

Today we are going to look at three of the virtues that Paul tells believers to put on in Colossians 3, kindness, humility, and meekness. This is about the kind of people God is renewing us to be. We have seen in earlier passages in this letter that God has begun the renewal of the whole creation which includes creating a renewed human race in Christ. Verse 10 of chapter 3 speaks about the new humanity which is being renewed after the image of its creator. Human beings were originally **created** in God's image and in his plan of salvation God is **renewing** the followers of Jesus in his image. This sets the Christian life in the framework of the renewal of the creation. One of the wonderful things about this is that as images of God we are to reflect God's glory. That is what images do. They reflect that which they image. To the degree that we are like God we are reflect God's glory. And God's purpose is to fill the earth with people who reflect his glory.

At the beginning God told his original image bearers to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. God's plan was to fill the earth with images bearers who reflected his glory and that is still his plan. When God says in many places in the OT that the earth will one day be filled with the glory of God at least part of what he has in mind is that he is going to fulfill his original plan to fill the earth with image bearers who reflect his glory.

And it is in the light of this that we must understand Paul exhortation here for us to put on these character traits such as the ones we will look at this evening – kindness, humility, and meekness. These are ways that we image God. These characteristics are ways that we reflect the glory of God. Whenever we think about human beings as they ought to be we are thinking how we reflect God's perfections. Jesus is the perfect image of God and he is also the perfect human being and so these character traits that Paul us urging us to put on are ways that we can reflect the glory of God in our lives.

Now the reason that I am taking the time to look at each of them fairly carefully is each of them has something to contribute to our what it means to be renewed in the image of God. This in turn refers to what it means to be truly and fully human. That is what salvation is about – God is making us more like Jesus who is the perfect human being. The more we are like Jesus, the closer we are to being all that we are created and recreated to be as human beings. These characteristics are characteristics of the fullness of human life.

And one of the things that this list of characteristics conveys is that human interactions with one another are very, very rich when we relate to each other as we ought. Each of the virtues teaches us something of the richness of the way that we are meant to interact with one another. Each of these words conveys something of the beauty of God's character and the beauty of human relationships as God intends them to be. So we have a list of words and phrases here each of which tells us something different about the beautiful way in which we are to live together as images of God – as the new humanity.

Our first word today is kindness. Kindness is closely related to compassion, but it is not exactly the same which is why Paul includes it in the list next to compassion. We are to put on compassionate hearts. We are also to put on kindness. And by figuring out where compassion and kindness are similar and where they are different we add a little more to our appreciation of the beautiful way that God is calling us to relate to one another.

Compassion has a narrower focus than kindness. If you are being compassionate you are being kind, but not every expression of kindness is compassion. Compassion is kindness to those who are suffering to a greater or less extent. But kindness is also directed to those who are not suffering. Not all the people we interact with are suffering. You don't have compassion towards a believer who is in a very happy place in his or her life. But it does make sense to be kind to a person who is in a very happy place in his or her life.

So what exactly is kindness. We obviously have a general idea, but we want to understand as far as we can exactly what Paul here is telling us to put on.

The next step is to focus on the meaning of the Greek word that is translated as kindness. In a good translation like the ESV we can trust that the English word is a good translation of the Greek word, but it helps to consider the Greek word that is being translated and to consider the ways in which it is used in the NT.

The Greek word can either mean goodness or kindness. It is often used of God towards sinners. Romans 2:4 says that God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. Titus 3:4 refers to the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour and there the word "goodness" translates the Greek word that is translated "kindness" in our text. So the idea of kindness here, when it is used of God, has to do with his grace to sinners. He does good to sinners who do not deserve it. He is kind to sinners who do not deserve it.

But the Greek word that is translated kindness in our text is describing how humans ought to relate to one another. And here the idea is not only grace, where that is called for, but goodness, mildness, and generosity. Other words and phrases associated with this word in studies of the way that it is used in the Greek of the time are, concern for others, willingness to be of service, being considerate, benevolence, being warmhearted, gentle, and sympathetic.

So our English word "kindness" is a pretty good translation. Kindness has to do with relating to other people in a good way - with care, gentleness, interest, warmth. It may be an expression of compassion but it is often expressed in situations where compassion is not called for. It is being thoughtful. It is being welcoming. It is caring and showing interest in someone else's life. It is treating others in a way that shows that they are valued. The opposite of kindness is harshness, indifference, showing a lack of respect, not paying attention.

Here are a few examples of kindness in action: a genuine complement, a word of encouragement, listening carefully to what others say, taking their opinions seriously, being sensitive to the feelings of others. It may sometimes be expressed in a word of warning or rebuke, but if it is a kind warning or rebuke it will be expressed with as much care and sensitivity and gentleness as possible. Kindness means relating to others in such a way that they feel blessed by the experience.

So Paul here is calling us to grow in relating to other people with warmth, care, helpfulness, and encouragement. It is helpful to think of Jesus. The word "kindness" is not used of him directly, but the idea is certainly there in the way that NT describes him. We see him giving himself to heal the sick and to preach the

good news. We see it in the content of his teaching. He cares about people's anxieties. He came to serve. He came to heal. He was gentle. He had time for the little children.

