

“FAMILY VALUES (#2): RELATIONAL VALUES”

(Colossians 3:12-14; Romans 12:9-10)

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1. Read Text: Colossians 3:12-14; Romans 12:9-10 Pray.
2. As part of our spiritual preparation during the Christian season of “Lent,” last Sunday we began a new sermon series called “Family Values,” in which we’re using the 12 Values of *our* church here at East Cobb UMC as a *lens* through which to explore what it means to live as a Christian in today’s world by practicing the “Values” of the “Family of God.”

A—Last week, we focused on three “Spiritual Values” by which we relate “vertically” (if you will) to GOD Himself – you’ll find these listed in your bulletin.

B—But a careful study of the Bible reminds us that Christianity also deals with the “horizontal” (that is: the human-to-human) dimensions of faith.

C—So today, we’re going to talk about a set of three Values that deal primarily with how we relate to ONE ANOTHER (hence title “Relational Values” =dealing w/human relationships).

–II–

3. The first of these is a Value the Bible teaches should define ALL that we say and do as Christians... **LOVE** [Add Block #4 of “Let God Rock” & write in bulletin blank].

A—Today’s first scripture from Colossians 3 gives a list of things that we as Christians are to “*clothe*” ourselves with, but the entire passage culminates in Verse 14, which says “*Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*”

1—Now, the kind of “love” that it’s talking about here is *not* romantic, or sexual love, or a love that is in any way centered around what *we* want or need.

2—Instead, as many of you know, the word the New Testament most often uses for “love” is the Greek term “*agape*,” which refers self-giving and self-sacrificing for others, putting *their* needs ahead of our own.

B—Now let’s be honest, this is a very difficult kind of love to have and live by.

1—The famous Methodist Pastor Dr. Cecil Myers once said, “*I’ve never met a person I couldn’t love, but I’ve had some close calls.*”<sup>1</sup>

2—I don’t know about you, but I can sure relate to that! It’s *tough* to love some people (even in the church) – those who we don’t like, or can’t get along with, or who always seem to find a way to get on our very *last* nerve and continually jump up and down on it just to spite us! Do you know what I’m talking about?

3–And yet Jesus says (in Luke 6:32-36)...

*“If you [only] love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ...But love your enemies, do good, ...expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High.”*<sup>2</sup>

C–You see, biblical love is not just a philosophical *concept* to *think about*, but a *behavior* to *put into practice*.<sup>3</sup>

1–Love means, for example, that there are times where the granting of grace is more important than strict adherence to church policies, rules, or procedures.

2–It means there are times we should be willing to share (or even give up) our room/space to another group who might need it for ministry, as well.

3–Love means even occasionally trying a different style of worship than we’re used to (or comfortable with) because we know it’s important to other people of our church family, and it’s OUR ways of telling them “We love you.”

D–Let me ask: What is YOUR “love-quotient”? Does your love extend only to people who are like you? Or who you like? Or who make you comfortable? OR... are you willing to stretch to have the kind of self-less, self-giving love that Jesus talked about that puts the needs of others before even your own?

4. A second “Relational Value” that we’re to aspire live by as Christians is found Verses 12-13 of today’s first scripture: **COMPASSION** [Add Block #5 of LGR cross & write in bulletin].

A–Besides “compassion,” notice the other words/phrases that appear in these verses:

*“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”*

B–The point here, is that I believe these other words further describe “compassion,” so that if you and I as Christians want to truly understand and practice the “compassion” of Christ, then we’ve got to learn to be “kind,” “humble” (as I talked about last week), “meek”, “patient” and “forgiving” with and towards one another.

1–For example, practicing compassion means (among other things) giving each other room to make mistakes and *not be shish-kebob-ed for it!*

2–It means saying “*I’m sorry*” and “*I forgive you*” when we DO make those mistakes or hurt each other (whether it was intentional or not)!

3–It means that we’re *always* looking for the good-intentions behind people’s actions and behaviors, rather than *presuming* the worst in their motives.

4–And of course it also means having an empathy that moves us to ACT about the plight of the poor, the homeless, and those without food or proper clothing.

[I once had a Pastor who said that “*Compassion is when your hurt touches my heart.*” <sup>4</sup>]

C–Friends, Compassion has always been a hallmark of mature Christianity, and if we want to truly live as Jesus lived and taught, then we need to seek to practice the Compassion of Christ in the way that we behave towards and treat one another.

5. A final “Relational Value” that I want to talk about today which we as God’s family are called to live by is that of **AUTHENTICITY** [Add Block #6 of LGR cross & write in bulletin] – what the Romans 12 passage essentially describes as learning to be “real” with ourselves and with one another.

A–The first part of Verse 9 says this: “*Let love be genuine...*” Notice: we’re called to have “*genuine*”, as opposed to... what? What’s the *opposite* of “*genuine*” love?...

1–...Could it be love that’s “*fake; phoney; bogus; hypocritical; love that pretends to be something it’s not, or have something it doesn’t.*”

2–You know, there’s nothing in our world today that turns non-religious and nominally-religious people OFF to God more than inauthentic Christians.

