A TRANSFORMED LIFE – COLOSSIANS 3:12-17
Part 1: A Transformed Life of Love (verses 12-14)

Open your Bibles if you would to Colossians 3.

As your turning there, I want to start this morning by asking you a question... What are the characteristics of a life transformed by Christ?

When a person is genuinely converted through faith in Jesus, what changes would you expect to see in that person? What should shape their perspectives, their responses? In what ways would they stand out from the world around them?

All of us probably know someone who professes to be a Christian, and yet their life doesn't bear any fruit of transformation.

When I was growing up, I knew a lot of people who claimed to be Christian, but aside from attending church, they didn't live any different from how I did, and I knew I was a complete and total heathen.

And so I grew up thinking Christianity was something people believed in, but it didn’t really change the way a person was, never effected how they lived, and so what was the point.

But then I came to college in Virginia. And in God’s good providence, I fell in with a group of guys who didn't just profess Christ. There was something really different about these guys.

And the difference was appealing to me. But what exactly that difference was, well that was hard for me to nail down. It was more than what they said or didn’t say. It was more than what they did or didn’t do. They were different to their core.

They were living a transformed life. Are you?

What is it that makes a follower of Jesus different from the world? What are the characteristics of a life changed by Christ?

That is a question that believers need to be able to answer if they are going to be assured that their own walk reflects genuine conversion. And because this is important for Christians to know, Paul provides answers for us in Colossians 3.

And really, who better is there to answer that question than Paul? A man whose life prior to conversion was full of self-righteousness, external forms of religion, hatred and persecution, but who was transformed by faith in Christ into a humble, loving, self-sacrificing shepherd of the faith.
Well, over the next two weeks, we are going to unpack what Paul identifies as the characteristics of a transformed life.

Follow along with me now as we read Colossians 3:12-17...

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. 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.

In the beginning of chapter 3, Paul reminds the Colossians of their identity. He tells them who they are as a result of their relationship with Christ.

They were raised in Christ (verse 1). Their life is hidden with Christ (verse 3). And they will appear with Christ in glory (verse 4).

And because of who they are in Christ, there are things they must put off. Things like fornication, uncleanness, evil desire, covetousness (verse 5). Things like anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language and lying (verses 8 & 9). Such things have no place in Christ, and so they can have no place in His people.

And as we reach verse 12, Paul reiterates the significance of the believer’s identity in Christ. They are chosen of God, and declared by God to be holy and beloved.

Now don’t miss that everything mentioned about a Christian’s identity, describes what God has done on behalf of the believer. He is the one who initiates relationship by choosing them.

He is the one who declares His people to be “holy” – set apart, separate from the world.

And He declares them to be “beloved” – dear to Him and precious in His sight, NOT because a believer has done anything to merit such affection, but because God is gracious in bestowing it.

Chosen... Holy... Beloved. These words all speak to what God has produced in the life of the Christian. And if you are a believer, you too are chosen, holy, beloved. You have been transformed.

Does your life testify to that transformation? How can you know? How can you be sure?
Well, in verses 12 through 17, the passage we are going to focus on this week and next, Paul explains six characteristics of a transformed life. Where verses 5-9 gave us what the believer is to put-off, verses 12-17 tell us what a believer is to put-on. Six characteristics of a transformed life.

And the first of those characteristics is... a Christian has a NEW HEART.

**Read with me again verse 12...**

*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...*

The term Paul uses here is not the normal Greek word for “heart” (*kardia*). Rather, he uses the word *splagchna*, which literally means your guts, your intestines your bowels.

In Greek thought, *splagchna* represents the seat of a person’s emotions. Now, we can relate to that. You’ve probably had emotional experiences that caused your stomach to churn or do summersaults, right?

We call that a “visceral” response to something. Well, *visera* is the Latin word for our intestines our guts. *Visera* is the latin equivalent of the Greek work *splagchna*.

But where we usually associate our stomach coming into play with unpleasant emotions, *Splagchna* is more typically associated with positive emotions, things like affection, compassion, sympathy and tenderness, emotions that moved a person in their very core.

In fact, the verb form of the word *splagchna* shows up frequently in the Gospels describing Jesus’ compassion towards people He interacted with.

