

## How to have strong relationships?

**Colossians 3:1-14** - *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 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 one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

What do you want most out of life? Most of us would rank healthy relationships high on the list. Except for knowing Christ and having eternal life, healthy relationships make life enjoyable perhaps more than anything else. Even if your health isn't the best, if you have loving relationships, you can enjoy life. You can make a pile of money, but if your relationships are broken or shallow, your life will be empty. A poor man with a loving family and good friends is far richer than a rich man who is poor relationally. The Bible ranks healthy relationships as the most important thing in life. A religious expert asked Jesus ([Matt. 22:36](#)), "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied ([Matt. 22:37-40](#)):

"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets."

A loving relationship with God is of first importance; but loving relationships with others is second. **The Bible is all about these two important relationships.**

Because the Bible emphasizes healthy relationships so highly, it's sad that there are so many believers who have hurting or broken relationships. Many Christian homes have been shattered by relational problems. Their homes are a tense battle ground, not a loving refuge. Many Christian parents are at odds with their kids and the kids with their parents. On the church level, some bounce from church to church, leaving a trail of damaged relationships behind. I know of Christians who won't speak to other Christians because of misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and wrongs that have taken place. Sadly, the loving families, genuine friendships, and the healthy relationships that we want most out of life often elude us.

In our text, Paul gives the prescription for healthy relationships. If you'll consistently practice these qualities, you'll have healthy relationships. But maybe you're thinking, "But healthy relationships also depend on others, don't they? It's virtually impossible to have a good relationship with some people!" True. Paul acknowledged this when he wrote ([Rom. 12:18](#)), "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Sometimes, no matter what you do, some people are hard to get along with. But often if you treat a difficult person with the qualities that Paul enumerates in our text, he will change for the better in how he relates to you. But even if some relationships never improve, if you relate to others as Paul describes here, most of your relationships will be healthy.

But this isn't easy medicine to take, because to develop these qualities, you've got to kill all immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed ([Col. 3:5](#)). You've got to get rid (put off) of all anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, and lying ([Col. 3:8-9](#)). And, you've got to put on "a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other" ([Col. 3:12b-13](#)). The reason you should do this is because God has graciously chosen and loved you. Paul is saying,

***God's gracious, loving treatment of us is the basis for our treatment of others.***

Paul first gives the basis for the commands which follow, namely, how God has treated us:

### **1. God has graciously chosen us in love to be set apart to Himself.**

[Colossians 3:12a](#): "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved..." "So" (or, "therefore") shows that verse 12 follows from what came before. The flow of thought is: Because we have laid aside the old man (what we were in Adam) and have put on the new man (what we now are in Christ, both individually and corporately), the old differences that you have, no longer matter. For Christ is all and in all, therefore, we should put on the qualities listed here.

*"Holy and beloved"* further describe what it means to be chosen by God.

To be *holy* means to be set apart unto God, separate from the world. *Beloved* means that we're the special objects of God's love, just as a wife is to her husband. We often think of holiness negatively, as telling us what we can't do. But it's a positive concept. Picture a wife who is set apart from others for her husband who loves her. She delights to keep herself from others and to give herself exclusively to him because of his love. So, we too should keep ourselves pure from this evil world and be exclusively devoted to Christ, who loved us and chose us as His bride.

But why does Paul mention that we are chosen by God, holy and beloved, in the context of talking about healthy relationships? For at least two reasons. First, it's not easy to kill my selfishness and anger and to practice these Christlike qualities toward others, especially toward difficult people. But it's easier when I remember how God loved me and chose me when I was not very lovely.

Second, seeing myself as the object of God's gracious, sovereign love, set apart unto Him, frees me to love even those who are difficult to love.

If I'm dependent on the other person's response for my sense of security, I won't risk loving someone who might reject me. But if I'm secure in God's love for me, I'm free to love those who may not return my love. If someone insults me, I'll feel hurt, but I don't need to retaliate. I can give a blessing instead ([1 Pet. 3:9](#)), because I'm secure in God's love for me.

**That's what Paul is saying here: God's treatment of us is the basis for our treatment of others. God has chosen us in love to be set apart to Himself when we weren't worthy of His love. Secure in His gracious, unfathomable love, we're able to treat one another with the qualities listed here.**

## **2. We should treat others with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness.**

Actually, there are five nouns: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, which are probably set in contrast to the five sins in verse 5 and the five other sins in verse 8.

"Bearing with one another and forgiving each other" describe the way in which those five virtues are put into practice.

