

Just Do It

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 September 2008

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to continue this evening with the passage we've been considering last Sunday evening and this morning in Colossians chapter 3.

So if you turn with me to that chapter of Colossians chapter 3, it's on page 1184 and we'll read again just to remind ourselves of this part of the chapter that we've been considering and will continue to consider this evening.

Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 to 14. This evening we'll be thinking about verse 13. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

So we know who we are. Chosen, holy and dearly loved. We also know what we ought to wear. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and love.

[1 : 29] And now we're going to think about what we have to do. The two things that Paul mentions here in verse 13, we can just notice, bear with each other.

We have to bear with each other. And then he goes on to tell us that we must forgive one another. Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. So two things that Paul specifically mentions that we must do as Christians. Bear with one another and forgive one another. Now this evening I'm going to focus or spend a little bit more time on the second of those two.

But I do want to mention briefly the first as well. Bear with each other. Now the Bible, not surprisingly given the author, reflects such an accurate grasp of the human condition.

As Christians, we do struggle to live in a way that reflects who we are. So often we are not the beautiful people we ought to be and one day will be.

[2 : 39] And this exhortation recognizes that reality. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is so realistic when in the middle of this wonderful description of who we are and how we ought to be clothed, he comes in with what seems a bit of an anticlimax and says, Bear with one another.

Put up with each other. And so that reflects how accurately he understands what people are like, what we are like. We don't clothe ourselves as we should so often.

And so it is necessary for us to bear with one another. So often rather than dressing with the wonderful garments that we were considering this morning, rather we are often insensitive.

We are often selfish. We are often opinionated. We are often rude. We are often hurtful. And sometimes we are just plain silly. And we say things and do things without maybe any malicious intent.

And yet the result is that we hurt somebody or offend somebody. I don't think anybody would quibble with that. That is a reasonable, I think, description of what so often is the case with us.

[3 : 57] And so given that this is the reality, how important are these words of Paul? Bear with one another. Put up with each other. Don't be too quick to take offense.

Don't be too prickly. There will be people who will say things that are offensive. There will be people who aren't grateful for the work you do. There will be people who misjudge you and come to conclusions about you that aren't justified, that aren't valid.

There are people who will maybe gossip about you and say things about you behind your back and you'll find out, don't be quick to be offended. That will always be. That will always happen.

Bear with one another. Let's put up with one another. It is interesting how Paul says one another.

And as he says, bear with one another, I take it at least at one level to be saying, well, today it will

be your turn to put up with somebody.

And maybe tomorrow somebody will have to put up with you. And if you're not willing to put up with somebody today, how can you expect or hope that tomorrow, when you're the one who hurts, you're the one who offends, somebody will put up with you, will bear with you.

[5 : 08] Now, it is true that there are some people that are very difficult to put up with. I don't want you to immediately having names in your head. Maybe some of you immediately thought of somebody.

A visual image immediately came into your mind. I suppose that's understandable. But it's true, isn't it? There are people who are very difficult to bear with. They're very difficult to put up with.

And so maybe you might say, well, what about those people? What about those people who are particularly difficult to bear with? What do we have to do with them? Well, we just have to do what it says here.

Bear with one another. We have to bear with each other. We have to put up with people who are difficult, who are hurtful so often. And so Paul, very realistically, and in a very down-to-earth manner, comes to the church in Colossae and says, if you want to be a united church, if you want to be a church that is indeed bound together in love, one of the things you will have to learn to do is to bear with one another.

And that is important to stress that Paul is addressing a congregation. His concern is for the behavior of a body, a group of believers. And we all have to play our part in bearing with each other.

[6 : 27] It's unfair and it's unrealistic to expect just a handful of folks to do all the putting up with. And to deal maybe with those special people who are particularly difficult to bear with.

As a body of believers, we have to share that burden and not simply expect one or two very special people to do all the putting up with. because their shoulders simply won't be able to bear all that weight.

