



Sermon – June 27, 2021  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Colossians 3:12 – 13*

*Matthew 11:28 - 30*

*Matthew 18:21 - 35*

Let me invite you to open your Bibles. We're going to be in Colossian 3, verses 12 and 13. Steve, I think you saved the best for last. Wasn't that great this morning? Him leading us one more time in worship. What a joy to be gathered together seeking the Lord, trusting that when we meet together through His word, He's going to change our lives by the power of the Spirit. And if you remember, as we're journeying through Colossians, last time we were in this book, we saw the way that Paul spoke about how we are new creations who've experienced new relations in a new community here as a church. And what we're going to find this morning as we continue working our way through the text, is that he now shows us that we as new creations have new characteristics that we display in light of the new life that we have in Jesus. And let's see the way he talks about those new characteristics in verses 12 and 13.

*<sup>12</sup>Put on then, as God's chosen holy ones, chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against each other, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

Let's pray together.

Father, in this time we come to You. We lay our lives at Your feet. We surrender everything to You, God. We want to know You more. We want to become more like You. We're praying in this moment that You would change us and make us more like Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, have you ever had one of those moments where you walk into the room and everybody turns their head to look right at you? There's a woman named Sarah Studley that had that exact circumstance happen. It was back in April of this year. She walked in just like thousands of other people into the Baltimore Ravens football stadium in Baltimore. They were having a mass COVID vaccine clinic there and she was just one of the others that was there to get her vaccine.

And yet everybody was staring at her. Well, if you go back in her life, back in 2019 she got engaged, she was moving towards a wedding that was supposed to happen in 2020, and then the pandemic showed up and upended all the plans. The big celebration they were intending to have, instead was replaced by a small ceremony. And as a result of that, Sarah never got to wear her wedding dress for the big day. So she decided, once she finally got this COVID vaccine appointment, why not put that thing to use? And the reason everybody turned their heads and stared at her as she walked through that stadium is because she was coming through wearing her wedding gown. You can imagine that kind of contrast. That's why everybody turned their heads. Here you are in this dingy stadium, people minding their own business just going through the motions trying to endure the lines and the crowds. And then all of a sudden in the midst of the chaos, in the brokenness, in everything surrounding you, here is this one radiant, pure, spotless, set apart, you couldn't miss her, because of how different the way she was clothed was from everybody else. When we come to this text this morning, Paul is continuing this metaphor of putting on Christ, to wear His robes of righteousness upon us. And that is the image he is giving. That when we put on Christ, we trust Him in salvation, we are marked out from the world around us. That in the midst of the chaos, the disorder, the brokenness, when the world sees the righteousness of Christ in us on display in these ways we are called to live, it's unmistakable, it turns heads, it shines a light to the glory of the Gospel. I mean, think about what's happening here in this text. After Paul, over the last few verses has been reminding us of all the darkness that is in this world, he now calls us to shine our light brightly. He gives us this list of characteristics we should embrace that should shape everything about who we are and how we relate to the world around us. And if we are going to embrace the new life in Christ that Paul is calling us to here, we need to realize that what he is doing is calling us to live like Jesus as we forgive like Jesus.

So notice how this text begins. Back in verse 12, we see first that we are called to live like Jesus. He said, put on then. He is continuing in this metaphor as I mentioned. He's been focused previously on the negative, what we should put off, what we should remove from our life. And now he moves to the positive; what we should do. So what should we do? Well, look what it says there. We need to become like Jesus so we can live like Jesus. He talks there about how we are chosen, holy, beloved. These images that he gives there are speaking to the way that we are marked out as a new community. But we're marked out in ways that pick up on ancient realities. Every one of these descriptions, chosen, holy, beloved, were used to describe God's people in the Old Testament. But even more important than that, we see these same terms describing Jesus Himself. I mean, just think about the way the New Testament speaks of Him. So, for example, in 1 Peter 2, it tells us that Jesus is the chosen one. Acts 4 reminds us that Jesus is the holy one. And right there in the baptism of Jesus in Matthew chapter 3, we hear God Himself declaring, "You are My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." So the reason these things are true of us is because they are true of Jesus first. And through our faith in Him we have been united to these realities in a way that transforms us. We are chosen. We are holy. We are beloved members of God's family. We have been given a new life and if that's true, Paul is telling us we need to live like Jesus. We need to be that light that shines. So now that he's already reminded us of how we become like Jesus, he's going to show us what it looks like to live like Jesus. Look back in verse 12, he says there:

<sup>12</sup>....for put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

He gives these five characteristics. Remember back in the earlier verses, he gave us two lists of five vices, things to put off, things that are negative, sinful, in our lives that must be put away. Now he matches that with these five things that we should put on. See, the reality is that God is not simply trying to make us more moral; He's trying to make us more like Jesus. And every one of these characteristics shine through the light of Jesus Himself. Now I woke up in the middle of the night one time this week and I noticed there was light coming from our bathroom area. And I thought, "Maybe we left the light on whenever we were heading to bed." And then when I walked in there, I realized there was no light on at all. It was just the brightness of this super moon that's shining right now. It's the last super moon of the year. And the light was unmistakable. It was almost like a dim version of day radiating through the windows of our home. And the way that that moonlight works is it doesn't generate from the moon. It doesn't produce its own light. Instead, what is it doing? It's offering a reflection of a greater light. It is reflecting that light of the sun so that it can shine in the dark world around us. That's the picture. That's the image. That's what Paul is telling us. That we are called to shine the light of Jesus into the world around us. And if we're going to do that, he shows us that has to be true in both our attitudes and our actions towards others. So notice these first three characteristics here that talk about our attitude towards others. That we should live like Jesus in our attitude towards others with compassionate hearts, kindness, and humility. In other words, how we see others reflects whether or not we are living like Jesus. And the way that happens is by showing these compassionate hearts. He's talking about your innermost parts and most literally, in the original language, it's the bowels of you. It's the inner portions. It's the part that's at the heart, the center, of who you are. That should be marked by compassion. In a world around us that is characterized by hard hearts, we should be people of mercy. Who believe the best about others. Who have tender hearts of compassion towards them. Compassionate hearts, he says.

And then he goes on to speak of kindness. And the way that that word originates in the Greek is it talks about the proper handling of an item. To use it according to its purposes for a good reason and a good outcome. That's what kindness looks like. To treat others how we would like them to be treated. And in a culture that tells us that we are divided into tribes and we need to own the other side, and strength wins, the Bible gives us a different picture. That it's the kindness of God that leads us to repentance. That a soft word turns away wrath. That we should bless those who persecute us. That's the picture of kindness we find in Scripture. And it's a kindness that goes hand in hand with this idea of humility there. You see that word. It's the exact same word that Paul has already used in verse, chapter 2, verses 18 and 23, to critique the false humility of these false teachers. They have pride masquerading as false humility. And in contrast to that, we should be the ones who have a humility of mind. In other words, if kindness is having a right attitude towards others, humility is having a right attitude towards ourselves. We see ourselves for who God sees us to be. We live in a way that reflects the way that God calls us to live. See, we need to live like Jesus in our attitudes towards others.

But notice as this list goes on. He also calls us to live like Jesus in our actions towards others. That's why he speaks there of both meekness and patience. In other words, how we serve others should reflect the fact that we're committed to live like Jesus. This word meekness, it has this idea of gentleness or being considerate. It's, in fact, the same word in the fruit of the Spirit that is translated as gentleness. See, meekness happens when you take kindness and humility and you put them into action. When I was a senior at Texas A&M, those were the dark days of Aggie Basketball. It was the last season of Melvin Watkins' era and we went 0 and 16 in

