

## “Looking Back and Ahead”

January 4, 2026

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 things and situations that bring back unpleasant memories—there have been bitter/sweet times like the passing of friends or family members, there have been devastating storms, massive wildfires, and ever-increasing violence, including mass shootings. But, as well as looking backwards, this changeover 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 Christians should strive or “strain for.”

### II. Christian Characteristics

**A. Compassion** The 1<sup>st</sup> characteristic that Paul listed was compassion. The Greek word Paul used means “*pity, mercy, sympathy, as well as compassion.*” As children of God, Christians need to display a tender feeling of compassion and mercy towards those around them. We must not be indifferent to the sufferings of others. 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. [Romans 5:8](#) says, “**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” 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 is kindness; 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—Rom. 5:6 reminds us that “**When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.**” 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 oneself; humility is having a proper estimate or opinion of oneself. Romans 12:3 says, “**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.**” Jesus said in Matthew 18:4, “**Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**” Humility allows one to serve others without caring whether he is noticed or not. Humility is the absence of pride.

**D. Gentleness** The fourth 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, He 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 part of the 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. 1 Timothy 1:16 says that Jesus had “**unlimited patience, i.e., perfect**

patience.” But at the acceptable time, He did get angry—like when He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple in [John 2:13-16](#). That’s what is 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 fellowmen. 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, it is a sin, to get angry at the wrong things for the wrong reasons.

**F. Then there’s Bear with each other** Bearing with each other means to endure or hold back, not retaliating, regardless of the circumstances—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 Christians to endure problems and not retaliate, but they 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**” OR as a different translation puts it, “**Forgive us what we have done wrong, as we too have forgiven those who have wronged us.**” ([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 wrote to “**put on agape (sacrificial love).**” Agape love is the belt that holds all these virtues together. As [1 Corinthians 13](#) reminds us, nothing is acceptable to God if not motivated by love. Turn to [Romans 13:8-10](#). Paul wrote that when love lives and rules in one’s heart, it unites all the virtues or characteristics together.

### **III. Christian Priorities**

**A. The Peace of Christ** 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.*” 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 one obeys the will of God, he will have God's peace within; but when he steps out of God's will (intentionally or unintentionally), he loses 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 and conflict with those onboard the ship.

Paul went on to write that when there is peace in the heart with God, there will be praise on one's lips—he wrote, “**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. If you find it hard to praise God, perhaps you are walking out of God's will.

**B. The Word of Christ** Paul wrote 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 God's Word must dwell in or live in your life; the Word of Christ must fill your life. 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 a person is in God's will and is filled with His Word, then 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 Cor. 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. When people look at you, 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, have the characteristics of a Christian been visible in your life as you went about your daily activities? Are you compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient? Are you long-suffering and are you quick to 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. Phil. 1:6 says, “**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.**” 2 Peter 1:3 says, “**His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him.**” As we 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.

## Communion Devotion – January 2026

Matthew 26:17-20, 26-30

Just like Christmas and New Year's, the Lord's Table is a time to remember and celebrate what Jesus did for us. In [Phil. 2:8](#) we are reminded that "**He humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!**" Jesus humbled Himself; He became a servant so that you could be redeemed—saved. [1 Cor. 15:3-4](#) tells how Jesus "redeemed" us, "**Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.**" If you believe that Jesus died for your sins; if, as [Rom. 10:9](#) says, you have made Him your Lord and your Savior, then you are a child of God. If you have done this, then whether or not you are a member of TBC, we invite you to join us in this time of celebration and worship—a time for saying "Thank You" to God for His love and mercy and grace.

The Lord's Table is also a time for every Christian to take inventory of his or her life—again, like many do on New Year's Day—it's a time to examine our lives. While the elements are being passed, look at your heart, look at your life. Living a Christian life—a sanctified life—a life not even dabbling in sin doesn't come easy. Through trials and sufferings, the world is constantly trying to get you to be like the rest of the world in your thoughts, your words, and your actions. Traits like compassion, humility, gentleness, and sacrificial love are not particularly respected by the world. Are your priorities those of your Lord and Savior or are they those of the world around you? Is your motive in life to bring glory to God? Has your message of salvation, i.e., how to be saved, been perverted? Are you sanctified; i.e., are you separate from the world or "are you painted with the same brush"? Do your words and your actions testify to others that you are a Christian? Is your mission to bring sinners to Christ? In other words, can you say to God as Jesus did in [John 17:4](#), "**I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do?**" Remember, a divided gospel—a gospel of grace and works is actually no gospel at all. If, by God's standards, your life and your message aren't what they should be, confess to God whatever is holding you back, ask Him for strength to do what you should be doing, and then come to the Table and worship our great Lord and Savior.