But if we share it amongst all of us, then perhaps we will be able to do so. So, I just wanted to mention that just briefly, that first exhortation of Paul regarding what we ought to do as Christians. We have to bear with one another. But I want to move on and concentrate for a little bit more time on the second exhortation. The second thing that we must do as Christians.

And it is that we must forgive. Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Again, it's worth just noting that Paul takes it as a given that there will be grievances.

[7 : 36] It's almost just understood that in any group of people there will be grievances. Sometimes we are disappointed and frustrated by the fact that well, we're in the church and we're Christians and it shouldn't be like that.

We shouldn't have all these problems and people shouldn't fall out and it shouldn't be like that. And although at one level it's legitimate to be frustrated by things when they're not as they should be, we shouldn't really be surprised.

We shouldn't be shocked by the fact that there are grievances amongst us. It is the normal state of affairs. The thing to do isn't to be shocked by it but to know how to deal with it.

To say, well, yes, this is the reality. I do have a grievance against my brother. I have been offended by what he said. Well, what do I do about it? How do I find a solution to this grievance that exists? And so, Paul gives us the solution. We are to forgive one another whatever grievances we may have. And then, we have these very challenging words and very instructive words and very rich words.

[8 : 46] Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And it is on these words that I want to concentrate our attention now. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

I think here Paul really is pre-empting the question that the Colossians could well have come back to him with. The question, well, how are we to forgive? You are telling us that we have to forgive one another.

Well, how are we going to do that? What does that look like? And so, Paul preempts that question and says, if you are wondering how you are to forgive, well, here is the answer. You are to forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And this answer to this question that Paul is pre-empting highlights three important aspects of forgiveness.

And I'll just mention the three that I find at any rate and then we can think about each one in turn. The first thing that these words of Paul, forgive as the Lord forgave you, emphasize or highlight is the reality of forgiveness.

[9 : 49] And secondly, the quality of forgiveness. And thirdly, the demand of forgiveness. Now, in fairness to Paul's intent here, his primary concern is the third, the demand of forgiveness.

The demand that rests upon us as those who have been forgiven to forgive. And we'll get to that. But the words that we find do speak of the reality of forgiveness, also the quality of forgiveness, and then thirdly, the demand of forgiveness.

Maybe as we go through them, it will become clearer what I mean by these titles. First of all, then, the reality of forgiveness. What is it that Paul says? He says, Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Past tense. Something that has already happened. Paul speaks of forgiveness in the life of the Christian as a current reality. Forgiveness for the Christian is not a future hope.

It's not some worthy aspiration. The Christian isn't the one who says, Well, I hope one day to be forgiven. I hope God will forgive me. When it comes to that final day, Well, hopefully I'll be alright.

[10 : 57] Hopefully God in His grace, in His mercy, will forgive me. No. For the Christian, forgiveness is a present reality. We are forgiven people.

We are sinners, but we are forgiven sinners. And really that's all that distinguishes us from those who are not. We are all sinners, but we are forgiven sinners.

A current reality. An objective truth about us as Christians. Sinners, yes, but forgiven sinners. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

He's already forgiven you. You are already forgiven. Now, it would seem a very simple truth, and yet, sometimes we have difficulty with this.

We are unwilling to see ourselves as God sees us. Our self-perception remains as worthless, vile, unworthy sinners. And yet, God sees us, and God sees you, believing friend, as perfect in Christ.

[11 : 57] He sees you clothed in Christ's righteousness. He sees you as one who has been forgiven. And yet, we often, in a demonstration of false humility, refuse to receive, or at any case, recognize God's forgiveness.

God tells us, you are forgiven. God assures us that His forgiveness is for us. And yet, as I say, in some perverse expression of false humility, we say, oh no, not me.

I'm an unworthy sinner. God couldn't forgive me. I don't know if I could possibly be forgiven. I couldn't be a member of the church. I couldn't participate in the Lord's Supper.

I couldn't be a Sunday school teacher. I couldn't serve in this or that way. I couldn't tell others about Jesus. No, not me. And it can sound oh so very humble. And yet, really what we're doing is quibbling with God.

