

COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 3:12-17

Lesson #16

Introduction

Last week we got through verse eleven of our study of Colossians chapter three. So we'll begin today at verse 12 and read through verse 17.

The Christian Heart and Life

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you [forgive others]. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Col 3:12-17 (NASB)

Now, beginning with verse 12 let's examine these verses one at a time:

Verse 12(a)

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God,

This is just one more example of countless verses that state outright that God has a particular chosen group whom He selected Himself. Now, every time I read one of these verses, I'm constantly reminded of the countless hundreds of times that I'd read them before, and somehow just allowed myself to overlook the inescapable meaning of them. Having been born again in the late 1970's, I was never even made aware of any other interpretation than the Semi-Pelagian, Arminianism that's popular today. In spite of the clarity of the texts to the contrary, I still read it to be "as those who have chosen God" not as "those chosen by God."

Now one might ask "so what's the big deal, either way we're God's?" That's true, either way we are God's, but the difference is still significant. Because, the whole means by which it happens is at stake on the seemingly simple distinction between these two interpretations. And therefore, the whole gospel hinges on this distinction. As simple and unimportant as it may seem to some, nonetheless, this distinction defines the gospel Jesus proclaimed, and therefore the gospel that we proclaim. These simple distinctives that have come to be known as the "doctrines of grace", or sometimes "sovereignty Grace", or later on as "Calvinism", are those distinctives that define the good news proclaimed by Jesus and commissioned to be preached to all the world. So I'm not going to just read right over them here like I've done for so many years in the past.

I don't want to leave here until we understand the full significance of what we've just read. You see the salvation of mankind is either something that happens by a joint participation of God and man, which is called synergistic, or it's something that happens entirely and solely by the work of God, which is called monergistic. If it's synergistic then both God and man must do their respective parts, and each is personally responsible for their fair share of the work. If it's completed, then both may take pride in their accomplishing their respective parts with the means that they possess.

But on the other hand, if it's solely a gift of God that's monergistic in nature, then no one can be proud or boast in it's accomplishment except God alone. (Eph 2:8-9) One of the arguments that seems to arise to this interpretation is that everyone knows that they did participate willingly in the process. What they don't seem to grasp is by what power, or impetus, did they **come to be** willing participants. Was it by the exercise of something that they already had within themselves and just needed to be exercised, or was it by something that they didn't have but was put there by God as His gift, as Ephesians 2:8-9 declares? This goes to the very heart of what the gospel message actually is. Is it a free gift of God dispensed at His sovereign choice, or is it something resident within every man and only awaits man's own choosing to implement? This is no small distinction, it's the pulsing heart of the gospel message.

We surely won't convince anyone who disagrees by the force of our arguments, as I myself can testify, but that doesn't change the truth of the matter one wit, so we continue to faithfully proclaim what we've read and been taught in the holy scriptures. Just as Jesus often said, "let him who has an ear hear what the scriptures teach and what the Spirit proclaims to the churches." And if anyone adamantly wishes to be ignorant, then let them be ignorant. But not because we didn't proclaim the truth, but because they wouldn't receive it. So, now I've publically declared what I have to declare about the meaning of the scriptures, and we can proceed to the next point.

Verse 12(b)

Those who have been chosen by God are: *...holy and beloved,...*

Point (1) - Holy

This seems like a simple statement little of sentiment. And that's what it is. But it implies a lot more than just sentiment. Because we can readily understand how we might be beloved, like any parent loves their own children, in spite of their flaws. But what about that little word "holy?" How can the scriptures say that we, as fallen human beings, about which the Bible says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, are now here being called holy? Now we know that the scriptures are inerrant and don't lie or misrepresent facts, so just how can the scriptures declare that those who are loved by God are also holy? Is this hyperbole? Is it just a generalization that implies that God considers obvious sinners to be holy just because He loves them? I think this is by far the most popular interpretation, but it misses the whole point of the extent of God's love for His chosen. In that while we were, and still are, sinners, nevertheless He sent His only beloved Son to both pay our penalty AND to be our perfect righteousness. (Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4)

No, God doesn't just write off our sins in the name of love, He imputes them to His own Son who then completely and fully pays for them Himself in our place. But much more, He then takes that perfect and sinless life that His Son lived in the flesh, and imputes that to us for our righteousness. And by this act, we are "in fact" holy in His sight, without violating His own character and righteousness nature. This declaration of holiness for those whom He's chosen isn't hyperbole, it's absolute fact. To see it and understand it, what we have to do is get our eyes off of us and look directly at Jesus, who has accomplished this on our behalf, at the Father's request. You see, the crucifixion of Christ was sufficient for atonement and reconciliation of specific sinners, but it did nothing for our righteousness and holiness.