**For example, in Matthew 9:36 it says...**

*“When [Jesus] went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.”*

The phrase “felt compassion” is *splagchni-zomai*, the verb form of *splagchna*.

And notice that Jesus’ emotional response to the crowd led Him to action. He felt compassion, so He healed their sick.

And that is the key to understanding what is so important about the word *splagchna*: it describes emotions that demand a compassionate response; emotions that compel us to get involved in the lives of others.

Every single time that word is used of Jesus in scripture, it describes the compassion that moved Him to action. As His followers, we are called to mirror that heart of Christ, and put on a “guts” of compassion.
We should feel for others, and be drawn to them, just as Jesus was drawn to us in our desperate need. That is the idea of the word *splagchna*.

But since in our modern way of thinking, we typically associate our heart, not our intestines with being the seat of such emotions, the Bible translators wisely interpret that word as “heart” to better capture the sense of the passage.

Likewise, I didn’t think it would benefit your understanding if I had made the first point of my sermon, “A believer has bowels that move them!”

I just didn’t think that would convey what it should. And so I’m sticking with the word “heart” in my outline. If you want to use “guts” in your notes, be my guest.

The important thing is that you understand Paul’s meaning. The believer’s identity in Christ requires them to put on a new heart. One that responds to what others are going through with compassion. One that reflects Christ’s own heart towards us.

And now, that phrase “put on” carries with it the idea of putting on one’s clothes. Paul is saying we are to adorn ourselves with these attributes. To cloth ourselves with them.

And so, that phrase implies work on our part. We shouldn’t expect compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience to just happen on their own. We have to put effort into them – we have to strive for them.

And notice that these attributes He commands us to put on are all things we do that benefit others. We are called to be compassionate, kind, humble, gently and patient towards others. For their benefit.

These are things that draw us away for our natural self-centeredness, and focuses our concern on the welfare of others. That is the *splagchna* we are to “put on.”

The life Christ calls us to is not an entitlement to receive from others, but empowerment to give to others.

In fact, immediately following this passage in the end of chapter 3 and beginning of chapter 4, Paul lays out what the life of a believing wife, husband, child, parent, employee and employer should look like. Now, everyone in this room this morning falls into at least one of those categories, so pay attention – this applies to you.

Everything Paul lists for those roles God which has given us concerns how believers are commanded to act towards others. What believers are expected to give to others; how you are to serve, bless and benefit others... at a cost to you.
Nothing in those commands is about what we should expect from others.

In fact, let’s take that one step further, because, it isn’t just in Colossians that that is true. Everything scripture says about the life of a believer involves how we should act towards other. There is nothing in scripture that says, “Christian, this is how you deserve to be treated by your husband, wife, child, parent, employee, or employer.”

What you receive from others is NOT the point of the Christian life. The focus is on what you have received from God through Christ, that you are to GIVE OUT to others as a blessing and benefit to them.

And yet somehow, we turn that all around. Husbands mistakenly think, “God’s commands to my wife are about how she should serve me.” But they aren’t – they’re about how the wife serves God. Wives mistakenly think, “God’s commands to my husband are about what he should do for me.” But they aren’t – they are about what the husband should do to honor God.

The commands God gives to believers on how to live are always about God’s glory being revealed in the transformed lives of His people. They are never about the human recipient of those behaviors. We merely get to be the beneficiaries of those blessings.

And so, when I benefit from my wife living out her God given role faithfully, that is grace to me! I do not in any way deserve that! I have not earned that!

But in our delusion of self-importance, we think God commands others to be holy in order to serve us. To benefit me – it’s all for my glory.

And so we use will actually use scripture to condemn others for their failure to give us what we feel we are entitled to.

“I’m not getting the respect I deserve, I’m not getting the attention I deserve, I’m not getting the reassurance I deserve, I’m not getting the thanks I deserve and I’m mad about it!”

Let me say it again, the call of the Christian life is not about what you get from others, but what you have received from God, that you give to others.

In fact, what is the ONLY thing the Bible promises believers WILL receive from other people? Persecution.

Well, there you go. Now that’s what you need to complain about: “Hey, I’m not getting the persecution the Bible promised me and I’m mad about it!”
Now, if that statement seems ridiculous to you, how much more should those complaints we utter about respect, attention, reassurance, thanks, whatever – you fill in the blank with what your own heart thinks it deserves from other people; how much more so should those selfish complaints seem ludicrous to us?!