Before we look at these qualities, I have two observations. First, every Christian should have these character qualities, but there is freedom for different personality types. In other words, all mature Christians aren't going to have the same generic personality. These qualities will take one form with a Barnabas, another with a Paul, and another with a Peter. Part of the glory of God's creation is the variety of personalities which He has given us and that He has a special purpose for each one. While He knocks the rough edges off each type of personality, He doesn't erase the differences. Whether you're hard-driving or laid back, extrovert or introvert, people-oriented or task-oriented, God wants you to have these character qualities.

Second, all these character qualities are modelled in Jesus Christ.

He was compassionate and kind ([Matt. 9:36; 14:14](#)), humble and gentle ([Matt. 11:29](#)), patient, forbearing, and forgiving ([1 Pet. 2:23; Luke 23:34](#)). He is our great example of how to relate to others. As we learn to put on these qualities, we're really putting on the Lord Jesus Christ ([Rom. 13:14](#)) and becoming more like Him.

### **A. We should treat others with compassion.**

The King James Version translates this, "bowels of mercy." The closest English equivalent is what we mean when we say "heart." So, "a heart of compassion" captures the idea. The main thing to grasp is that this is an emotional term. Being moved to compassion involves the feelings, not just the head. It means being touched by the needs of people so that we respond with appropriate action to help them.

Jesus used this word to describe the good Samaritan, who felt compassion for the wounded traveller and was moved to help him ([Luke 10:33](#)). He used it of the father of the prodigal son, who saw his wayward son returning, felt compassion for him, ran to

him, embraced him and kissed him ([Luke 15:20](#)). He was stirred emotionally when he saw his son coming home.

Jesus felt compassion for the widow of Nain who had lost her only son ([Luke 7:13](#)). When Jesus saw the multitudes, He felt compassion for them ([Matt. 9:36](#)). On another occasion, Jesus and His disciples withdrew to a lonely place for some much-needed rest. When they arrived by boat, they discovered that the crowd had arrived by land before them. Jesus saw them, felt compassion for them and healed their sick. The disciples saw them and said, “Send them away!” ([Matt. 14:14-15](#)).

**If you lack compassion, you’re too focused on yourself and not enough on others’ needs. Jesus saw the multitude and felt compassion because He saw that they were like sheep without a shepherd ([Mark 8:34](#)). The disciples saw the same multitude and didn’t feel compassion because they were focused on their own need to get away and rest. It all depends on your focus.**

When you encounter a difficult person and you’re inclined to be irritated rather than to have compassion for them, put yourself in their shoes. Get to know them. Often, when you find out what the person has gone through, it helps you to overlook his irritating behaviour and show the Lord’s compassion to them.

### **B. We should treat others with kindness.**

To be kind means to be free from all which is harsh, rough, and bitter. This word was used to describe wine that had mellowed ([Luke 5:39](#)). It didn’t bite or leave a bitter taste. A kind person is not demanding and pushy. He gives others room to be imperfect without crawling all over them.

Joseph is a great example of kindness. His brothers had hated him and sold him into slavery. After being falsely accused of impropriety with Potiphar’s wife and imprisoned for several years, he finally rose to the top as prime minister of Egypt. He easily could have taken vengeance on his brothers, but instead, he forgave them and was generous with them. After their father, Jacob, died, the brothers became afraid because they thought that perhaps Joseph would now pay them back for what they had done to him. But when Joseph heard it, he wept and spoke kindly to his brothers, assuring them of his continuing love and care for them and their children ([Gen. 50:15-21](#)).

Jesus said that God Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men ([Luke 6:35](#)). Paul said that the kindness of God leads us to repentance ([Rom. 2:4](#)) Peter said that tasting God’s kindness should motivate us to long for the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow in respect to salvation ([1 Pet. 2:1-3](#)). If we’ll show kindness to those who are not kind to us, it will often motivate them to repentance and growth.

### **C. We should treat others with humility.**

It’s often said that if you think you’re humble, you’re not. But I find that neither helpful nor correct. It’s not helpful because how can I obey the command to be humble if I can’t know when I am humble? And it’s not correct because Moses, Jesus, and Paul all claimed to be humble ([Num. 13: 3](#); [Matt. 11:29](#); [Acts 20:19](#)).

So, I think that we can know when we're being humble so that we can obey this command.

Humility does not mean that when someone pays you a compliment, you look down and say, "It really wasn't much!" Humility is not to dump on yourself.

But then what does it mean? Literally, the Greek word means "lowliness of mind."

The Greeks did not see it as a virtue, but as a weakness.

Biblically, there are three sides to it:

First, a humble person is Christ-sufficient, not self-sufficient. A humble person consciously relies on the Lord and recognizes that God has given him all that he has ([1 Pet. 5:5-7](#); [1 Cor. 4:7](#)). He knows that he is weak in himself, but he is strong when he trusts in God's strength ([2 Cor. 12:9-10](#); [Phil. 4:13](#)).

