

Scripture: = Colossians 3:12-17.

Theme: Christian virtues.

Text: Colossians 3:14 -- "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Proposition: The distinctive virtues of this Christian life are bound together in harmony by love.

Date written: Jan. 12, 1957.

Dates and places preached:

- Jan 13, 1957, Grace Church,
Clayton, Miss - 8:15 & 11 a.m.
- June 2, 1959, 9:30 & 11:00 a.m.,
Shenandoah, Miss
- May 31, 1965 - 8:30 & 11:00 - Moberly, Colo.
- Feb. 5, 1967 Bruce & Alameda.
- for Feb. 5, 67 - Bruce & Alameda

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Introduction: Purpose of Colossians.

1. The Book is another of Paul's letters that author J. B. Phillips calls "Letters to Young Churches." Paul probably wrote this letter to the church at Colossae while he was a prisoner at Rome. It was most probably delivered by the runaway slave Onesimus as he, after being converted to Christianity under Paul's preaching, was on Paul's advice going back to his also-now-Christian master, Philemon. The New Testament Book of Philemon is Paul's letter to Philemon telling him to receive Onesimus as a brother and not to punish him for having run away. The letter bearer was Philemon himself, who evidently passed through Colossae and delivered our present Scripture to the Christian Church at Colossae.

2. Paul wrote to the christians at Colossae primarily to argue against a heresy, wrong thinking as he saw it, that he considered deadly to the Christian faith. The Colossians, or Christians of Colossae, evidently thought God was too holy and remote to have much to do with the world, and so they developed a theory of his control being exercised through a system of angels, some of more and some of lesser degree. This, Paul said, just isn't so.

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Colossians 3:12-17.....)

Jesus is God in the flesh, and still is active in earth affairs if men believe on Him, and no intermediate angels between God and the ~~individual~~ are necessary, writes Paul. This is a stand ~~the~~ modern Protestants think is pretty important still, and many of us deplore the praying to saints, to Mary, to angels, etc.. God, as known in and through Christ, is enough for the Protestant. It is Christ, and he alone, who reconciles man to God, and, Paul says, it is his, Paul's job to proclaim the necessity of Christian faith to win people to it.

3. Then Paul goes on to tell the Colossians some of the practices and habits of Christian living before he closes ~~his~~ his letter. It is one of these passages, relating to Christian life, that is our Scripture.

4. One commentary calls this passage, chapter 3:12-17, "the garments of holiness." We have called our topic today "Christian virtues." We are talking of the same thing as the commentator. Christian virtues form such garments, or clothing of holiness, as a Christian may wear. Let's think about the distinctive virtues of the Christian life, as they are suggested by Paul in our Scripture.

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I. A description of the Christian virtues.

8 1. In the verses immediately preceding our Scripture of today Paul compared the old life of the Christian with the new. Chapter 3:5-11 well summarizes his view of the things that must be put aside, and ends by stating his view that faith in Christ binds all believers together as one (Read 3:5-11).

2. Then follows verses 12-17, today's Scripture, in which Paul starts right in telling of the characteristic or distinctive virtues of a Christian. He has said what or how a Christian is not; now he tells the Colossians how or what a Christian is. He advises the Colossians, as written in verses 12-13 (read). Here in these 2 verses is his description of Christian life virtues. Without taking time for all of them, let's think about a few of them, perhaps just one or two of them, as practiced by Christians of recent times, or as applicable to your life and mine. One or two illustrations, perhaps, can best serve our purpose to point out that to become Christian is to live a different sort of life than before conversion.

3. The first virtue that Paul mentions in our Scripture is compassion, another word for which is sympathy, sympathy which leads one to love and serve others.

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a. The story of Thomas Guthrie, a Scottish preacher, illustrates lengths to which Christian compassion, sympathy and concern can lead in the service of other people. On a midnight visit to a police station in Edinburgh the young preacher saw several homeless waifs who had come there to take shelter. On an open space near the stove, where the light shone full in his face, lay a little boy who attracted his special attention. The lad was about eight years old, with a sweet and innocent face. The preacher later wrote of him this way "his pillow a brick, and as he lay calm in his sleep, forgetful of his sorrows, he might have served for a picture of injured innocence. He knew neither father nor mother, brothers nor friend. In the wide world his only friends were the police. How he lived they did not know. But there he was at night."