At least if we were upset about not receiving persecution we would have a scriptural basis for our complaint.

How my wife is commanded to live towards me has nothing to do with me. It has everything to do with God.

My heart for my wife – my splagchna – should move me to help her live out her role, out of love for God and for her, not out of my own selfish interests.

Those verses don’t belong to me, and so I have no right to use the commands God has given to her to justify and feed my own self-centeredness.

And here is the flip side of that coin. Neither can my wife excuse herself from living out the commands of God based on my failings as a husband. Believe me, that is something I am eternally grateful for!

God’s commands for her aren’t dependent upon me, anymore than they are given for me.

But you know what happens. A person is confronted on why they aren’t living out the commands of scripture for their relationships, and they respond by listing everything their spouse does wrong, or everything their child does wrong, or everything their parent does wrong, or everything their neighbor does wrong.

We tend to believe the lie that our obedience to the commands God gave to us somehow depends upon the performance of others.

And you can see where such thinking leads, can’t you? Since every human relationship is made up of two sinners, both parties will constantly be giving one another adequate justification for why they don’t need to follow God’s commands, because of the failings of the other person.

Talk about a hopeless spiral! All because we tend to have a man-centered view of the scriptures that sees ourselves as the deserving recipients of God’s commands to other people.

That’s why we need to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Only a new heart that reflects Christ’s character can remedy the wicked self-centeredness of natural man.

Notice as well how all of these attributes of the believer’s new heart, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, they all help lead to a life of peace.
In fact, the opposites of those characteristics all lead to a life of strife, bickering, and disorder, don’t they?

I can’t tell you the number of people I have known over the years who are condemning, abrasive, self-righteous, controlling, demanding and they wonder why they have so much conflict and drama in their lives. They just don’t see that the common denominator in all their failed relationships is them.

It’s sad – and frankly, it’s pretty common. In fact, I’ll bet you all know someone like that, don’t you?

Maybe the person you know like that is you. Maybe God is using this passage this morning to help you see that the peace you lack, is the result of your never having put on a new heart.

Now, whether or not you suspect that of yourself, it would be good to ask others if your life is characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Ask your spouse that. Parents, ask your kids that. And kids, ask your parents and your siblings. But don’t just ask the people who you get along with. Ask the people you regularly butt heads with, too.

Are there things you need to put off? Is there a new heart you still need to put on?

Well do it! If you’re a believer, your identity in Christ demands it. Put on a new heart that reflects His nature.

And let me say, what a blessing the compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient person is to everyone they come into contact with. What peace they bring to relationships! What a joy they are to be around!

Why? Because being around them gives us a glimpse of what Christ is like.

You all know people who are like that, too, don’t you? People who display a heart transformed by grace. If you don’t, get with me after the service and I’ll introduce you to a few of them.

Now, some of you may be thinking, “Yes, but even the compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient person still has to deal with people who aren’t that way.”

You’re right of course. But think about it, it is the reality of the presence of sin in each of our lives that makes these Christ-like attributes so necessary. I mean, how can you be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle or patient except with people who need those things?
In a way, God redemptively uses the weakness and failings of others in our lives to **grow us** in our Christian character.

And even the person who exemplifies all these good attributes, is still a sinner, and still needs others to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient with them.

That’s why Paul provides us with the second new characteristic of a transformed life. The first characteristic was that a Christian has a new heart. Now the second is: a Christian has a **NEW RESPONSE**.

**Read verses 12 and 13 with me again.**

*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.**

Let me ask you, “How do you respond to being sinned against?” How do you react when someone pushes your buttons, tweaks your nerves, grinds your gears, or burns your bacon? How do you respond?

Do you become indignant? Do you lash back? Do you blow up?

Or, do you clam up? Do you bottle it all up inside and try to suppress it?

Do you replay the video of it over and over in your mind re-scripting the ending each time with what you wish you had said or what you wish you had done?

Or let me ask the question a different way. Do you respond any differently than an unbeliever responds? What difference does your relationship with Christ make in how you respond to being sinned against?

In verse 13, Paul tells believers they have a new way of responding. Bear with one another and forgive one another, just as the Lord forgave you.

