unity and diversity in the world, in the country. But it is not.

And there's a lot of differences, a lot of reasons why, not all of them bad. But we're not. Let's just look at who we are right now.

If you look around this room, just this particular room, we're very different. Education, wealth, job type, personal interests, family backgrounds.

[26 : 49] We're different. But our common commitment to Christ, our common faith in Him, should bring us together as brothers and sisters who embrace one another as brothers and sisters.

Now, I don't want you to think I'm talking about some kind of pie in the sky type stuff. Paul understood that this list of people, they were very different.

And as in the church, as Christians, they embraced one another. They loved one another. They were united. He's talking about it in Christ. But they were still different.

Even in your family. If you've got more than one sibling, you are probably closer to one than the other. You love them both.

If you've got a whole bunch of them, you probably don't even like one of them. I mean, you think about it. When you get together at Christmas, Thanksgiving, you've got a bunch of people there, you know, aunts, uncles, all these cousins.

[27 : 56] And you really do love one another. You go to war with one another. But there's some of them you really love. And there's some of them you like. And there's some of them, I don't care if I ever see them. In this church, being who we're supposed to be, there's going to be some people, your brother and sister, that you love, you're super close to.

There's going to be some that you like to see and speak to and, you know, talk a little bit to. There's some, if your path never crossed, no big deal.

That's the reality of being different. But as Christians in the church, in the kingdom of God, while we're not as close to everybody, you can't be.

While we do recognize differences and we do some things differently, there should be this common bond of love, of common faith in Christ that enables us to truly look at one another and love, care, hope, seek the best for.

Embrace one another. Look out for one another. Now, is that true for you? For some people, it certainly is.

[29 : 22] For some people, your church family is truly your Christian, spiritual family, and you look around and these are my brothers and sisters.

I know some of them better than I know others, but I'm here and I'm a part of it. But everybody's not.

I want to ask you, do you have the kind of love that allows you to look beyond the differences you see in this room and truly embrace everybody you see as a brother or sister?

Or, do you look around and see all the differences and you really only embrace those who think and look like you?

the love of Christ. When He fills us, He will help us to work on truly being a family with our Christian brothers and sisters.

[30 : 41] But let's think about outside the church for a moment. Do you really believe that people of different races, classes, and cultures are created in the image of God just like you?

Do you ask God, at least ask Him, to help you to treat all the different kinds of people in your life with worth, with value, with a certain amount of dignity because they are a fellow human being, your equal human being?

Let's go one step further. You look at these different type of people around you in this community. It's not only being created in the image of God, but being loved by God.

Do you ever even think about some of these people as someone for whom Christ died? And do you ever think that some of the people who are different, who are odd, who are difficult, but they're in your life, they're in some of your worlds, do you ever think maybe God put them there for you to embrace and share the gospel with and show them love?

When the love of God is active in our lives, we will be able, it may be hard, but we'll be able to find common ground with people who are different from us, especially when they are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

[32 : 35] We won't let racial and cultural and class differences be barriers to our developing relationships with them.

Now next week we're going to look at how Christian love will enable us to live like God's people with those who are closer to us, how love will enable us to bear with our brothers and sisters in Christ, be compassionate, show kindness, these kind of things.

And we're going to also look how Christian love will enable us to forgive people, not to hold grudges, not to be bitter, but to forgive people just as God has forgiven us.

But I want to conclude this morning by looking at the first phrase of verse 12. He says, put on. Verse 12, put on then as God's chosen and so forth and so on.

Put on. Some translations say clothe yourselves. What he wants to see is this is a present tense command. It means to put on and keep on putting on these character qualities.

[33 : 48] Our developing humility and kindness is something we're supposed to work at every day in just an ongoing effort.

spirit. It's not, it's a mindset. It's a lifestyle. And we can live and love people this way because we are God's chosen, holy, and beloved people.

God has put his spirit in us to give us the desire and the ability to live like his people. So here's how I want to end it. Do you see signs that God is working in you this way?

Do you see signs that the love of God is at work in you toward people as we're talking about?

If we're truly Christians we should see some signs. If you don't see any, if you basically just do not care about anybody that's different from you, you can't be a Christian.

[34 : 53] You can't have the spirit of God in you, the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, you can't have his spirit dwell in you and just not care about anybody who looks, thinks, or acts different than you do.

So if that's the case, what you need to do this morning is admit that and if it bothers you, turn to Christ in real faith and commitment. But it could be that you are a Christian.

It could be that you know very well what I'm talking about, how the spirit of God gives you the desire and the ability to show this kind love but you've just not been doing it lately. Maybe you have quenched the spirit of God.

Maybe you've developed a hard heart towards certain kinds of people or certain individuals. If that's the case, I want to encourage you to do some serious soul searching.

That's not who you are in Christ. That's not how God calls you to be. And it may be there needs to be some confession made, changing minds, turning from sin, coming back to the Lord in a new commitment, asking him to help you to love this way.

[36 : 13] And you can do it if you're united to Christ, filled with the spirit of Christ. That's just who we are as Christians. let's pray together.

Father, show each one of us just where we are in our relationship with you and help us to draw closer.

Give us the desire to put forth the effort to put on the love of Christ in these specific ways that we've seen and do it in our relationships with all kinds of people.

Let's just now listen to the Lord and respond to him. I'd be happy to pray with you here at the front during this time. Just the main thing is to obey the Lord. What a man