So God here is calling us to put on kindness. If we are believers he is at work in us renewing us after the image of God and of Christ, but his work of renewing involves us putting on the grace of kindness. So we are to think about what kindness is, reflect on our own lives, and seek to grow in this area.

We all need to ask ourselves – am I a kind person? When I interact with people do they feel positive about the interaction? Or do they feel they have been brushed off, or disrespected or not heard? God's call to put on kindness means that we need to examine how we come across to people, notice tendencies to treat others unkindly and seek to grow in becoming a more kind person.

Next we have humility. Here is a helpful definition of the Greek word: "Humility is the disposition of valuing or assessing oneself appropriately; especially in the light of one's sinfulness or creatureliness." So humility is not thinking that you are a nothing or that you are insignificant or that you have no gifts or abilities. It is thinking of yourself accurately in the light of the Bible. Paul in Romans 12:3 gives a definition of humility although he does not use that word. He says there "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." He goes on in that passage to speak of spiritual gifts which have to do with God-given abilities that are to be used to serve in the church.

So it is not humility to deny your gifts. It is not humility to feel that you are worthless – to have feelings of low self-worth. Humility is not self-loathing. Paul says that we are to think of ourselves with sober judgment and that means thoughtfully in the light of the Word of God. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but we are not to think of ourselves more lowly than we ought to think either. We are to aim for accuracy in the light of the Bible.

The first requirement for humility is to recognize that we are creatures made by God. This is one of the most fundamental truths of the Bible. God is God and we are not God. God made us. We are accountable to him. We exist for him. Psalm 10:4 says, "In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'" This is the starting place for all humility. God is God and we have been created by God.

The second fundamental requirement for humility is to recognize that we are sinful. Certainly this is a key part of the biblical teaching that is intended to inform the way that we think about ourselves. Paul reminds us in Romans 3:10, "None is righteous, no, not one." The Bible teaches us that apart from Christ we are guilty of breaking God's law, that we have sinful hearts and that we are worthy of death.

Here is where we need to make a careful distinction between a couple of words which are used in humility contexts that sound similar but mean different things. I said earlier that humility does not mean think of ourselves as worthless. It is profoundly unbiblical to think of ourselves as worthless. But we are **unworthy**

because of our sin. That means that we deserve nothing but death and hell. Because we are sinners we are worthy of death and we are not worthy of life or of any of the blessings of life. We can never say to God that we deserve anything that he gives us including life itself. We are unworthy of anything but death and punishment. The other side of this truth is that everything good in our lives comes to us by God's grace. If we are saved it is because of God's grace in Christ. If we are not saved, the good things in our lives come from what we call God's common grace. So humility also involves acknowledging that we are unworthy sinners.

But we are valuable. Humility involves recognizing that we and all people are valuable because God made us and he made us in his image and he gave Jesus for salvation. As human beings made in God's image we have great value and part of humility is recognizing that that is true of everyone else as well. Humility includes understanding we are not more valuable than any other human being.

One of the great expressions of pride is the conviction that we are more valuable than others. Every single person in the world is made in God's image because of that no one is more valuable than any other. Think back to verse 11 of Colossians 3. "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free...." These are all distinctions by which people devalued one another and Paul is saying that those distinctions are not negatively relevant in the new humanity and if they are not negatively relevant in the new humanity, they should not be negatively relevant at all. So humility means thinking of others as just as valuable as you are.

It also means that we cannot take credit for our own gifts and abilities and positive character traits. In 1 Corinthians 4:6-7 Paul warns the Corinthians not to "be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it." We are not to be puffed up and we are not to be boastful. God has made us all different. We have nothing that we did not receive in terms of gifts and opportunities. We can be thankful for whatever God has given us, but we are to live with the awareness that our gifts and abilities and opportunities come from God and we are to use them for his glory. Humility requires that we do not think more highly of ourselves than we ought because we cannot take credit for any of our abilities.

So humility is about thinking appropriately about ourselves. In relation to God, we are his creations and we are worthy of death because of our sins. But at the same time we are valuable because we are valuable to God. In relationship to others humility means thinking that we are equal to others in as far as value is concerned and we cannot take credit for the gifts and abilities that God has given us.

Now I have not yet considered humility as an attribute of God. That is a very interesting and fruitful topic. One the one hand God can neither be humble or proud because he is perfect. If humility is thinking appropriately about himself, then God must think very highly of himself – he must think of himself as worthy of the worship of his creatures. God is not being proud when he seeks his own glory because that is appropriate because he is

worthy of it. The Bible does not use the term humility to refer to God. But it does use it to refer to Jesus and that opens up a very amazing insight into God's glory because Jesus is God and he reveals what God is like.

In Philippians 2:6-8 Paul writes of Jesus that "though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." This is a very profound passage. And it teaches us that by becoming a man God humbled himself for our salvation. God took the form of a servant in Jesus. God reveals himself in Jesus and one of the things that he reveals is that he humbled himself in Jesus for our salvation.