conference play. And yet, me and my friends kept going to games. I guess we had nothing better to do back then. But one of the highlights of that season, and several of those seasons during that time period, was whenever Texas Tech came to town to play. Because Bobby Knight was their coach at that time. You remember him? He was a character, wasn't he? He was brash, he was aggressive, he was well-known for throwing chairs on the court. There was no softness to a guy like him. And he paraphrased the Bible one time, I think in a press conference. And he said, "The meek may inherit the earth, but they rarely get rebounds." The idea of meekness is so often misunderstood in our culture. We take it as weakness, as being docile, as being somebody who is lazy or unintentional. But this is so different from the way that the Bible pictures it. It is strength through quietness. It is a gentleness and compassion and sensitivity that overflows in a care for others. And that's why, if you look at Matthew 11, verses 28 through 30, the one time in the gospels that Jesus describes Himself, look at the way He describes Himself on the screen.

<sup>28</sup>Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, don't miss this part, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

See that word gentle there? That's the same word that we see right here in Colossians 3, speaking about meekness. When Jesus, the second member of the Trinity, God incarnate, speaks about Himself, describes who He is to us, the way He does it is by calling Himself gentle, meek, lowly. And that's what Paul is calling us to here in this broken world. That the way to overcome brokenness is not through strength, but weakness in action. In meekness that depends on God. And it's a meekness that doesn't happen just for a moment, but for a lifetime. That's why Paul goes on to talk about our patience. This idea of long-suffering or enduring difficulty, under duress for extended periods of time. It's so that we are not easily provoked. And it's fascinating that he calls them to take up this reality of being patient. Because if you were to look all the way back in Colossians 1:11 when Paul is praying for the Colossian church, one of the things he prays for is patience with joy. So in other words, now he celebrates the patience that he's called them to. It's a perseverance with a purpose. That's one of the reasons why when we finish our services together each week, when we read that passage of Scripture and I offer you that word of benediction, you will always hear me say, keep pressing on. Keep pressing on. Live with the kind of patience that Paul speaks of here. He summarizes the Christian life, these characteristics we're to take up by speaking about how we should reflect Him in our attitudes and in our actions. And that's one of the reasons, Central family, I was so grateful to get to see you in action this week right here at our church through our Special Needs VBS. I gathered up a couple different times with our group to experience what was going on, including on Thursday night on our last evening. And me and my boys came up, we jumped in and did some of the rec time with them. And my favorite moment of that entire week is on that final night. They gave the opportunity for those that were there gathered up to have the microphone and to share what the Lord had done in their life, or what they were grateful for. And you know what stood out to me over and over again about what they shared? They talked about the way our volunteers loved them. The compassion they showed, the kindness, the meekness, the patience. They might have described it in different ways and from different perspectives, but at its heart, Central, I saw this verse on display through you serving these amazing people with special needs this week and it

brought me deep joy. Because Paul is telling us that when we embody these characteristics, we are living like Jesus.

But this is not where the text ends. Paul is showing us that if we want to carry out the new life in Christ that we have, it comes not just by living like Jesus, but forgiving like Jesus. And that's why we see him saying this in verse 13:

<sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against each other, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive.

