



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for May 16, 2010
Released on Wednesday, May 12, 2010**

"A Chosen Community"

Lesson Text: Colossians 3:12–17
Background Scripture: Colossians 3
Devotional Reading: Isaiah 41:4–10

Colossians 3:12–17

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List some of the attitudes and behaviors that Paul says should and should not characterize the church.
2. Explain how a mind that is set on Christ rises above the pettiness of the world.
3. Volunteer for a ministry in his or her church that is focused on expressing a Christlike attitude toward people in the community who do not fit the demographic makeup of the congregation as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

As noted in last week's lesson, Paul probably never visited the church in Colossae, but he knew quite a bit about it. His letter to them shows that he had a high view of these people. He commended them in several areas. But he did not hesitate to remind them that they needed to leave behind the "old man" of lying and other malicious behavior, for they had put on the "new man" of peace and thankfulness for their fellowship with God and with one another.

He urged them to build a community where the ideal church should be an island of respect and honesty in the worldly ocean of deceit and pretense. We may not have the ideal church, but we should not be satisfied with a church that shows no marked difference from the corruptions of the world.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In Colossians 2, Paul deals with doctrinal dangers to the Colossians, specifically their understanding of the nature of Christ. This may be combating an early form of Gnosticism (last week's lesson). Paul moves to the ethical demands of Christianity in Colossians 3.

The ancient world had many competing ethical systems, just as our world does today. For example, deceit and trickery could be seen as cleverness in certain circumstances and thus counted as a virtue rather than a vice (weakness). Today, some idealize the efficiency and effectiveness of the Roman Empire's governing. But in reality the Romans could be violent and corrupt with little regard for ethical standards. They built their empire on slave labor. Julius Caesar was murdered on the Senate steps by the same senators who had elected him Dictator for Life. This confusing ethical stew was the environment of the Colossians as they sought to live Christian lives as a tiny group within their city.

Putting on Christian Virtues (Colossians 3:12-14)

1. Why did Paul call on Christians to practice Christian virtues? (Colossians 3:12a)

Christian virtues are the evidence that people are indeed Christians. Jesus reminds us that the world will know that we are his followers if we love one another (cf. John 13:35). Not only do we need to love one another, but we also need to love people of the world. Christian virtues stem from love. Without love, these virtues are impossible. Because God has been so merciful and gracious towards us, we should be inspired to love others.

Christians should get rid of the excess baggage of their past sinful lives, as Paul has pointed out (vs. 5-11), but they should not be known merely for the things they do not do. They should show evidence of a transformed nature through godly deeds. "Therefore" (v. 12) points to the twofold reason for living a transformed life. First, it is consistent with the new nature God gave us in Christ. We have already "put on the new man" (v. 10); so it is only logical that we put on the virtues that this new nature

produces. If we are God's children, we can be expected to exhibit the same qualities He has.

2. What did Paul mean by "bowels of mercies (v. 12b)?"

Bowels represent the innermost part of a person, which were believed to be the basis of emotions. As the first virtue is "bowels of mercies," we need to have a heart of compassion for other people. No matter what people may do to us, we are commanded to have compassion for them. After all, God has compassion for us when we sin against Him.

Kindness is a second quality produced by the new nature. This speaks of pleasantness of disposition and goodness of heart. It leads us to seek the good of another. Next comes humility. This is a realistic view of oneself in the light of God's assessment. Although the Greeks considered this a vice, it was modeled by Jesus Himself (Phil. 2:5-8). It preserves us from arrogance.

3. How are meekness, and long-suffering related to one another (v. 12c)?

We are also to exhibit meekness, the social side to humility. This involves courteous treatment of others and a readiness to yield—a contrast to rudeness. Akin to this is long-suffering, or patience. It is the opposite of being short-tempered or irritable when provoked. One with this virtue refuses to take revenge when wronged.

Worldly responses to being wronged involve self-gratification. In other words, the emphasis is on the individual. In contrast, spiritual responses to being wronged involve self-denial. The Christian let's God fight his or her battles. This leads to peace on behalf of the Christian.

4. How do forbearing and forgiving one another go hand in hand (v. 13)?

The attitude of patience is actualized in this virtue: "forbearing one another." This is the willingness to be patient with others who may do stupid or inconsiderate things. Since this includes all of us from time to time, forbearance is a crucial attitude to foster within any church.

Forbearance is promoted by the seventh virtue: forgiveness. Paul reminds the readers that they have a supreme model of forgiveness in *Christ*, who in His worst moment of agony and injustice said, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Likewise, Christ has forgiven each of us and paid the penalty for our sins with His own blood. When church members can humble themselves in both seeking and granting forgiveness freely, the church will be blessed. Perhaps we will *quarrel*, but we must forgive.

5. What is the most important virtue (v. 14)?

The last virtue is Paul's most important. That virtue is "charity", meaning love. This involves more than giving to homeless people or performing other charitable acts. It is an overwhelming mind-set to care for the church and all of its members with selflessness and devotion. This is how the "bond of perfectness" is achieved. Without the presence of this ultimate attitude, there will be no peace in a church.

The Colossians may already be aware of Paul's teaching that Christ "loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). As Christ taught forgiveness on the cross, He demonstrated love through the cross. The harmonious church is where the members serve one another "by love" (Galatians 5:13).