We're questioning God's promises. We're questioning His faithfulness. We're questioning His power to forgive us. Oh, He couldn't forgive me. Paul, as he speaks to the Colossians, he reminds them that forgiveness is a current reality for the Christian.

[13 : 16] Now, if you don't believe that, then Paul's argument loses all its force. You see, this exhortation will do nothing for you when you hear these words.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. If you doubt His forgiveness, then it loses all its force. How are you going to forgive as you have been forgiven if you're not persuaded that you have been forgiven?

And so, it's important that we recognize the reality of our forgiveness.

Now, if there be those that may be here with us this evening who have never sought God's forgiveness, who have never come in repentance and faith asking God to forgive them, well, indeed, you are unforgiven.

But now is a good time. Now is a perfect time for you to come to Him and recognize your need and ask to be forgiven and to receive, even now, the forgiveness that He is ready to give.

We are going to see in a moment the quality of His forgiveness. But we must ask to be forgiven and He will forgive us. But if we have asked, if you have come to the Lord and with a sincere heart have sought forgiveness and have asked to be forgiven, then you are forgiven.

[14 : 26] He has forgiven you. Don't question the faithfulness of God's promises to you. So that's the first thing that Paul's words to us, forgive as the Lord forgave you, highlight the reality of forgiveness.

But they also speak of the quality of forgiveness. Because Paul's exhortation is to forgive as the Lord forgave you. Not simply because the Lord forgave you.

Paul could have said that. He could have said to the Colossians, forgive because the Lord forgave you. It would be a reasonable argument. It would be a valid way of exhorting them and persuading them to forgive.

You should forgive because God's forgiven you. And of course, that truth is found in these words, but it's more than that. Because Paul doesn't say just forgive because God has forgiven you. He's saying forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. And so there he's pointing to the quality of God's forgiveness. He's inviting them to consider just the breadth and the wonder of God's forgiveness and saying as He's forgiven you, in the way that He has forgiven you, so you must forgive your fellow believer who has grieved you, who has hurt you, who has offended you.

[15:51] And so this little word as highlights the nature or the quality of Christ's forgiveness. But what can we say about the quality of forgiveness that we enjoy in Christ?

Well, we can only this evening scratch the surface. But let's notice three characteristics of the Lord's forgiveness. And as we do, it's as well to be pre-empting the third point, which is the demand of forgiveness.

Because that's really what Paul's getting at. Think about Christ's forgiveness. That's the way you have to forgive. So what characteristics or what qualities of Christ's forgiveness could we highlight this evening?

Well, I think one of the things we can say about His forgiveness is that it is immediate. Now, I won't dwell on this as we touched on it last week when we were thinking of that verse in 1 John.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But just to stress this characteristic of God's forgiveness, it is immediate.

[17:06] Suffice, perhaps, at the moment simply to say that as we seek to be forgiven, so we are forgiven. Or in the words of Amazing Grace where we sing or read, the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

An immediate pardon. A disposition to forgive in the very moment that the sinner comes seeking forgiveness. So that's the first characteristic we could highlight of God's forgiveness.

It is immediate. But a second thing that we want to mention is that His forgiveness is exhaustive. Everything is covered. Jesus is not selective in forgiving.

Remember again the words that we considered last week. Faithful and just to forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness. When we think of wrongdoing, we sometimes talk of crossing a line, don't we?

We say, well, that person has crossed the line. They've crossed the line. Up to here, I could just about put up with it. Up to here, well, maybe I could forgive.

[18:19] But they've crossed the line. They've just gone too far with Christ's forgiveness. There is no line. There is no line.

Friend, if you think you have crossed the line, because the devil sometimes wants to make us think and wants to confuse us and to deceive us into thinking, well, you couldn't possibly be a Christian. You couldn't possibly be forgiven. You've just crossed so many lines. You're just way beyond the scope and the reach of Christ's forgiveness. Well, if maybe you've thought in that way, there's good news for you.