Second, a humble person has a proper evaluation of himself. Paul said ([Rom. 12:3](#)), "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." He goes on to talk about using the gifts that God has given us to serve one another. A humble person doesn't think that he's indispensable in God's program, nor does he think so lowly of himself that he neglects the gifts God has given him to use ([Matt. 25:14-30](#); [2 Tim. 1:6-8](#)).

Third, a humble person esteems others more highly than himself. As Paul said ([Phil. 2:3-4](#)), "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." He goes on to cite the example of Jesus, who laid aside His glory in heaven to take on the form of a servant and go to the cross for our salvation. He esteemed us more highly than Himself.

#### **D. We should treat others with gentleness.**

The King James Version translates it "meekness." There is no good single English word to translate the concept of the Greek word. It does not mean to be a mild-mannered or compliant. The main idea is, "strength under submission." It was used in classical Greek of trained animals, such as a horse which was strong and powerful in battle, but totally submissive to the warrior who rode him. The gentle person is not self-willed but surrendered to do God's will. Plato used the word of a gentle doctor who used only enough force (as in setting a broken bone) to bring healing. So the gentle person will sometimes be strong to confront sin, but only strong enough to bring healing ([Gal. 6:1](#); [2 Tim. 2:25](#)).

#### **E. We should treat others with patience.**

Kindness, gentleness, and patience are listed in the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)). The Greek word for patience literally means, "long-tempered." It's the opposite of having a short fuse. It means being tolerant of imperfections, differences and faults in others. The patient person gives others time to change and room to make mistakes in the process. It's a virtue that's especially difficult for those who are perfectionists!

## **F. We should treat others with forbearance.**

This means putting up with someone's faults and idiosyncrasies. We need to recognize that being different doesn't necessarily mean being wrong. Let's face it, a lot of areas aren't black and white. Just because I've always done something a certain way doesn't mean that everyone else has to do it my way. We must never be forbearing when it comes to biblical moral absolutes. But we must bear with others when it comes to things the Bible doesn't clearly command.

## **G. We should treat others with forgiveness.**

Rather than holding a grudge or harbouring bitterness and resentment, we must forgive those who wrong us. Did you notice that many of these qualities are needed only when you have a complaint against someone? So, you can't excuse yourself by saying, "I'd treat him right if he would treat me better." You wouldn't need patience, forbearance, or forgiveness if everyone treated you well!

We are to forgive "just as the Lord forgave you." That's a lot, isn't it! The Greek word used here for "forgiveness" has the nuance of undeserved favour. We didn't deserve God's forgiveness, but He provided for it and granted it freely in Christ at great cost to Himself. God didn't say, "Don't worry about it; it's no big deal." He paid the price, but He doesn't make us pay. God's forgiveness means that He will never bring up our sins as evidence to condemn us. He never hauls out our past as leverage against us. Even though He legitimately could, the Lord doesn't make us feel put down because He was so loving and selfless as to forgive us. His forgiveness means total acceptance and restored fellowship with us.

While compassion involves our feelings, forgiveness is primarily a decision. You choose to absorb the wrong and not allow it to be a barrier between you and the other person. The feelings may follow. If you struggle with feeling forgiving after you've granted it, do something kind for the one who wronged you. While God never extends forgiveness until there is repentance, He showers those who have wronged Him with repeated kindnesses until they come to repentance. We must do the same, hard as it is to do.

## **Conclusion:**

### **Some helpful practical steps:**

**1. Admit your mistakes** – repent, apologies, ask for forgiveness when you mess up. Don't blame others or the circumstances for your behaviour – they may have contributed, but you chose your behaviour

**2. Watch your language** - eliminate 'always and never' from your vocabulary when dealing with people and resolving conflict

**3. Watch your attitude** – don't approach your relationships to accuse others. Try and approach relationships with a 'help me understand' attitude.

**4. Watch your motives** – do I want revenge, retaliation, retribution – or do I want reconciliation? Don't judge people's motives or put your standards on them.

So, in summary, because God graciously chose us in love to be set apart to Himself, we should treat others with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. His gracious, loving treatment of us is the basis for our treatment of others.

Maybe you're wondering, "Where do I start?" You may need to begin by focusing on your relationship with God. Have you trusted in Christ as your Saviour so that you've truly experienced His forgiveness, mercy, and love? You can't love others as you should until you're rightly related to God.

Act obediently, not on feelings. When you blow it, confess it to the Lord and ask the forgiveness of those you've wronged. You may need to begin by going to those you've already wronged to make things right. Make a habit of putting on these "new clothes" and you'll enjoy the blessing, not of perfect relationships, but of strong and healthy relationships.

(Adapted from an article on [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)  
"Healthy Relationships" dated April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016)