Notice again, that how we are to respond to others is tied directly to what we have received from Christ! Isn’t that something, to know that Jesus never asks us to do for others, what He has not already done for us… **infinitely better!**

Because Jesus has forgiven us, we **can** forgive others. Because Jesus has forgiven us, we **must** forgive others.

James 2:13 warns us that...  
“...**judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.**
But then he adds this encouragement: *Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Much more than a begrudging willingness to show mercy, Christians should be known for our desire to forgive. If the greatest act Jesus did – dying on the cross and rising again – was done for our forgiveness, then our lives should portray an unquenchable thankfulness for that a new *splagchna* that yearns to share with others what we have received from Christ.

Now, I should clarify, I’m not talking about the shallow kind of forgiveness that merely seeks to sweep the issue under the rug. Nor am I talking about the empty sort where I say... “I forgive you, now get out of my life.”

Paul says we are to forgive “just as the Lord forgave” us. “Just as” – to the same degree, with the same sincerity, for the same goal of restoration.

Jesus did not forgive simplistically or naively. He dealt seriously with our sin – He died for it! Nor did He forgive us while leaving a gulf of separation between us and Him.

And biblical forgiveness doesn’t require the offender to earn or deserve forgiveness. Let’s face it, if anyone could have withheld forgiveness on the grounds that the other party was undeserving, it would have been Christ withholding forgiveness from you and me.

The forgiveness He gave us was gracious – unearned, unmerited. It was full and complete.

There is so much more that I could say about the quality of the forgiveness believers find in Jesus, but if you have questions about what biblical forgiveness looks like, let me recommend to you the book *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande. It provides clear, scriptural insights on this topic.

But for now, let me just add that there is no greater testimony of the forgiveness we have received, than the forgiveness that we give. On the other hand, why would anyone listen to us about the forgiveness that can be found in Christ, if no forgiveness can be found in us?

Jesus’ forgiveness is a doorway, a threshold through which He carries His bride into a new intimate relationship with Him.

So too is our relationship with Christ a doorway to deep and fruitful relationship with those who are His church. Our relationship with Christ is the basis for our relationship with other believers.

And that leads us to the 3rd characteristic of a transformed life, and the final one we will cover this morning.

First, a Christian has a new heart. Second, a Christian has a new response. Now the thirdly, a Christian has a NEW RELATIONSHIP.
Look again at verse 14:

Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Here again, Paul commands the “putting on” or “adorning oneself” with an attribute. But notice that love is to be put on “beyond” or “above” all the other attributes.

As John MacArthur notes in his commentary on this verse:

“In keeping with the motif of putting on clothes, love is the belt or sash that pulls all [the other attributes...] together.” (pg. 157)

That is a great word picture for us to understand the effect love has on the other qualities we’ve looked at.

Love is the supreme attribute. Believers cannot truly be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient or forgiving to one another, unless they are first and foremost loving.

MacArthur adds, “To try to practice the [other] virtues apart from love is legalism.” (157)

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 states...

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Listen, this is God’s arithmetic: All things – Love = Nothing!

Could God make the significance of love any more clear to us than that? All things – Love = Nothing!

Now, as most of you know, there are a couple different words in the Greek for love, each with its own nuances. The word for love used here in verse 14 is *Agape*.

It is the same word used in 1 John 4:8 when it says...

The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Love is the hallmark of a genuine relationship with God, because God is love.

Now, there are many attributes one could name about God, but I would contend there is none more important to mankind than God’s love. God could be holy, sovereign, wise, almighty... without ever having any relationship with us at all.
It is God’s attribute of love that bridges the gap between God and His people. It is His love that caused God to extend grace and bring salvation to His people.

As we are told in 1 John 4:9...
*By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.*

And in John 3:16...
*For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

Because God loved, God gave. And here again, we see this attribute being one that is sacrificial, other-centered in its nature; aimed not at the welfare of the giver, but at the welfare of recipient.

Not only is love God’s motive in His relating to us, but He says it must be our motive in relating to Him. His greatest commandment to us is to...

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

And second only to our love for God, is the love we are to have for others.

LOVE is the basis for the two greatest commandments from God for His people. Love defines who we are as believers.

Love is to be a distinguishing characteristic that sets the follower of Christ apart from the world.