There is no line to cross. With Christ's forgiveness there is no line. The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus full pardon receives.

So, Christ's forgiveness is immediate. It's exhaustive. But there's a third characteristic I just want to mention and that it is generous. It's generous. Last week, again, just remembering what we were considering last week in the morning, when we spoke of God's faithfulness and justice constraining Him to forgive.

[19:38] And we were making that point and we hold to that point. We think it's true that God's faithfulness constrains Him to forgive. The promises that He makes are such that when somebody seeks forgiveness, He is, in a sense, obliged to forgive because there are promises that He has made and He is faithful to His promises.

And we also notice that even His justice constrains Him to forgive. Given what Christ has done for us on the cross, given that He has taken the punishment for our sins, then if we come seeking forgiveness, then the just thing to do is to forgive the sinner who comes seeking forgiveness.

And so, there is a sense in which God is constrained to forgive. And yet, as we recognize that truth, let's make it very clear that there is no measure of reluctance on the part of God.

There is no reluctance on the part of the Father. There is no reluctance on the part of Jesus to forgive a sinner. We can go further. We can say that God enjoys forgiving.

I don't know if you've maybe thought of it in those terms, that God enjoys forgiving. Well, don't take my word for it. Listen to the prophet Micah. We've read in that passage just a few moments ago.

[20 : 58] What does the prophet say? Who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy.

God delights in forgiving. He enjoys forgiving. Even as we prayed, we made reference to the prodigal son who returned to the father and that wonderful picture of the father waiting for the son to come.

And when he sees him from afar off, what does he do? He comes rushing down to hug him and to embrace him. He enjoys the sinner coming home. He enjoys the sinner who comes seeking forgiveness and restoration and reconciliation.

He delights to show mercy. Yes, his justice constrains him. Yes, his faithfulness constrains him. But there is no reluctance on the part of God. He is generous in forgiving.

The prophet Isaiah also speaks in similar terms. You can maybe look it up if you wish later, but in chapter 55 and verse 7, Isaiah speaks of God as one who forgives abundantly or lavishly.

[22 : 13] And the words speak of generosity. There is a generosity in God's forgiveness. So, there are some characteristics we might say as we think of the quality of forgiveness.

Immediate forgiveness. Exhaustive. Generous. And of course, all of this simply brings us to the final point which is the demand of forgiveness. And it's really the point that Paul is primarily concerned with.

As he writes to the Christians here in Colossae, his concern is to persuade them to forgive. And as he seeks to persuade them, he uses these words, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Consider the forgiveness that you have been the objects of. Consider the quality of God's forgiveness that you enjoy. That's how you need to forgive others.

That is how you need to forgive those who you have a grievance with. That is the way in which you must forgive the brother who has hurt you, who has offended you. How are we to forgive?

[23 : 17] We are to forgive immediately. We are to forgive exhaustively. We are to forgive generously. Don't allow resentment to fester.

It's difficult to forgive immediately when we are suffering the pain of some hurt or some offense. And maybe there is in us a willingness and a thought that well, the day will come when I will forgive.

I do intend to forgive, but I'm not ready yet. I don't feel ready yet to forgive. And we allow resentment and hurt to fester, and really the only one hurt or damaged is ourselves.

And so, we have to listen to Paul as he says to us, forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Perhaps you've been let down by somebody in this congregation.

We are gathered here together as a congregation, as a body of God's people. We can't just speak in the clouds and say, well, these things happen somewhere else. Maybe you have not forgiven somebody who hurt you, who did do something they ought not to have done, who did speak to you or about you in a way they shouldn't have, who judged you wrongly and you were hurt and you were offended.

[24 : 37] Well, that's happened. What have you done about it? Have you forgiven that brother? Have you forgiven? Don't allow that resentment, I repeat, to fester and to damage you and to damage the fellowship that you are part of.

Don't wait for a suitable time. Don't postpone it until you feel like forgiving because you may never feel like doing it. You wait until you feel like forgiving and maybe you'll never forgive and you will live frustrated and incapable of fully serving God and fully blossoming as a Christian because there deep down you have this thing that you haven't got rid of.