The crucifixion got us off the hook of paying the price of death for our sins, but it by no means, in and of itself, established the necessary righteousness required for our entrance into the kingdom of God. It was the sinless, perfect, and holy life of Christ, which is completely worthy of entrance into God's kingdom, that is imputed to us through faith; this is what meets God's requirement of holiness; and absolutely nothing less will do.

We quite often hear discussions concerning the necessity of Christ's absolute righteousness to qualify Him for the position as the sinless Lamb of God. Unless He was perfect then His offering to God would be disqualified and our sins wouldn't be atoned. On this point we mostly all agree. However, it seems that we very often overlook what is perhaps an even greater aspect of His perfect righteousness. And that is, that nothing less than perfect righteousness meets the mandatory requirement of holiness demanded by God the Father for entry into His eternal kingdom. (Rev 21:27)

The Scriptures tell us that multitudes will try to offer God some other substitute righteousness, either their own or some imaginary kind. But these same Scriptures tell us plainly that the only human ever to walk the earth in perfect righteousness was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. No other human being has, or ever will, attain to the righteous requirements of God except Jesus. Unless one offers to the Father the righteousness of Jesus the Son, his offer will be deficient and rejected. If God were to declare a general amnesty for sin there would still be none who are of sufficient righteousness to enter the kingdom of heaven on their own merit. Heaven isn't just the default place for those who don't end up in hell, it's a place that is attained only by perfect and sinless righteousness. And only Jesus has done this.

Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me." I want us to understand what He means by those last few words "but by Me." They not only mean atonement, but even more perhaps, they mean the imputation of His perfect righteousness to all who believe. Any and every other attempt, or offer, will fall short of the glory of God. Therefore, yes, in the eyes of God all of His children are as holy as his Son, because His Son's righteousness and holiness has been imputed to us through the gift of saving faith. There is no other means to enter into the eternal kingdom of God. Absolutely none other of any kind taught, or mentioned, or implied, in the holy Scriptures.

All who think, or hope, or gamble, that there may be some other way, do so at their own peril. To accomplish His predetermined plan, God needed only to provide a single means for the redemption of His elect, therefore, He has provided only one means for humans to be accounted sufficiently holy to be with Him in his kingdom, and His Son Jesus is the solitary source of that holiness. All who are in Christ are partakers of His perfect holiness.

Point (2) - Beloved:

(Jn 15:13) *13 "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.* We're told by this verse that there is no greater demonstration of love in the created universe than to lay down one's life for it. And this is exactly what God has done to demonstrate the depth of His love for His chosen. He created a cosmos, and all the circumstances that have arisen within it, so that He could visibly demonstrate to His chosen children, the depth of His love for us. He wasn't satisfied just to tell us with His words, He desired in His heart, and then chose by His own sovereign free will, to actually show us by visible demonstration through the sacrifice of His Son.

He certainly didn't have to do that. He was under no compulsion or mandate whatsoever. So then, just what manner of love is it that would motivate an omnipotent, sovereign creator God to intentionally, and publically, sacrifice the life of His only begotten Son, for a handful of creatures that He had molded out of the dirt of the ground? What kind of love is this that freely does such a thing? This is truly God's demonstration of divine, and perfect, and immeasurable love that cannot be duplicated, or even comprehended, by the likes of men or angels.

This is the love of God for His chosen my brothers and sisters, and it cannot be measured by any ruler or weighed on any scale. It bursts right through the boundaries of space and time, and extends to the extremities of infinite eternity. The holy scriptures are His words of love that He's given to us for our education and edification, but the crucifixion and resurrection of His Son Jesus are His visible demonstration of the height and depth, and length and breadth, of that perfect and boundless love which utterly surpasses all man's possible knowledge or understanding. (Eph 3:18-19)

My brothers and sisters, this is that God that awaits us who are His chosen, and holy, and beloved children. I don't believe that the human mind, and the human heart are even capable of comprehending the value of the love of God. So we eagerly await His calling us to be with Himself in His presence, where we will receive a new body and mind that is capable of grasping and appreciating the enormity of this love.

Verse 12(c)

...put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;...