Jesus said in John 13:35...
*By this all men will know you are my disciples...”*

Now, just hit pause there a minute and think of all the ways Jesus could have ended this statement... but didn’t. All the things that He could have said would show us to be His disciples. All the things WE tend to think are most important. All the things we exalt as the marks of true holiness – true Christianity. All the things we pat ourselves on the back for.

But how does Jesus complete that statement?
*By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Love is the supreme defining characteristic of a Christian. And so we are to put on love, which is “the perfect bond of unity.” Love is to be the unifying force in the church.

That is the idea here. And it is a RADICAL idea!

To think – a relationship that isn’t defined by me getting my needs or my expectations met,
but is defined instead by me giving love! That is a kind of unity that is only possible among people who have been transformed by Christ.

You see, one aspect of the church reflecting God’s glory, is that we are to mirror the unity and harmony that exists between the members of the trinity. But get this -- the unity of the Trinity is not based on one member of the Godhead having their needs met by the other members of the Godhead. God has no needs!

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in perfect unity not because they meet one another’s needs, but because God is love. And God calls His people to reflect that divine unity by relating to one another in love!

How different that is from the consumeristic approach so many have towards the church today, where my relationship to the local church is based on how dynamic the preacher is, or how stirring the music is, or how entertaining the youth program is. In other words, based on how the church pleases me.

But Paul says, “No! The only perfect bond of unity for the church is the love we give one another!”

Listen, if your relationship to the local church is grounded in anything but your desire to love Christ and His people, prepare to be disappointed!

No local church will ever perfectly satisfy your desires and felt needs. It just won’t happen.

Give us enough time, and our church will disappoint you. Not because we want to, or don’t care about you, but because we aren’t perfect – we will fail you.

That is why love has to be the basis of our relationship to the church, because only love is the perfect bond of unity. It is the only thing that does not fail. Prophecies will fail. Spiritual gifts will fail. Knowledge will fail. But love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Despite messages in our modern culture to the contrary, the church does not exist to make its members happy. The church exists to help us strive to be holy. To help us grow to be more like Christ. And no part of that growth is more important that helping us to love better.

Now, let me encourage you by saying, one of my greatest joys as an elder… is getting to see all the ways that you love one another.

There’s a lot of care for one another that is done publically that anyone in the congregation can see and celebrate. But there is also a lot of sacrificial love that take place behind the scenes, anonymously, that is channeled through the elders, and we have the unique privilege of seeing those acts of love and generosity and sacrifice. Let me say, what a blessing you are to us!
My sons can testify to how many times Teresa and I have pulled out of the parking lot after service exclaiming, “I love our church, I love our church!” Why? Because of the way we see you ministering to one another, serving one another, counseling one another... loving one another!

And that gets me stoked! And if you’re a believer, that kind of love should get you stoked too!

When we experience that kind of tender care taking place in the body, our souls are reminded of God’s great love for us.

In fact, if you aren’t loving the body sacrificially, if you are receiving without giving, if you are being served without serving, let me just say, you do not know what you are missing! You have no idea what joy is passing you by.

Is our church perfect in how we love one another? Have we arrived? No, we are still far from perfect. We are well aware of our shortcomings. And when we fail to love as we should it grieve us.

But there is also much grace to be thankful for in this body, and so I would just encourage you, excel still more! Love still more!

Now, if you have no idea what I have been talking about this morning. If your life isn’t characterized by a new heart of concern for others; if you have held onto bitterness and allowed the sins of others to go unforgiven, separating you from them; if you realize your relationships to others have been driven more by what you can get from them, than what you can give to them; and you’ve never experienced the blessing of Christian unity rooted in genuine love for the brethren, then maybe the issue is you aren’t really a Christian.

Maybe you’ve accepted the truth about Jesus without ever being transformed by it. You may even have asked Him to save you, but you’ve never allowed Him to be your Lord, have never really submitted your life to His control, and so you aren’t really converted.

If that describes you, let me encourage you to call out to Him today. Ask Him to be both your Lord and your Savior. Submit to His word, His will and His ways.

Ask Him to help you put on a new heart, to have a new response, and to commit to a new relationship. Be transformed through Christ!

We would love to help you with that. One of our elders will be down front following the closing of our service today to help answer any questions you have and to pray with you.