See, one of the greatest tests that we face when we seek to live like Jesus, is when we're challenged to forgive like Jesus. In other words, it's not so hard to carry out these five characteristics in your life when things are going right. It's much more difficult, if we're being honest, to embody these realities when you've been wronged. And that's what Paul begins to speak of here. And what he tells us is that if we want to live like Jesus, there are two tests when it comes to forgiveness that every one of us will face as we go through life. And you see the first one there at the front half of verse 13. He says, if we want to live like Jesus, we must bear with one another. You see what it says there? Bearing with one another. This term, bearing with, has the idea of holding up and enduring. It implies that this isn't natural. It's something that we have to consciously do. It's not simply just putting up with someone, but instead, persevering with a purpose. We had the exciting chance to honor Steve and Cathy earlier this week. The worship ministry hosted a celebration for them and we got together, had a great toast, talked about some of the amazing things the Lord has done in you and through you, and I was thrilled to be able to be up there for part of that. But the other dimension that won't surprise you is when Baptists get together to celebrate something, the food comes along with it, right? And we were flexing the potluck muscles on Monday night. And I remember as people were going through the line, there was one mom that came through. And she had a baby strapped to her, she had others in tow, she was holding plates in both hands. It was as if she was an octopus. I don't know how she carried that many things at once. And then the big test was could she shepherd them past the desserts without them doing too many drive by selections. And she was taking them through that line in order to feed them. She was going through challenges in order to provide for them. She was persevering with a purpose. She was bearing with the difficulty, the weight, the challenges, the demands, the desires for something that was important. Well, how much more so in the way that Paul speaks of what we are called to do with one another. This idea of bearing with one another to persevere with a purpose. To love each other well even in those moments that are hard. And we do that, not just by not putting one another down, not just by putting up with one another, but pressing on together. Moving towards a common mission for the sake of the Gospel. You see, Paul here in verses 12 and 13 is giving us two sides of the same coin. He's first talked about how we should live in 12 and now in verse 13 he talks about how we should respond when others fail to live in the way that God calls us to. And part of that is we are to bear with them in the midst of their sin. In the midst of their brokenness. In the midst of their mistakes. And as we do that, we are imaging a God who does that for us. I mean just think about Scripture. The way that over and over again, God is bearing with us in our sin. Adam in the garden. Noah on the ark. Israel in the wilderness. Even in Jesus who takes upon Himself our sins. God bears with Him in judgment on our behalf. See, Paul is calling us to bear with one another. And in my prior role before coming here to Central, I got to work with pastors around the country. And there's this interesting trend that I observed with new pastors at churches.

Here's what normally happened over the first 5 years. Year number one was the honeymoon stage. Everybody loves them. He loves everybody. Things are great. Couldn't be better. You remember what honeymoon life was like as a newlywed. In year 2, though, a silent resistance begins to form in the church. Maybe they don't like the way the new guy preaches or some of the changes he's made or some of the things like that. And what happens is year 2 moves on to year 3 where that private resistance opens up into public opposition. And now there is a tension in the church, a disunity, a separation, a disagreement, a discord. And what happens is, as that sorts itself out in year 4, there is a resolution to that conflict. Whatever happens, happens. Wherever they go moving forward, begins to take place so that in year 5, the church can adjust together to a new normal in wherever the Lord maybe taking them. You know what one of my prayers for us is at Central? That God would spare us of that life cycle. That I would bear with you. That you would bear with me. That we would bear with one another. Because what Paul is showing us here is that if we are to walk in Jesus, there will be tension, there will be friction, there will be times of difficulty. Perhaps even times where we have been wronged. But the call of the Gospel, the test that we face, is are we willing to bear with one another in the mist of brokenness? But that's only the first test.

Look back at the second half of verse 13 and we see a second test that's there. Paul tells us if we want to live like Jesus, we must forgive one another. That's why he says there, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. See, one of Satan's greatest weapons in our life is the power of unforgiveness. And now Paul makes it clear. If you look back there at verse 13, there are times when it is legitimate that you have been wronged. He says, if anyone has a complaint. It's the only time this word shows up in the New Testament. It's this picture of a grievance, a fault of a blame. And you can imagine these Colossians that he was writing to were probably filled with complaints towards one another. These are new believers in a new church trying to figure things out together for the first time. And Paul says, it may very well be the case, you have a legitimate complaint. And that same is true for us this morning. You may have been wronged or overlooked or mistreated or forgotten or even sinned against. And he reminds us that if we have complaints, Jesus has far more. The world turned its back on Him. And so if that's true for Him, that He received the same types of complaints that we have experienced, then we should also follow Him on the way in responding to that. And what does that reality look like? He tells us it comes through forgiveness. So often forgiveness is misunderstood. Forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean forgetting what happened. It doesn't necessarily mean there will be no more pain. Forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean that you remain in the exact situation where that sin occurred against you. It doesn't mean necessarily that you are minimizing what took place or that there won't ever be another wrong from that person again. That's not what forgiveness is. How does Paul speak of forgiveness here? Well, this word in the original language, translated forgiving comes from the same root word as the word we get grace from. It's giving over the sins of failures of others to God so that we might extend the same grace to them that God has already done for them in Jesus Christ. What happens in those moments is that he is writing here and he is speaking to the entire church about an ongoing expectation of continual forgiveness. And what happens in those moments as we are turning our wounds over to God, trusting that in the end He will hold others accountable and by doing that allowing Him to transform our perspective of that person. You see, unforgiveness sees people through the lens of their mistakes. Forgiveness sees them instead through the lens of our Messiah. Unforgiveness sees people through the lens of their sins. Forgiveness sees them through the lens of their Savior. That's what Paul speaks here