It is interesting that in Mark 10:42ff, Jesus teaches that true greatness is expressed in service to others.

"[W]hoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." We cannot say that Jesus served us in his human nature, but not in his divine nature. Jesus became a servant and Jesus is the God-man. It belongs to true greatness that, in Jesus, God came to serve especially by giving his life a ransom for many.

This is an awesome thought There is a sense in which God is humble because in Jesus God became a man and humbled himself to be a servant to the point of giving his life as a ransom for many. This belongs to the greatness of God. This belongs to the glory of God. And that is a very powerful motive for us humble ourselves to serve others. Paul applies this idea in Philippians 2 by saying that believers should show humility by counting others more significant than themselves. That is what we do when we serve one another humbly. And that is what Jesus models for us.

So hear the word of God calling us all to humility. Let us consider how we think of ourselves in relationship to God and in relationship to other people and seek to put on this characteristic of the new man. We need to ask ourselves – when think of other people, are there some people that I consider to be below me? Do I feel superior to others? When I consider myself in relationship to other people, am I humble?

Finally this evening we consider meekness. God through the apostle Paul is calling us to put on meekness. The idea of meekness in the Bible has a number of facets to it. It has the idea of submission to the will of God in difficult circumstances. This idea is mostly in the OT when it refers to the poor who wait upon the Lord to deliver them. Isaiah 11:4 says "[B]ut with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth." The meek of the earth are deal with hardships like poverty or injustice trusting that God will in his time deliver them. Peter describes Jesus in this way without using the word meekness – but that is what it is. 1 Peter 2:23, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." So there is this idea of suffering persecution and not lashing back, but trusting in God to vindicate. Jesus' call in the sermon on the mount to turn the other cheek falls into the category of meekness.

The NT also uses the idea of meekness to describe how we are to receive God's word. James 1:21 speaks of those who "receive with meekness the implanted word...." So meekness also has to do with our attitude to the word of God, which would include the preaching of the word of God.

But the Greek word that is translated meekness in our text is often translated as gentle or humble in other places in the NT. If we take these ideas together we think of someone who is submissive to God and gentle toward others.

The word is used of Jesus a couple of times and they are significant. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus refers to himself as gentle and lowly in heart. The Greek word behind "gentle" is the same word that is translated "meekness" in our text. Another significant reference to Jesus in connection with meekness is Matthew 21:5 which is a quotation from Zechariah prophesying about Jesus – "Behold your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey." The word "humble" is the translation of the Greek word behind "meekness" in our text. This one is very interesting because the point of that verse is that Jesus pursues his kingdom in a gentle way rather than in an aggressive and warlike way.

A couple of helpful references that refer to the meekness of Christians are Galatians 6:1 which says, "Brothers if anyone is caught in a transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness" and 1 Peter 3:4 which says of the adorning of godly women should be "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious."

So meekness is a combination of a submissive spirit towards God and a gentle spirit towards people. Think of Jesus as gentle and lowly in heart. Think of Jesus humble and on a donkey rather than a warhorse. Think of the spiritual restoring someone caught in a transgression in a spirit of gentleness. And think of a godly woman with a gentle and quiet spirit. Together these references give us a pretty good idea of what Paul is telling us to put on when it tells us to put on meekness.

There is in meekness the idea of not being pushy or aggressive in our interactions with others. It is not being defensive. Not always having to be right. In a situation where Christians were taking other Christians to secular court, Paul appeals them to turn to wise people in the Christian community to settle the dispute, but he also says "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" (1 Cor 6:7). That is meekness. Some of the characteristics of love that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 13:4 describe meekness. We could say that meekness is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it bears all things and endures all things. Meekness is about putting greater value on peace and harmony than on insisting on one's own interests or opinions.

And so the question comes, are we meek? We have seen that there are different nuances to the concept of meekness. The combination of submissiveness and gentleness suggests the attitude that is willing to mild and accommodating in order to promote peace and unity in the body. This fits well with what Paul is calling for in

the first part of Philippians 2. He says that the Philippians should “be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” And what he describe next is meekness. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

So let’s consider our lives and the way that we relate to others in the light of this virtue of meekness. Are we gentle? But more are we willing to mild and accommodating as a way to promote peace and harmony in our relationships with others and in the body in general.

So we have three virtues to think about. Kindness, Humility and Meekness. God is not calling us to grow in these areas with a heavy hand and harsh words. Instead he is urging us in the light of the vision of the new humanity to grow in the character traits that we will one day fully embody. Just think of how wonderful it will be when we are fully perfected and everyone is perfectly kind, humble and meek. That kind of relating together is what reflects God’s glory and pleases him.

Just think of how pleased God will be when he sees his people living together in perfect harmony and unity. Just think of the blessedness that we already experience because of what God has already worked in us. And so let the beauty of the goal and the hope of living it in perfection draw us into the self-examination, the changes and the practices that will enable us to put on kindness, humility, and love.