So, listen to Paul. Listen to God as he speaks to you through his word. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Do it now. Maybe one question that could legitimately be asked would be the following.

Is the granting of forgiveness conditioned on forgiveness being sought? I've had that question posed to me. I think it's a legitimate question. Not posed in a way of trying to get out of fulfilling this duty, but somebody who genuinely can have that concern or that question.

You know, do I have to forgive when somebody asks me to be forgiven? And at one level that would seem to be reasonable because God himself forgives those who seek forgiveness.

[26 : 05] God himself forgives those who come asking to be forgiven. And so at that level we might say, well, the person who's offended me, the person who's hurt me, they haven't done anything. They seem to be quite happy.

They don't seem to have any remorse or any repentance, so what can I do? If they came asking for forgiveness, well, I'd be willing to grant it, but they don't do anything.

They don't say anything, so what can I do? Well, when we hear these words, forgive as the Lord forgave you, could we not be brought, or should we not be brought to the foot of the cross?

And as we hear Jesus hanging on that tree and surrounded by those who were mocking him and despising him and torturing him and tormenting him, and we hear the words that he spoke, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

So don't wait until somebody comes to ask for your forgiveness. It is a good thing when somebody has hurt you that they should ask, and they should come, and pray that God would touch their heart, that they would do so.

[27 : 08] But even if they don't, you, before God, and in your own heart, grant them the forgiveness that Jesus was willing to grant even those who were tormenting and torturing him.

We are to be like Jesus. That is something we're thinking about this morning. We are to be like Jesus. So the demand of forgiveness, that we, like Jesus, are to forgive immediately, and exhaustively, whatever the fault, however unforgivable it may appear.

Sometimes withholding forgiveness is a weapon we employ in order to get even with somebody.

This is the way we hit back, or this is the way we almost come to terms with a situation.

Well, they've done me harm, and I'm not going to be able to do them harm, or maybe you don't even want to do them harm, but one way I can handle the situation is I'll simply withhold forgiveness, because the fault was just too great.

And all we're doing really is poisoning ourselves. If we think we're doing harm to the other person, we're probably kidding ourselves. They probably aren't even aware that forgiveness has been withheld. The only one damaged is ourselves.

[28 : 21] Just you, you're just damaging yourself. Even when the fault is so great, forgive as Jesus forgave you. It reminds me of a story I was told, a true story.

It was actually my father who told me about a fellow who came to the session in Dorneuf, seeking membership. And he was asked how he knew he was a Christian.

And the answer he gave, he said, well, I know I'm a Christian for three reasons. He said, the first thing is God has put a new song in my mouth. He worked in construction. And he says, when I'm on the construction site and I'm surrounded by my workmates, I'm singing.

I'm singing praise to God. They think I'm crazy, but I don't care. So, I reckon that is a pretty good sign I'm a Christian, which I thought was reasonable. He said, I also know I'm a Christian because God has given me a new vocabulary.

I was a very foul mouthed person, but God has helped me to clean up my vocabulary and I don't have to speak like that anymore. So that's why I'm pretty sure I'm a Christian. But the third thing, the thing that makes me absolutely sure I'm a Christian is that in this place, in this town, there is somebody who did me a great wrong.

[29 : 33] There's somebody who did something very terrible to me and I had decided deliberately and consciously that I would never forgive that person. I wasn't going to get back at them.

I wasn't going to do them any harm, but I decided I would never forgive them. And to my great surprise, I have forgiven them. And so I know I'm a Christian.

Well, I think the elders and that, the minister, was also very persuaded that this was indeed a believer. This was indeed a man who had been born again. And why? Because of his willingness to forgive.

It is the trait, or ought to be the trait of the Christian, to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us.

Immediately, exhaustively, and generously.

You remember the occasion, it's so well known, when Jesus was asked, well, how many times do we have to forgive? You know, there's people that they're just always offending us.