who the model of our forgiveness is. Look back at verse 13. He says there, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And we know what that forgiveness looks like because we already saw him talk about it in Colossians 2, verses 13 and 14. That what Christ does for us on the cross is he takes the record of sin against us, He takes it upon Himself, He dies in our place on the cross so that we might be forgiven. So that it might be nailed to the cross satisfied in the eyes of God. If you have met Jesus, you have handed over your sins to Him so that you might instead receive His righteousness and God declares you forgiven. That's the model. Jesus, in our place, offering us forgiveness by being nailed to the cross. And Paul is saying, as the Lord forgave us, we also should forgive others. So take a moment right now in the quietness of your heart and think about that person that wronged you. Those open wounds that you still have as you walk in here this morning. And I know some of you are saying, "Why would I want to think about those? I spend all my days trying to forget about that person or forget about that situation." But if we're going to live out this text, we can't do it at the generic level, we need to get to the heart of the wounds that we bear. Maybe it's the family member who wronged you. The friend that betrayed you. The coworker that sabotaged you. The church leader that burned you. The person that failed you. Who is it for you? Picture that person's face in your mind's eye right now as you hear Paul speaking to us. I mean, just think about it. After all they've done, how could Paul expect us to forgive them? Why would he make that demand upon us? You see where it says there that you must forgive? This is not a recommendation, but a requirement for faithful Christian living. And if that is going to be the expectation for us, we need to understand why God calls us to this reality. And there are two reasons that we find in Scripture that God calls us to forgive even those that have wronged us.

The first one is, we forgive others because Jesus has already forgiven us. How could you withhold forgiveness from someone else when God has already forgiven you if you're in Christ? This is why we see that Jesus speaks about this in one of His parables. You don't have to turn there; you can see it on the screens in Matthew 18. It's the parable of the unforgiving servant. And as He is about to give this parable, this is what He has to say.

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came up and said to Him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" <sup>22</sup>And Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

And then he goes on to tell this parable. He tells this parable about this servant of a master who owed this tremendous debt to them. The equivalent of an uncountable amount of money. And that master comes to him and in his kindness, forgives him of that debt. The servant is overjoyed by that reality of his new life. And yet not long after that, he comes upon another servant. One who owes him a debt. One that, a debt that is miniscule compared to the debt he has just been forgiven. And instead of responding in kind, he tells that fellow servant that he must repay the debt that he owes to him, even though he has just been forgiven by his master. And listen to the way that that parable ends. If you look down beginning in verse 32, this is what the parable concludes with:

<sup>32</sup>Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup>And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" <sup>34</sup>And in anger his master delivered him to the

jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup>So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

When you look at Colossians 3:13 and it tells you that you must forgive others, the first reason is because God has already forgiven us. And how can we withhold forgiveness towards others when he has given us the forgiveness of heaven in Jesus Christ? But there's a second reason that we find in Scripture that we are called to forgive others. And it's not just because Jesus has already forgiven us.

