

## “Looking Back and Ahead”

January 3, 2021

Colossians 3:12-17

### I. Introduction

Often as we come to a “New Year,” people take time to look back over the past year and take inventory. Looking back, there are going to be things and people for which we are thankful—they bring pleasant memories. But there are also going to be other situations that bring back unpleasant memories—this year would include the covid-19 pandemic, a contested election, increases in violence. This change-over time is also a time to look ahead to the coming year and consider how the pleasant memories can be repeated and the unpleasant ones avoided. Some people even make New Year’s resolutions to help; sadly, they may be kept for only a week or two.

As Christians, we should take inventory, too. Have we grown? Do those around us see Jesus in what we say and what we do? Are we more Christ-like today than we were last year? Do we have a better understanding of God and who He is than we did last year at this time?

As we begin a new year, it would be good to look ahead and ask, “How can my Christian life be more pleasing to God and to those around me and even to myself?” In today’s Scripture, Paul gave 8 characteristics that should be seen in every Christian’s life. As Paul wrote in [Philippians 3:13](#), things we should strive or “**strain for.**”

### II. Christian Characteristics

**A. Compassion** The 1<sup>st</sup> characteristic that Paul listed is compassion. The Greek word Paul used means “*pity, mercy, sympathy, as well as compassion.*” As believers, we need to display a tender feeling of compassion and mercy towards those around us. We must not be indifferent to suffering. **BUT** we must be concerned about meeting people’s **spiritual** needs as well as their *physical* needs. As people who have been chosen by a merciful God, we need to show mercy and compassion to others in the same way.

**Turn to [Philippians 2:1-4](#).** Do you put the interests—the welfare—of others ahead of your own interests?

Jesus did. Some Christians are very good at caring for the physical needs of others, but what about their spiritual needs? Are we showing compassion to others if we don't tell them how they can have eternal life? Which is more important: a comfortable life here on earth or eternal life in heaven?

**B. Kindness** The 2<sup>nd</sup> characteristic: kindness is related to compassion. A *kind person* is as concerned about his neighbor's good as he is about his own. He is helpful to others. **Turn to Luke 6:35-36.** God is kind even to ungrateful and evil people—at one time that could describe each one of us (**Rom. 5:6**). Now as God's children we should do the same. We need to follow the example demonstrated in the story of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37**. Everyone is your neighbor, and everyone needs your kindness.

**C. Humility** Then there's humility, Humility is not thinking poorly of yourself; humility is having a proper estimate of yourself; of who you are. In **Romans 12:3** Paul wrote, **“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”** As we read in **Philippians 2**, the person with a humble mind will think of others 1<sup>st</sup>. Humility allows one to serve others without caring whether it is noticed or not. Humility is the absence of pride.

**D. Gentleness** The next characteristic of a Christian is **“gentleness;”** gentleness is closely related to humility. Gentleness, or as it is sometimes translated *“meekness,”* isn't being spineless, but rather being willing to suffer injury instead of inflicting or causing it. Gentleness is power under control. Jesus demonstrated gentleness when He allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross. Obviously, as the Son of God, He could have resisted successfully, but He didn't. In **Matthew 26:53**, Jesus said, **“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”** but instead He was willing to suffer death on the cross for you—this is “gentleness” or “meekness.” The gentle person does not fly off the handle, he has everything under control. Gentleness is the mark of a Christian under control of the Holy Spirit—it is a fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22-23**.

**E. Patience** Then there's patience. The patient person never gets unduly mad at others; that is, he doesn't get mad without a just cause. In [1 Timothy 1:16](#) we read that Jesus had perfect or unlimited patience. But at the suitable time, He did get angry—like when He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple in [John 2:13-16](#). That's what Paul meant in [Ephesians 4:26](#), "In your anger do not sin." The commentator William Barclay put it this way: *"This is the spirit which never loses its patience with its fellow-men. Their foolishness and their unteachability never drive it to cynicism or despair; their insults and their ill-treatment never drive it to bitterness or wrath."* Patience is the opposite of resentment or revenge. Turn to [James 1:19-20](#). There are times—although few in number—when it is appropriate to get angry—to defend others, but it is wrong to get angry at the wrong things for the wrong reasons.

**F. Bear with each other** Bearing with each other means to endure or hold back—the KJV translates it as "long suffering." In [1 Corinthians 4:12](#) Paul gave an example of being "long suffering," "When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it." He did not respond in kind and neither should we. [Ephesians 4:2](#) says, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

**G. Forgiving each other** Not only are we to endure problems and not retaliate, but we must also forgive the one causing trouble. If Christ can forgive us as we sin over and over, we must be able to forgive each other. We pray every Sunday, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" ([Matthew 6:12](#)). Since we want to be forgiven by God and by others, we must be ready to do the same.

