

Paul's Letter to the Colossians

10. The Bond of Unity (3:9-15)

Fall is a favorite time of year for football fans! The college season is off to a roaring start as the Ohio State Buckeyes have gotten their first win under new head coach Urban Meyer. "Go Bucks!" One of the things that makes football great is that it is a team sport. It takes more than an individual to go out and win ball games, but requires cooperation and a unified effort from players at every position. If a team is going to be successful, there must be a spirit of camaraderie and a shared focus. However, when there is division and strife in the locker room, disaster will result on the field.

The local church is also a team, of sorts, though with a much higher purpose. As members of Christ's Body, there must be a spirit of unity that brings us together with a common focus if we are to live out what the church is supposed to be. The apostle Paul addresses this in Colossians 3. As He calls us to turn from our old ways and embrace our new life in Christ, he shows us how this affects our relationships with others, particularly with one another within the church.

I. A Heart for One Another: (verse 12)

1. When we allow ourselves to be controlled by the old fleshly nature, we make a mess of things, and that is certainly true in our relationships with others. Glance back at verse 8. How do human beings tend to treat one another? What happens to our relationships when we demonstrate these attitudes?

2. Throughout the passage, the apostle has been calling believers to take _____ the "old self" (v.9) and put _____ the "new self" (v.10). In other words, stop living like the person you used to be before you met the Lord, but rather let the character of Christ shine forth in your life. In verse 12 Paul instructs believers to "clothe yourselves with..."

- C _____ -
- K _____ -
- H _____ -
- G _____ -
- P _____ -
- Briefly define of each of these terms. Give an example of when it might be difficult to show these qualities when dealing with others rather than responding according to our old selfish nature.

3. Several of these virtues are listed in Galatians 5:22-23 as "the fruit of the Spirit." What does this tell us about how we can grow in each of these areas? If (when) we find ourselves struggling in these areas, what should the believer do?

4. When these virtues are evident in the life of a congregation, how will that affect the way the unsaved community views Christians? What if those virtues are absent in a congregation?

5. Consider the words of Jesus in Luke 6:31-36. What is the "golden rule?" How should we treat those who are not always very nice to us? Why? Whom should we strive to imitate?

III. Forgiveness a Must: (verse 13)

6. Believers are not yet perfect, but are still a work in progress. We say this not to make an excuse, but to acknowledge that sooner or later our old fleshly nature will get the best of us and we will find ourselves acting in very selfish and ungracious ways. That's why verse 13 is so important.

- Do you think it is easy / natural for human beings to forgive when wronged? Explain.
- What does it mean to “bear with one another?” Why is it necessary within a church family?

7. According the second part of the verse, why should Christians be willing to forgive when wronged? What kind of forgiveness should we be willing to extend? (*see also Ephesians 4:32*)

8. Is there ever an excuse for the believer to be unforgiving, or a limit to our mercy? (*Matt. 18:21-22*)

9. Do you find it difficult to ask for forgiveness when you realize you have offended someone? It is tempting to ignore the rift in our relationship, hoping that it will blow over in time. More often, what usually happens when unresolved conflict goes on for days...months...years? (*Matt. 5:23-24*)

III. Spiritual Super-Glue: (verse 14-15)

10. Divide and conquer is one of Satan's favorite strategies to render churches ineffective in carrying out our mission. Sadly, Christians often play right into his hands, allowing ourselves to be drawn into petty disputes over silly issues. The apostle calls believers to allow the p_____ of Christ to rule in our hearts. How do we maintain this spirit, and guard against divisions? When conflict arises, what might be healthy ways to address it? (*1 Cor. 1:10-11; 11:17-18; 1 Tim. 2:8*)

11. Love is the greatest of all Christian virtues, summing up how believers ought to relate to one another. What would a Christian be without love? Why do you think Paul calls love “the perfect bond of u_____?”

12. The Greek language had several different words to describe various forms of love. However, “agape” is the one most often used in the NT. It is pure, unselfish, and sacrificial. Where do we see this kind of love demonstrated most brilliantly in Scripture? What do we learn about this form of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8? If believers consistently love one another in this way, do you think there would be as many church splits, people leaving the church, or church conflicts? Explain.