Maintaining a Proper Relationship with God (Colossians 3:15-17)

6. How should God's peace act as an umpire among Christians? (v. 15a)

When the church consists of members who embrace and practice the Christlike virtues Paul has listed, it is a congregation of *peace*. Peace reigns, beginning with the *hearts* of the believers. For Paul, this ideal is what the church should be, indeed what it is *called* to be.

Here in verse 15, Paul commanded, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." God's peace should be a standing feature of our lives. "Rule" means "to act as an umpire or judge." The peace of God should be the basis for judging rightness or wrongness in a conflict.

How does this inner peace act as an umpire in conflict? The primary application here is to relationships among members of the church, for as Paul wrote, we have been called to this peace "in one body" (Col. 3:15). The Holy Spirit has brought us together in unity, but it is our responsibility to preserve the unity through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Though unified in faith and purpose, Christians do not always agree; so they need the "umpire" of God's peace to guide them.

7. Why is it necessary for us to keep on cultivating thankfulness? (v. 15b)

Paul's second imperative regarding our relationship with God is "Be ye thankful." The idea is to keep on becoming thankful. We should start by being thankful for all the people God has placed in our lives. In fact, we should be "giving thanks always for all things" (Eph. 5:20). So we must cultivate this attitude with strength from the Holy Spirit (v. 18).

Paul pointed out elsewhere that a lack of thankfulness is one of the first steps downward toward apostasy and moral degradation (Rom. 1:21). It is also an early step toward disunity in the church and the restlessness that opens the door to false teaching. Conversely, thankfulness is an expression of humility and trust as we recognize the goodness and wisdom of God's design even though we cannot always understand it (cf. 1 Thess. 5:18).

8. What will characterize Christians who let Christ's word dwell in them richly? (v. 16)

Another characteristic of the peaceful church is the presence of the *Word* in the church's *teaching* and worship. Christ's word should dwell richly within us. This means we should give it more than a superficial acknowledgment, We should desire all the wealth it has to offer and make it the inner fountain that continually refreshes and nourishes us. If we do this, the outcome for the church will be rich as well.

The earliest church in Jerusalem was focused on its obligation to “teach and preach Jesus *Christ*” (Acts 5:42). Now, three decades later, Paul reaffirms that learning the ways of the Lord is a lifelong duty, and the teachings of Christ are an inexhaustible source of material. This ministry of the Word includes both the words of Jesus and the teachings of the Old Testament that are the foundations of His teachings. Today we have the added benefit of the writings of the apostles and their associates—our New Testament; this is a resource largely unavailable to the Colossian church at the time.

A peaceful church is more likely to be a worshiping church. It will find togetherness in singing praise in unity. It is important that such singing is not by rote or mere habit. Rather, it is to be a true expression of the melody of praise that the believer naturally has in his or her heart.

9. What principle should guide us in what we say and do? (v. 17)

Paul’s final imperative in this section is a wise reminder: it is not about us. It is about God. Church activities and fellowship must always have this perfect perspective, that we are doing everything for the glory of the “name of the Lord Jesus” (compare 1 Corinthians 10:31). We can measure how well we are doing this by asking whether what we say and do is in harmony with an attitude of “giving thanks to God.” Do we give thanks when we bad-mouth other believers? No. Do we give thanks when we refuse to forgive? No. Do we give thanks when we fight and fuss? No. We must give thanks to God with our whole hearts, leaving no room for bitterness or pettiness (Psalm 9:1). This is the essence of praise.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** The elect of God should, spiritually speaking, dress like God (Col. 3:12).
- 2.** Our forgiveness of others should model Christ’s forgiveness of us (v. 13).
- 3.** The greatest Christian virtue of all is love because it enwraps every other virtue (v. 14).
- 4.** A spirit of thankfulness and a heart of peace often go hand in hand (v. 15).
- 5.** The Word of God must be our guard and guide in any and all situations (v. 16),
- 6.** Thankful hearts will desire to bring God the greatest possible glory in all they do (v. 17).

CONCLUSION

In the society of the street gangs that plague our cities, the most volatile offense is to “disrespect” someone. On occasion gangs can live in peace with rival gangs if no disrespect is shown. Even in this culture of lawlessness, respect may lead to a type of warped peace.

Why, then, is the church sometimes a hotbed of disrespect? Why can some churches never seem to achieve the peace and harmony that Paul sees in (or at least desires for) the Colossian church? Can't we, the chosen people of God, learn to respect one another? Can't we practice humility and forgiveness? Can't we muster up a powerful love that will bind us together?

We can. We should. We must. A fighting, divided church will not survive. Are there things you can do to bring more harmony to your congregation? Have you been one of the agitators, or are you one of the peacemakers?

PRAYER

Lord, fill our hearts with Your love. Give us patience with our brothers and sisters, and help us forgive one another. May Your peace rule in our hearts. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Live out your calling.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEKS' LESSON

In our lesson next week we look at the importance of doing the right thing under all circumstances. We are called to live in the world, where we have to make many decisions every day. It is often through these that we are to clearly demonstrate to those around us that we are Christians. Paul challenged Philemon to make some crucial decisions to do what was right in his situation. Study Philemon 1:8-18,21.

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