Guthrie said that for days and nights he could not get that boy out of his mind and heart. It was scenes like this which caused him to start working that the outcast children of Edinburgh might be guarded and reformed. Today on beautiful Princes Street in Edinburgh you can see the monument of the great preacher, Guthrie, with the

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"street Arabs," as the boys were called taking refuge under his arms. "I have the satisfaction," said Guthrie, "when I lay my head upon my pillow of always finding one part of it soft, and that is that God has made me an instrument in his hands by saving many a poor creature from a life of misery and crime." Thomas Guthrie became a great preacher because his Christian compassion led him to be concerned and to do something about the misfortunes of others.

b. To become a Christian is to have compassion. How is your compassion? Are you truly concerned over the misfortunes of others, like Hungarian or Arab refugees. Or are you selfishly afraid they'll come in and replace you at your job? Your answer gives a pretty good insight into your degree of Christianity.

4.4 Let's look at one additional Christian virtue mentioned by Paul, and then illustrate it from life, to show that Christianity does change one. Let's think about the word "lowliness," which Paul gives as one of the things a Christian puts on. Immediately following his use of the word "lowliness" is the word "meekness," and I think there is some difference between the meaning of the two words.

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a. We've all known people -- perhaps you and I have been among their number, or, worse still perhaps we still are -- who seem to judge all others by their own standards, who seem to want to compel all others to yield to their opinions. Such a person frequently uses such terms as "As I see it," "I don't think much of your way of doing it," "That's not my way of looking at it," the emphasis always seeming to be on self, and woe be to the lame brain who doesn't agree. "I'll tell the guy what I think of him," this character says, and he usually does so in not very kindly words, often even being abusive. Such a high brow may be courteous in business if he stands to profit thereby; but in social, community or church activities is often abusive and insulting toward others. Strangely, he seldom sees himself as others see him. This type of fellows, and all of us run across him from time to time, is really pretty offensive. You and I need to watch carefully that he and and you or I are not identical.

b. Christian lowliness is certainly anything but that way of living. Lowliness is putting self in the background that others may always have the

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credit due them. It is being willing to stay for the program even after you've made your contribution to it, or done your part. It is being willing to let the majority rule, when they do so sincerely and are seeking the right solution, even though it may cost some money to give them their way.

These are examples, but we might summarize by saying that Christian lowliness is the willingness to do whatever is necessary to keep the Christian spirit of love for others. Jesus was the supreme example of Christian lowliness. He was arrested, mocked, tried, and hung rather than to make a show of pride and power.

5. Compassion and lowliness -- two Christian virtues. But any one or several of the Christian virtues are of little value, and may even be dangerous to self, loved ones and society, unless they are coordinated, or bound together by one great thing.

II. The Christian virtues should be bound together by love.

1. In the realm of clothing there is a class of garments sometimes referred to coyly as "unmentionables," or undergarments. As a rule, which like all rules has its exceptions, a person is usually unmentionably unattractive in the

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undergarment stage of dress or undress. The top clothing when put on both covers the undergarments and helps hold them more firmly at the proper place on the body. And the addition of an attractive outer garment can make the person much more attractive in appearance.

2. Paul uses something of this sort of an analogy in the Scripture verse which is our text. "And above all," he writes, "put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Love is, as it were, the outer garment which binds together the other garments and makes them attractive and harmonious. Love binds together compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness. It is the motive for each of the Christian virtues and gives meaning to them.

3. The rural teacher was introducing the study of arithmetic to a class of youngsters.

"If a farmer's boy by himself could pick six quarts of berries in an hour and a girl could pick five quarts, how many quarts would they pick together?"

"Teacher," said an overgrown lad, "I don't know exactly how many, but it wouldn't be eleven."

And he was right. A boy and a girl together, particularly if they're big,

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often pose a different problem from a boy or a girl separately.

4. Christian love makes life a different sort of problem too. And ~~like~~ ^{as} the boy and girl together will probably find berry picking much more enjoyable than if they pick apart from each other, so does Christian love bind together the Christian virtues and make them interesting and meaningful.

Conclusion:

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

2. The distinctive virtues of the Christian life are bound together in harmony by love.

3.

Hymn of At-one-ment

Thou God of all, whose spirit moves
From pole to silent pole;
Whose purpose binds the starry spheres
In one stupendous whole;
Whose life, like light, is freely poured
On all men 'neath the sun;
To Thee we lift our hearts, and pray
That Thou wilt make us one.

One in the patient company
Of those who heed Thy will,

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And steadfastly pursue the way
Of Thy commandments still;
One in the holy fellowship
Of those who challenge wrong,
And lift the spirit's sword to shield
The weak against the strong.

One in the truth that makes men free,
The faith that makes men brave;
One in the love that suffers long
To seek, and serve, and save;

One in the vision of Thy peace,
The kingdom yet to be --
When Thou shalt be the God of all,
And all be one in Thee.

--John Haynes Holmes, 1879--

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