After calling us His chosen, holy and beloved, we're then told to take an action or attitude ourselves that's in keeping with His. We're told to "put on" a certain kind of heart attitude. To "put on" is an active verb phrase indicating conscious and intentional actions performed by us which are appropriately fitting responses to the love that God demonstrates for us. While all five of these words are, at their core, invisible and internal attitudes of the mind, nevertheless they are made manifestly visible by physical acts that demonstrate their presence. God's invisible mind set of love for His chosen was made manifestly visible by His tangible sacrifice of His only begotten Son, and likewise this verse is telling us to put on these attributes mentioned by manifestly demonstrating them in our daily lives. Putting them on means start demonstrating them by our daily actions.

The Christian life was not designed by God to be hidden, but rather to be lived and proclaimed, as a lamp that's set on a lampstand. Not so much by acts and words of condemnation of everyone, but much more so by a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; exhibited consistently to all mankind by those who are the chosen of God. And yes, sometimes when it's absolutely necessary, we also must be the ones to publically point out sin when it's being practiced and promoted as an acceptable lifestyle. But God hasn't appointed his chosen as the worlds policemen, but rather as the worlds role model. We teach and proclaim His message by word and example, not by force.

Do we realize the shear force Jesus could have instantly brought against His opponents with nothing but a word from His mouth. There were legions of angels constantly at His disposal. But He continued to heal the sick and comfort the oppressed and warn the sinners of their eventual judgement. He didn't even comment on the social issues of that day or encourage His disciples to stage protests against the government. His concern was for His chosen and their edification and education, so He had no time or interest in social or political reforms of the lost. (Explain this a little more. Use O/T)

If we look at these words and consider them it becomes immediately clear that these are a description of the life of Jesus Christ. Who was compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient in all his dealings with humanity. Even in his state of condescension he had powers beyond anything any man ever had. He could heal the sick with just a word, restore the sight to those born blind, make food miraculously multiply, calm raging storms with just the words from his mouth, and countless other things no other human being could ever do. Nevertheless, he only used these powers to authenticate the gospel message He was proclaiming and who He claimed to be.

Jesus Christ is that role model, that perfect prototype to which all the chosen and elect of God are being conformed. (Rom 8:29) It's these five characteristics, and many others displayed by Christ, which his chosen are learning day by day to live and demonstrate while we still reside here on earth. All of this is serving at least two distinct purposes. One, it demonstrates the power and glory of God over the lives of man, and two, it's the process of preparation whereby the chosen are being made ready to take their place as worshipers in God's eternal plan.

We see that Jesus Christ came to earth and visibly demonstrated the kind of life he requires from his followers. While being infinitely more powerful than man, nevertheless He himself demonstrated all of these virtues. And through the holy Scriptures is teaching us that this is also what he requires from his disciples. Jesus didn't choose to win the world by force, though he certainly had the power to do so, but rather the divine plan of God is much more profound. By the foolishness of the message proclaimed regarding Jesus Christ, God has chosen to redeem and prepare those whom he has predestined for glory from before time began.

However, make no mistake, there will come a day when the Lord Jesus Christ will demonstrate the magnitude of his power. He will, with nothing but the word of his mouth slay hundreds of millions of arrogant humanity who are determined to destroy the whole earth by nuclear war, and who refuse to bow to his Lordship. On that day of vindication the universe will see a display of the power of Jesus Christ. But until then both He, and we, are commanded by God our Father to patiently await that day and continue to live and to demonstrate lives of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Many are those who call themselves Christians, and probably a great many actually are, who believe it's our mission, that is the mission of Christians, to take the world by storm. To preach the world into submission to the will of God. Many of these become political activists and stage demonstrations, and wage media campaigns seeking to transform society. Now this may seem to be a noble effort, and perhaps it is, but the simple fact is this isn't what Jesus taught. This isn't the example that He set for us. He told us to proclaim the Gospel, and those who had an ear would hear it and respond accordingly. But he never told us to take the world, or to take our country or our city, that's entirely the Father's choice, ours, just like Christ's, is simply to proclaim the message, and God will take care of the growth, or lack thereof.

Jesus has told us in John chapter 6 that all that the Father has given to him, that is, all those whose names were recorded in the book of life before creation, will come to him when they're called. But he didn't stop there, he also said that none whatsoever could come to him unless his Father specifically drew them by his effectual calling. So what's my point? My point is that we must be patient. We cannot force the hand of God, we cannot force, or argue, or persuade, or entice anyone into submission to Christ. He himself has laid out for us what our place is in his plan. We are to display a heart of compassion, we are to demonstrate kindness, and humility; gently and patiently proclaiming those very same truths that Christ himself proclaimed, and then live in such a manner as to authenticate their source as being divine.