3–I once heard someone say that “*The greatest cause of atheism in our world today are Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. THAT is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.*” <sup>5</sup>

B–You know, we Christians tend to be experts at wearing emotional & relational masks: “*How are you doing?*” “*Oh, fine*”... when we know very good and well we’re not! We’re hurting or struggling from something, but we’re too proud to let anybody know, so we wear our masks, even at church (perhaps *especially* at church!)

1–I’ll be honest, friends, this used to be one of my worst struggles – it’s hard to let others see your pain or shortcomings, especially if you’re a minister, because “*if they saw and knew the REAL me, maybe they wouldn’t like me or follow me.*”

2–Now I know intellectually that that’s a bunch of bologna, but that’s how our human heart feels, and it’s probably how *most* of us also feel from time to time.

3–So over the years, I’ve had to work hard at learning how to open up and share more of myself with others, so that (hopefully) “*What you see [of Brian] is what you get*” – that you *don’t* see one person in the pulpit or at church, and someone different at home or out in public. <sup>6</sup>

C–THAT’S what I mean by being an *authentic* Christian – not trying to act “holier-than-thou”, or as some who’s always “got it together,” but instead as some who’s inviting God to transform the current *real* US into a more perfect likeness of Jesus every day of our lives (we might not arrive in this life, but we’ve at least got a goal to shoot for!).

1–Friends, how “authentic” are you, not only in your Christianity, but just as a person?

2–When people see and interact with you, is “*what they see what they get?*”

3–Does the “You” at home, or at work, or on vacation, or when you’re by yourself match the “You” that you portray to others at church or out in public?

D–You see, as God’s people, we’re called to be “genuine / authentic” in the way we live our lives – to be “real” with ourselves and with one another.

–III–

6. Now as I reminded us last week, all of these Values I’m sharing are *Ideals* = “*moral and behavioral standards which we aspire to live by.*”

A–It doesn’t mean that we’ve attained them perfectly yet, but that we’re continually inviting God’s Holy Spirit into our lives to enable us to get better at them.

B–So as we grow in our understanding of these three “*Relational Values*” of ***Love***, ***Compassion***, and ***Authenticity*** which relate us to one another in the “Family” of God, my prayer is that we would also seek to practice them more & more in our daily lives.

7. [PRAYER]

8. [HYMN: #408, “The Gift of Love”]

### **ENDNOTES:**

1. I first heard this quote in a sermon by my home church’s Pastor Rev. Gary Parrish at Fayetteville First UMC (Fayetteville, GA) in Fall 1994.

2. According to the Medieval Christian Bernard of Clairvaux, there are four degrees/stages of love that we can experience. There is love of...

(#1) “**Self for Self’s sake**”: “*First, we love ourselves for our own sake; since we are unspiritual and of the flesh we cannot have an interest in anything that does not relate to ourselves. When we begin to see that we cannot subsist by ourselves, ...*

(#2) “**God for Self’s sake**”: “*...we begin to seek God for our own sakes. This is the second degree of love; we love God, but only for our own interests. But if we begin to worship and come to God again and again by meditating, by reading, by prayer, and by obedience, little by little God becomes known to us through experience. We enter into a sweet familiarity with God, ...*

(#3) **“God for God’s sake”**: *...and by tasting how sweet the Lord is we pass into the third degree of love so that now we love God, not for our own sake, but for himself. It should be noted that in this third degree we will stand still for a very long time.*

(#4) **“Self for God’s sake”**: *I am not certain that the fourth degree of love in which we love ourselves only for the sake of God may be perfectly attained in this life. But, when it does happen, we will experience the joy of the Lord and be forgetful of ourselves in a wonderful way. We are, for those moments, one mind and one spirit with God.”*

[–Bernard of Clairvaux, cited in “Words of Devotion” from Richard J. Foster's anthology Devotional Classics (online at [www.geocities.com/stvp68/Quotes.html](http://www.geocities.com/stvp68/Quotes.html))]

3. This is why biblical “love” is a “Value”, not merely a “belief.”
4. Rev. Gary Parrish, North Georgia Conference United Methodist Church Pastor (now retired).
5. Brennan Manning, cited in the Intro of the song track “What If I Stumble?” on the album Jesus Freak by Contemporary Christian Rap Artist dcTalk (1995, Forefront Communication Group).
6. The one CAVEAT I would place on this sharing of self is that God always calls us to use wisdom in whom and in what context we are to share ourselves. Some people, for example, are not spiritually mature enough to appreciate and accept the “real you” without misusing or abusing that information or relationship. In this instance, to share *everything* of yourself with them would be tantamount to doing what Jesus said NOT to do in Matthew 7:6 (“*Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you*”). In the same way, some contexts are not spiritually *appropriate* for us to share all the nitty-gritty details about our lives. Instead, we are to use God’s wisdom to discern “safe people” and “safe contexts” in which to share ourselves. It might be that we open up and share *some* things about us with certain people and in certain contexts, and share more *deeply* with other people and/or in other contexts that are “safer.”