[30 : 32] How many times? Would seven times be enough? And you all know the answer that was given. Seventy times. Seven. Generously. And to forgive generously is a liberating experience.

To be able to forgive even the most hurtful offense is something that does us good. It liberates us from resentment and from hurtful and odious feelings that do us great damage.

And so, we have the demand of forgiveness. That we are to forgive as Jesus has forgiven us. Immediately, exhaustively, generously. Now, before we draw things to a close, I think it's only right to maybe bring a word of caution.

I don't know if that would be the way of describing it. But I just want to say this, the demand of forgiveness is not the same as the demand to expose ourselves to abuse.

Because that could be a misunderstanding. For example, to give very concrete examples, a Christian wife, or it could be a Christian husband, is called to forgive an unfaithful husband or wife. [31 : 45] That is the demand. If, as a Christian wife, your husband has been unfaithful to you, what this word that we are hearing today is saying to us is that you must forgive the one who has been unfaithful to you.

That is something you must do. But it doesn't mean that if your husband is serially unfaithful and shows no evidence or no desire to change his way of living and continues to be unfaithful to you, it doesn't mean you have to simply put up with that all your life.

You forgive and, if necessary, you move on. And that is not to go against what is being taught here. The forgiveness is an obligation. But having to put up with serial abuse, maybe psychological or physical abuse, is not something that is being asked of you here.

And just, I mention that just to clarify so that there would not be a misunderstanding, but maybe a less dramatic example, you know, within the life of the congregation. Maybe somebody you confided in has betrayed your confidence.

confidence. You know, you mentioned something that was very personal, that you wanted them to treat with great discretion. Maybe you were willing to show your vulnerability and asking for help in some situation, and you thought this person would help you and would be discreet and wouldn't betray your confidence, and yet they did betray your confidence.

[33 : 09] And that's very hurtful. And that's something that really shakes us up. Now, what do you have to do? Do you have to forgive that person? You do have to forgive that person.

Will you confide in them again? I suggest not. I would strongly recommend you don't. You see, one thing is forgiving, and the other thing is just being plain silly about it.

So the forgiveness is a demand, but that doesn't mean, and just as a word of caution or clarification, that we have to expose ourselves as some kind of floor mat for people to walk over us.

Because we're Christians, so we just have to put up with any wrong and any hurt that comes our way. And so, we draw it together.

We've considered who we are. We've considered what we wear. And this evening, we've just wanted to notice two things. The two things that Paul mentions here about what we should do as Christians. Bear with one another.

[34 : 08] Let's put up with one another. As we go forward as a congregation, and as we seek to do God's will, and to discern God's will, and as we seek to be God's instruments in this place and in this city, there will be times we have to put up with each other.

There are times, I'm warning you already, you're going to have to put up with me. And you say, oh, I don't think I'm in favor of that. I don't think that's the way to go. And oh, you're going to have to put up with me.

That's what the Bible says you've got to do. And I'm going to have to put up with you. There's no going back now. I'm going to have to put up with you. And we're going to have to put up with each other.

But that's what God asks us to do, and that's the way it should be. And let's not live in some cloud cuckoo land or some utopia where that's not the way it is. That's the way it is. I will offend you, and you will offend me, and we'll offend one another.

But if we bear with one another, then we can go forward. And we can put things behind and move ahead. Bear with one another. Forgive one another. That God would help us to grow in this grace, to grow in this willingness to forgive.

[35 : 17] It's so difficult sometimes. And certainly difficult to consider that we could do it as Jesus has done for us. And yet that is what we are presented with this evening. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And so I close, and I ask you where you stand this evening. Is there somebody you need to forgive? Just do it. Let's pray.

Lord, keep your invitation before you stand. Tell the redemption of the Lord always ■ed. Lord, forgive you for as just the bread of the morning for a sudden learning process. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let the Lordulture well untenable. Let me ask you where thisandslaisolate. Lord, I pray that may be all the mahdollswear and go through Christ. And so I see him in this evening. Lord, you imagine before that. You're gonnaorpom.