You see there's a much greater reason why we're given these attributes than just because they're good for us. These are the attributes that authenticate our message. Just as they are the attributes that authenticated Jesus's message. When the Spirit of God takes a fallen human, who knows nothing of compassion, nothing of kindness or humility or gentleness, and transforms that person, by the power of His indwelling Spirit, through only the proclamation of his word and not by force, this authenticates the divine source of the message, and in doing so gives all the glory to God.

I think perhaps many times we feel that verses like these are simply given as a suggestion to Christians as to how they ought to live. But think about it. If Jesus Christ had been a thief, and a liar, would anybody today believe he was truly the son of God, even in spite of all his miracles? The whole gospel message is presented from a platform that consists of attributes just like those declared in verse 12. Remove these, and the whole gospel message loses its credibility.

A quick example. The religion of Islam. Spread by force, by the threat of the sword. Any claims that it makes of divine origin are immediately dispelled by the very nature its own message and the behavior of its followers. This is why those nations that follow that religion absolutely forbid the teachings of Christianity. Because when the teachings of Islam are compared side-by-side with the teachings of Jesus, the absurdities of Islam are made crystal clear, and the whole system self-destructs. This is why a Christian nation can withstand a small contingency of Muslims, but no Islamic nation can withstand even the tiniest fraction of Christianity. It isn't the theological difference that poses the threat, it's the fruit which that theological difference produces that so clearly reveals which is true and which is false. By their fruits you will know who are really my disciples and who are not, said Jesus. (Mat 7:16-20)

Verse 13

13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you [forgive others].

After those five attributes just discussed, we're exhorted to practice them with forbearance and forgiveness. The scriptures readily acknowledge that life doesn't make it easy to do this. When I've been frustrated by something or someone, especially another brother or sister, I've long found comfort from a situation recorded in Matthew chapter 17 where Jesus was approached by a man who had a son who was demon possessed and the disciples of Jesus couldn't cast it out. So this man asked Jesus to do so "if He could." Jesus openly displayed His annoyance at man's stubborn and unreasonable disbelief, in spite of countless miraculous signs, that He was actually the divine Son of God, and therefore He could do anything and everything He wanted, whenever He wanted. We can feel that frustration in the words of His response to that man when He said:

17.... *"You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?"*

Here we have the Son of God, who is the person of the Godhead who spoke the universe into existence, walking among His creation, and still being doubted by everyone, even to a large degree by His own disciples. If our Lord can and did endure this frustration during His time here on earth, and even now after His ascension, is it too much that He asks us to *bear with one another and forgive each other* while we're here on this earth? And, if it didn't come easily to Jesus then it sure won't come easy to us either. It'll take conscious effort to maintain these attitudes and attributes. What I'm saying, and what I perceive the scriptures are teaching, is that we're to make a conscious effort in displaying "putting on" these attributes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; and successfully doing this will certainly require *forbearance* and *forgiveness*.

Because we will be wronged while we're here on earth. Certainly by unbelievers, but also even by our own brethren. And we'll occasionally do wrong to others. With this as a given, and make no mistake, it is a given, then there must be a way to get past offenses, or there'll be no possibility of any lasting relationships. We'll be able to be friends and colleagues only until one of us does something that's considered wrong by the other. So, the concept of forgiveness is introduced into man's universe. It was first introduced as a concept by God, when He dealt with the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and didn't immediately kill both of them. It gets its final definition by the life and death of Jesus Christ, who shows the full extent of the concept. Without it, there could only be God, and perhaps some holy angels, but certainly no humans.

Forgiveness is that element which makes it possible for multitudes of individually flawed creatures to peacefully coexist and maintain friendly relationships for long periods of time. Among the many things spoken by Jesus are these words recorded in Matthew chapter 6:

14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. Matt 6:14-15 (NASB)

Then there's that parable Jesus told in Mat 18:21-35 about a certain slave who owed an immense unpayable sum to his master, and received forgiveness of the debt when he appealed for mercy. But then, he turned right around and beat and imprisoned a fellow slave who owed him what was, by comparison, only a very tiny debt. Upon hearing about this injustice, the master of the first slave called him in for an explanation, and ended up reinstating the debt and throwing that first slave into prison until he paid every last cent of the impossibly enormous debt that he owed.

