

## Living Out A Holy Life

By Santiago Lange

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Colossae, where some problems had arisen because the people there were trying to mix paganism and Christianity, or Judaism and Christianity, or Greek thought and Christianity. This letter to the Colossians is Paul's attempt to straighten things out.



In Colossians 3: 12-14 we read:

*Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man has a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God. And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Paul made a list of the things the people of Colossae needed to put on to live a holy life. He began by reminding them that they're God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. He did this so they would know that they are special. God chose them even before they were born to be His special people. These words don't mean that the people at Colossae were the only ones who are holy and dearly loved. These words are addressed to Christians everywhere, in every time. They are also aimed at us, just as they were aimed at the first Christians.

*"Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."* One thing God wants us to put on is compassion. When we think of compassion, we usually think of sympathizing with someone else's pain. But the word used here for **compassion** means a lot more than that. It means actually feeling someone else's pain. Experiencing their pain just as they're experiencing it. Actually, entering into another person's pain and sharing it with them. Compassion also involves showing mercy to people who are shunned or even hated by others. Jesus showed compassion for a tax collector and called him to be His disciple. He showed compassion for the woman caught in adultery and sent her on her way with all her sins forgiven. He showed compassion for the people who crucified Him and asked for forgiveness on their behalf. Jesus was full of compassion.

God also wants us to put on **kindness**. What does it mean to be kind? Essentially, it means treating others without harshness. Kindness is treating other people with respect and honor. It's attributing value and dignity to another person. Jesus valued every living thing. He showed respect for the woman at the well. He valued children and took the time to listen to them. He healed slaves and rich alike. Jesus was kind.

**Humility** is next. In our lives, we haven't always been taught to be humble. Quite the contrary, many of us have been taught to be proud of ourselves. But there's a difference in taking proper pride in ourselves and being downright conceited. We can be proud and yet be properly humble. True humility stems from accurately understanding our own importance, or lack thereof. It comes from understanding that everything we have comes from God. It comes from knowing that anything we manage to accomplish is not through our own efforts, but through God's work in us. Humility is knowing our own shortcomings and that we exist only through the grace of God. Look at others and choose to see them the way God sees them, not simply in terms of their relation to us, but as people that God loves.

Then there is **gentleness**. Some synonyms for gentleness are tenderness, affection, and warmth. In our society, gentle people are often looked on as being weak, which is definitely not a trait to be desired. Jesus was gentle, and He was anything but weak. Look at the way He treated children, and at the way He was concerned about widows and orphans, the less fortunate, and those unable to look out for themselves. Jesus was tender, but He was also strong. And that's what He wants us to become.

**Patience** is next on Paul's list, and this is something many are sorely lacking. In today's busy world, we often zip around from one place to another, trying to get done all that we think we have to do. We're in a hurry, and we get frustrated when things don't go as smoothly or as quickly as we believe they should. People are sometimes rude, inconsiderate, or completely unconcerned with our needs, and we end up occasionally being rude right back. We've all seen people who get loud and belligerent because their needs aren't being met quickly enough. We've all dealt with people who seem determined to kill our last good nerve. We get frustrated with children who never seem to understand what we're trying to teach them. We get irritable with older people who don't hear as well as they used to and we have to keep repeating ourselves. We don't have time to mess with people who are new and just learning their jobs. In other words, we lack patience. What we need is a reminder that there have been times when we got on someone else's nerves; when we didn't hear exactly what was said to us; when we were rude and inconsiderate. What we wanted more than anything was for people to be patient with us, and when they weren't, that just upset us all the more. We have to keep those times in mind and react to others the way we'd want them to react to us, with patience.

Another instruction Paul gives us is **to bear with one another**. We've heard this expression used countless times. „Just bear with me, and I'll eventually get it done“. „Bear with me and I'll be finished soon“. In other words, be patient with me and things will eventually work out. But this isn't exactly what Paul means here. The meaning here goes much deeper and carries much more weight than the bearing with others that we think of. Here Paul is intimating that we have to actually take upon ourselves the burden of another person and help them to carry it.

When another's pain and grief is too much for them to bear, then let's bear with them, and take some of that pain and grief upon ourselves. When their burden is too heavy to carry any further, let's take some of that burden upon our own shoulders and bear it for them. Think of what Jesus bore for us, a weight that we didn't bear with Him, and maybe we can get an idea of the love that has to be involved in bearing with someone else.

**Forgiveness** is also mentioned. Paul tells us to forgive others whatever grievances we may have against them. We're to forgive as the Lord forgave us. How is that possible? The key to

forgiving others is remembering how much God has forgiven us. It's extremely difficult, bordering on impossible, to forgive others who have seriously wronged us. But it can be done, if we'll only take the time to remember how God has forgiven us so much. Realizing God's infinite love and forgiveness can help us love and forgive others.

Over all these virtues just named, we're supposed to put on **love**. The idea here reminds us of putting on warm clothes in the cold of winter. First you put on wool socks; then you put on shirts and pants; then sweaters and jackets; and last but certainly not least you put on an insulated coat. In God's closet, we're supposed to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Then over all of that, to make everything work as it should, we're to put on the heavy coat of love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Just like the wardrobe we've need in the cold winter weather, we need all these layers of characteristics in order to live as God's chosen people. And just like the winter clothes we need in cold weather, none of the pieces will work properly alone. We need all of them in order to be properly clothed.

Paul tells us to let the **peace of Christ** rule in our hearts, since we're members of one body and have been called to peace. Christians should live in peace, but to live in peace doesn't necessarily mean that all differences in opinion are automatically eliminated. It does mean that Christians should work together despite their differences. Love like this means that we have to consciously make a decision to meet the needs of others. If we try to live in love with each other, then that love will lead to peace, at church, at home, and in the community.

Sort of as an afterthought, Paul adds the words, "and be **thankful**." He doesn't elaborate at all on this, he just tells us to be thankful. It could mean that we should be thankful that we were called to peace. It could mean that we should be thankful that we're members of one body. It probably means that we should take the time to give voice to our gratitude to God. All too often we're in a hurry to ask God for something or to tell Him what we need. We sometimes forget to stop and take stock of what all God has done for us and actually thank him for it.

Paul tells us to let the **word of Christ** dwell in us richly as we teach and admonish one another. And we're to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The early Christians had the Old Testament to read and study, but not the New Testament. The stories about Jesus were memorized and passed on from one generation to the next. One way they did this was to set the words to music and teach the songs to each other. We know how effective this is. We should be passing those songs and stories of Christ on to our children and grandchildren, our neighbors and friends, our new acquaintances and everyone we meet.

The last instruction Paul gives is, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Doing "all in the name of the Lord Jesus" means bringing **honor** to Christ in every aspect and activity of daily living. As Christians, we represent Christ at all times, wherever we go and whatever we say and do. What impression do people have of Christ when they see or speak with us? Are there changes that we should make in our lives in order to honor Christ?

Let's resolve to follow the teachings of Paul and to open up to the lead of the Spirit so that we may become more Christlike. When people look at us, may Christ be mirrored in our faces, and in our souls. □