It's also because Jesus has already offered forgiveness to them. Think about it. How could you withhold the offer of forgiveness to someone that Jesus has offered forgiveness to already? Who do we think we are? If God is willing to forgive the eternal wrongs that they have done against them, how could we not also be willing to forgive the temporary wrongs they've done against us? God doesn't just offer us forgiveness; He offers them forgiveness. And when Paul is saying here that just as we've been forgiven, we should forgive others; that's the picture that he's providing for us. Here's what I want you to think about. Every person that's wronged you, including the one that is still lingering in your mind's eye right now, they will face eternity just like you and me. And one of two things will be true. They will either head into eternity having never met Jesus in a saving way and they will face judgment for their sins, including the sins they carried against you. God will hold them accountable. He will avenge them. The reason that you can forgive them in that case is that they will be held accountable eventually. You will be vindicated. You will be made right in judgment. But there's others who when they come to the end of their life, instead of spending eternity in judgment because they have not put their faith in Jesus, they will stand before God as His beloved son or daughter, rescued by the blood of Jesus, forgiven of their sins, set free. And the promise for you and me in that moment is that we will spend eternity fully reconciled with them. The broken relationship you experience now will be healed. The wrongs that you have encountered will be made right. There will be a full reconciliation that occurs in that moment for the rest of history. So why don't we just get started early? Why wait until heaven to seek that restoration, that reconciliation, to offer that forgiveness that God calls us to?

There's a man named Frank Morabito that has what may be one of the most boring jobs in all of South Florida. He's a structural engineer and consultant and he'll get brought into observe different buildings, to come in and do quick assessments and right and wrong, detailed reports about how they're doing, what needs to be improved in order to insure the structural integrity of them. To insure that they can bear with the weight that they are designed to hold. And he wrote one of these reports back in 2018 and it documented the case of a building right on the coast there near Miami that had significant structural damage. And abundant instances of cracking. In fact, what he discovered is that over time, it wasn't the one-time moments of major weather events like hurricanes that had created this. It wasn't even just the ongoing effects of the saltwater all around them. What he observed is that the structure was failing in two ways. One, is that its waterproofing efforts were ineffective and water was seeping down into the foundation level and remaining there. And the reason that it was remaining there, it was seeping down and settling in because the foundation was built with a design flaw. That hard surface was fully flat and what that meant is that there was no ability for gravity to take this water away. And over time, as a result of that seeping in of the water that remained there at the heart of that building, it was in danger. That report just came to light this week because it was written about a building in



the Miami area called the Champlain Tower South. Maybe you've seen the images this week coming out of Miami of that condominium tower that partially collapsed. The structure gave way now with many dead and even more missing. Rescue crews trying to salvage as many lives as possible. This man had filed a warning years ago. This is not sound. There is danger at the core, at its foundation. And if it is not addressed soon, then this structure may not stand. When we look at Colossians 3, verses 12 and 13 this morning, Paul is sounding the same warning for us today. He is writing to the Colossians with this call to bear with one another and forgive one another that radiates out to every church in the world, including Central, and every believer in the world, including you. With a warning to us that resentment, that bitterness, that unforgiveness can seep into our lives and come to its core at our foundation. And that if that foundation is not built on the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gravity of grace will not be able to roll the water of unforgiveness away. But instead, Paul puts in front of us a call of the gospel with a question, will we be the type of people who love one another, who believe the best about one another, who forgive one another, who bear with one another? Because if we want to carry out the new life that we have in Christ, Paul is calling us this morning to live like Jesus and forgive like Jesus.

Let's pray together.

Father, forgiving others is such an easy truth to proclaim, and yet, such a difficult reality to live out. I'm praying for people this morning, if they are in bondage to resentment, to bitterness, to unforgiveness, Lord, that You would set them free of that reality right now. That they would turn these wounds over to You and turn to You in trust and turn towards others in the pursuit of reconciliation. Lord, I'm asking for the people in this room that may have never experienced the forgiveness that You offer in Jesus. Lord, would You use Your word, Your Spirit to pierce their hearts and show them their need of the Gospel? Father, may You make me, may You make us, may You make this church a people that lives out this new life, that bears with one another and loves each other well so that we might be light in the midst of the darkness. We ask all these things in Jesus name. Amen.