That parable finishes with these words:

32 "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." Matt 18:32-35 (NASB)*

Now, given the nature of these verses we've just made reference to, what conclusion might we draw as to the importance of forgiveness in the eyes of God? Is forgiveness something that we arbitrarily give or don't give based on our frame of mind, or the size of the offense? Certainly these verses wouldn't support such a conclusion. But, neither can they be construed to mean that nothing man does can be held against him and everything must be completely forgiven.

If this were the case then there could be no judgment at the end of the age, there could be no great white throne judgment of God. So, how do we rightly interpret these verses and apply the principles of forgiveness in keeping with the biblical mandates?

First, let's see if we can establish some common parameters. In both of the instances given in the Scripture references the offending party acknowledged their guilt and asked for forgiveness. Then, upon their acknowledgment of their guilt, and their requests to be forgiven for those wrongs, they were granted forgiveness. There was no reference made in these verses to forgiveness as a blanket practice, for all grievances and offenses, until they were first acknowledged and confessed. At least in the verses that we're discussing here the principle of forgiveness apply to those who confessed their guilt and humbly asked to be forgiven. And in these situations it would seem that the biblical mandate is that forgiveness cannot be withheld by the offended party if they themselves ever wish to be forgiven by others.

But, what about those situations where the one who has caused the offense either doesn't know that they've done it, or sometimes perhaps has acted in keeping with what they believed to be absolutely right and just? For instance, two brothers being in a heated debate over points of theology and both are absolutely certain they're right. The debate escalates to the point where tempers flare and each becomes annoyed, and even angered at the other. Now if words were spoken that were out of order then confession of these must be made each to the other, but if no obvious acts were committed, then how do we resolve this problem?

The fact is that it's in these situations where we, as Christians, are afforded the most common opportunities to demonstrate the work of God within us. This is where we're called upon to let the love in our hearts simply cover a multitude of sins and grievances. We will be afforded many, many opportunities in this life to demonstrate the gratitude we have to our Lord for His forgiveness of our multitude of immense sins, by our willingness to forgive others without waving a flag and being vindicated. Sometimes we have to let love alone be the justification for our forgiveness. This is where maturity is involved, because it can be easily underdone, or even more frequently overdone, but there is a forgiveness that all of us are called upon to extend to others when the situation cannot be resolved any other way.

Yes, this means we will often be wronged and no one but ourselves will ever know. It means we won't always be vindicated in this lifetime just as Christ wasn't vindicated in His earthly lifetime. But what we don't always remember is that it also means that we receive this very same courtesy from our Lord, who, because of His great love for us doesn't bring immediate tragic consequences to our every transgression. Think about it, suppose the Lord took visible punitive actions at every single transgression that each of us made. What do we think our lives would be like under this kind of strict unforgiving justice?

We've all many times heard people say "no I just can't forgive him for doing that." Or another common phrase is well maybe I'll forgive him but I'll never forget it. Simple question, is this forgiving others from our heart? This mandate of forgiveness surely creates many dilemmas for us. For instance, when someone we know or care about has proven themselves through their actions to have a propensity for certain failures, are we mandated by these verses to ignore those propensities and take no action? I guess what I'm asking is, does forgiveness eliminate all consequences? This is a question we ponder about often, especially when it regards religious leaders who've committed various sins and been caught outright. Upon their confession, and request for forgiveness, are we then obligated to restore them to their positions as spiritual leaders? These kind of situations cause as much grief and difficulty don't they?

There's only two ways that I can think of to answer questions like this. One is simply to hash out what we believe in our minds and hearts and act on that. Or, secondly, to look to the Scriptures to see if we can find some examples that will help us make these determinations. My preference is the latter. An example I might use is that of King David, who committed the egregious sins of adultery and even murder. When the Lord sent his prophet to confront David on these issues he readily confessed his sin and pleaded to the Lord for forgiveness. He was granted that forgiveness, but let's examine the nature of that forgiveness and some consequences that were and were not abolished.

First, the baby that was produced by this adulterous affair died as an infant despite David's prayers to God to spare this baby's life. Second, David's own children turned against him and drove him away for some period of time. David pleaded for the life of his beloved son Absalom, but Absalom perished nonetheless. David's whole life was affected as a consequence of the actions he had taken, even though the Lord had granted him forgiveness.