**H. Love** Finally, Paul says to "put on agape (love)." Agape love is the belt that holds all these virtues together. As we can see in [1 Corinthians 13](#), the first 7 Christian characteristics listed here in [Colossians](#) are all part of true Christian love—agape love. Turn to [Romans 13:8-10](#). When love lives and rules in our hearts, it unites all the virtues together; then there will be spiritual maturity.

### III. Christian Priorities

If these 8 Christian characteristics are to be present and growing in a Christian's life, then we must get our priorities straight. Paul gave 3 Christian priorities beginning with *the Peace of Christ*."

**A. The Peace of Christ** The “*peace of Christ*” (and of God) is to rule or be the umpire in our hearts. This peace is to guide a believer in making decisions. When we obey the will of God, we will have His peace within; but when we step out of His will (intentionally or unintentionally), we lose His peace.

But peace of heart alone is not always the peace of God. When Jonah was running away from God, he was able to sleep peacefully in the boat while a storm raged outside. Having a feeling of peace about something isn’t sufficient evidence that one is in the will of God. If we are at peace with God, we will also be at peace with our fellow believers. If we are out of peace with God, we will bring discord and troubles to the church and even to others around us. Jonah thought he was at peace, but in reality, his sins created a huge storm for those around him.

Paul went on to say that when there is peace in the heart with God, there will be praise on the lips—Paul said, “**Be thankful.**” In **Psalm 32:1-7** David wrote that before he confessed his sins, he “**groaned all day long**” and his “**strength was sapped.**” But when he confessed his sins, he had peace with God and then he could sing. Do you find it hard to praise God? Perhaps you are walking out of God’s will. You don’t have the peace of God.

**B. The Word of Christ** Paul said that a 2<sup>nd</sup> priority for a Christian is “**the Word of Christ.**” If you are to experience the peace of Christ; if you are to demonstrate the characteristics of a Christian, the truths in this Book must dwell in or live in your life; the Word of Christ must fill your life. Paul wrote that it should feel at home in your heart. The Bible must be more than a bunch of facts or trivia, it must influence everything you think and say and do. The only way this is possible is through reading, studying, and applying the Word to your life. The Words of Christ must become part of you.

As well as causing the characteristics of a Christian to grow, Paul wrote that another result of being filled with God’s Word is that within the church body there will be teachings and warnings based on God’s Word—the Word of Christ. There will be singing of Psalms—*songs from the Old Testament*—and hymns—*songs of praise to God*—and spiritual songs—*songs of testimony telling of what God has*

*done for you.* Like Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail in [Acts 16:22-25](#), if we are in God's will and if we are filled with His Word, our singing will be done with gratitude to God even in the midst of calamity.

**C. The Name of Christ** The 3<sup>rd</sup> priority, "*the Name of Christ*," is the simplest and most basic rule of thumb for living the Christian life. Everything we say or do should be done and said in the name of Jesus; [1 Corinthians 10:31](#) says, "**So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**" By our words and our actions we should glorify His name. Actually, when people look at us, they should see Jesus Christ.

One of the best tests of any action is to ask yourself some questions: "Can I do this thing asking for Jesus' help?" "Can I speak it and in the same breath say the name of Jesus?" "Would I be willing to ask Jesus to do this action with me?" If the answer is "No," then it shouldn't be done at all—it is sin.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

As Christians we each bear the name of Jesus Christ. We belong to Him because He died for us. Bearing the name of Christ is a great privilege but it carries with it a tremendous responsibility. Just as our earthly families have expectations of us to bring honor to our family name and not disgrace it; our heavenly Father has expectations of us to bring honor to the name of Christ.

As you look over the past year, are the characteristics of a Christian visible in your life as you go about your daily activities? Are you compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient? Are you long-suffering and do you forgive others? Is everything you do regulated by agape—sacrificial—love? What are the priorities in your life? Where do having peace with Christ and living your life as God's Word says rank? Is your prime concern what others think of Christ and Christianity or what they think about you?

Since we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we have the resources we need to live and grow our Christian life. In [Philippians 1:6](#) we read, "**Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**" But we must allow the Holy Spirit to melt us, to mold us, to fill us, and to use us.

As you begin a new year, purpose in your heart and mind to allow the Holy Spirit to make you more Christ-like; to grow the fruit of the Spirit in your life; to transform you from the inside out. In your heart and mind choose to make the Peace of Christ, the Word of Christ, and the Name of Christ the priorities in your life.