On the positive side, the Lord allowed him to remain king until his death, albeit with much turmoil and some brief interruption. And the Lord gave David and Bathsheba another son named Solomon, whom God blessed richly and made him king of Jerusalem, and allowed him to build the great temple of the Lord. Furthermore it was from this very same bloodline that Jesus Christ himself was later to be born. We can see from this that God did forgive David from His heart, but He didn't absolve David of all of the consequences of his actions. These are always very difficult situations, but the Scriptures do shed light on the proper resolution, if we'll use them instead of our emotions and opinions.

Therefore, the whole of Christian life is a practice, a disciplined exercise, in learning and applying the principles of godliness in our own lives and practices. This only happens when those principles of godliness are written in our hearts and minds, and when we're well versed in the holy Scriptures, which afford us the true knowledge of God and His Holiness and righteousness and love for us. You see it's to these very principles, and this very mindset, that the chosen of God are being transformed, (Romans 12:2) and conformed. (Romans 8:29 and Ephesians 4:13) Throughout the New Testament, scriptures are a call to the chosen of God to learn about God through those holy Scriptures that He's left us, and then commence to bring our thinking and behaviors into conformity to those of Jesus Christ our Lord. Which is the preparation process that God the Father has specifically designed as the means to prepare us to be the bride of his Son and His family of worshipers.

Therefore these calls of Scripture to Holiness are much more than just suggestions on how Christians should live, but rather are the marching orders for all those who would call themselves His disciples. These are the descriptions of the attributes of Christ, and therefore the attributes to which we are commanded to be conformed and transformed. As we see, they start as inward thoughts and attitudes and affections, and are then demonstrated by visible and tangible acts and words and practices. This is the Christian life, learning about God, being conformed to what we learn, and then disciplining and training ourselves to live and act in conformity with our Savior and role model Jesus Christ. The Scriptures call this sanctification, which is also that narrow and restricted road that leads to eternal life, and there is no other path, and there is no other road, that leads to the that destination. (Mat 7:13-14)

Just for the sake of those who think were talking about works salvation, let me make it clear that what I'm saying is not that there is a certain level of holiness and sanctity that must be achieved by every person to enter the kingdom of God. The Bible doesn't teach this. What the Bible teaches is that there is only one road that leads there. And it's not an issue of how far we get down that road, but rather that it's that road of obedience to God and striving to our best to deny ourselves and follow Him that we **must be on**, or we'll never get there. And this is the whole point of the parable that Jesus told in Matthew chapter 7 that we call the two foundations. The foundation of sand is those who hear God's Word but don't choose to obey it, and the foundation of rock is those who hear the word of God and seek to conform themselves to it in submission to Christ. The outcome of the one his destruction, and the outcome of the other is survival.

Conclusion

Therefore now, to try and summarize the point of the first 13 verses in chapter 3, one could say that we've been introduced to a new man, who is no longer like the old man that he used to be. This new man is no longer permitted to behave in the manner that he used to, and much more, is expected not to want to behave the way he used to. Something is happened to this new man on the inside which cannot help but become visible by his outward behaviors.

What a man is on the inside is what determines what he does on the outside. This was the point Jesus was making in Matthew 15 when he said it was those things that proceed from the heart of man that defile the man. While He was answering a specific question about eating without washing your hands, He nevertheless used that situation to identify the true source of man's defiling behaviors:

16 "Are even you still lacking in understanding?" He asked. 17 "Don't you realize that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? 18 But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a man. 19 For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. 20 These are the things that defile a man, but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

How we think and feel in our heart is what determines what we say and what we do. People can say and do whatever they please, and we can all put on a front for a while, but eventually a person's true inward character and nature and feelings will become manifest by his resultant behaviors. Just as Judas Iscariot put up a good front for several years, nevertheless the true inward condition of his heart finally gave him away through his outward behaviors.

If we are truly a new man then we will truly demonstrate this newness of life by our attitudes and behaviors, and this is the message of Colossians chapter 3. A new man is only new if there's something different about him. If it's just like the old man then exactly what is it that's new? In Colossians chapter 3 we get a visual picture of the nature and character of those who have been regenerated, reborn, and are being progressively transformed and conformed to the image of their Savior.

Colossians chapter 3 is a picture of what the Lord's new men are learning to become, and our mandate is to learn to thoroughly understand and appreciate the value of this new heart and mind to such a degree that we long for it and eager strive to put it into practice, because it's our hearts desire, and, the end result to which our God and Father has created us. He's intentionally reserved the final and perfect completion of this sanctifying work for his beloved Son Jesus, but that final and perfect completion only comes to those who were already on that road to begin with.

Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
01/14/09