

Lesson 17

Bearing with One Another

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity, Colossians 3.12-14.

Introduction

Through their union in Christ, believers have become partners with other believers. Such teaching was radical in the Greco-Roman world and certainly remains a great challenge for our own time. The way of the first century is not any different than today. Christianity has come for the purpose of salvation and bringing a people together ... and part of that mission involves destroying all the barriers because *Christ is all, and in all*, Colossians 3.11.

Think of how Christianity brings people together:

- It has removed barriers from birth, nationality, and race. Christians are one in Christ.
- It has removed ceremonial and ritualistic barriers.
- It has removed barriers between the cultured and uncultured. Great scholars can sit down with the most uneducated and have perfect fellowship.
- It has removed barriers between class. In the first century a slave could be a leader in the local church, while his minister served as a humble member.⁶²

These realities weren't only applicable to the first century ... they are much needed in our time. The same barriers in Paul's day are still erected by the world, they're just given new names. We live in a world rife with racism, national and cultural divisions, extreme political partisanship, and economic class distinctions. May we remember Paul's admonition:

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12.13.

Colossians 3.12-14: What the New Self Looks Like

If we were to summarize these verses, we could rightly do so under one term: *love*. Love grows out of our new status with God.

We are chosen, holy, and beloved.

Christians are part of God's chosen people. And while this terminology was used to refer to the nation of Israel, now the application is made to Christ. Jesus is the *chosen* one, 1 Peter 2.4, 6. He is also referred to

⁶² Barclay, William. *The Letters to Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, p. 181. Barclay takes these points from T. K. Abbot.

as the holy one, John 6.69; Acts 4.27, 30. And finally, Jesus is the One loved by the Father, Matthew 3.17; Ephesians 1.6. It is in Christ that Christians find their identity as God's people.⁶³

We are to cover up our life in these things:

Compassion

The wording here is literally “the bowels of compassion.” It was common in Paul’s day for people to look at the bowels as the seat of compassion and sympathy. It referenced a deep, gut level feeling of pity, mercy, or sympathy. These are deep feelings of hurt out of concern for others and their needs . . . *an aching kind of concern*. It was the feeling of having a visceral reaction to the suffering and distress of others.

Kindness

This is obviously connected to compassion. It describes the person who is as concerned about the welfare of his neighbor as much as he is his own. It is characterized by being warmhearted, considerate, gentle, and sympathetic.

Humility, meekness, and patience

Humility was never seen as a virtue in the ancient world. Self-promotion, pride, and status were very much the norm. In fact, humility was so rare that there was no word in classical Greek for *humility*. It was seen as the disposition of a slave. And yet, here it is turned into a virtue for basic Christian living. This echoes other New Testament passages, such as Ephesians 4.2; Philippians 2.3-4; and 1 Peter 5.5.

Meekness is described as gentleness, mildness, or being even-tempered. It is strength under control. It is willing to suffer mistreatment and forego a response. “It is the power that enables us, precisely in situations of conflict with our fellow, so to meet him that he experiences the criticism of his behavior (assuming that it is justified criticism) not as condemnation but as help.”⁶⁴

Patience is the opposite of resentment and revenge. See again what was written in the previous lesson regarding *wrath*. Patience is the opposite of it, i.e., the disciplined maintenance of our animating strength.

It has been said that the qualities in verse 12 have to do with how a person responds when he/she is under someone else. Now, the qualities in verse 13 have to do with how a person deals with others when he/she is over them.

Bearing with others

The wording here carries along the meaning of enduring or putting up with, especially when the attitudes or actions of another person are immature or tiresome. We need to let others be themselves.

⁶³ Wright, p. 146.

⁶⁴ Dunn, p. 229.

This is all for the purpose of experiencing intimacy where hostility once existed. It has been said that compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience are the very essence of a congregation's life.

Forgiving each other

This is the way of Jesus, who taught on the principle of unceasing forgiveness in Matthew 18.22. Those who seek God's forgiveness must be ready to dispense it to others, Matthew 6.14. As the Lord has forgiven, so must we. The parallel passage to this is found in Ephesians 4.32. Our forgiveness must grow to be like Christ: with genuineness; completeness; no strings attached; in grace; and freely, not begrudgingly given.

Love: The greatest attribute of the new self

Love for others and for God is what holds all this together. It is the primary fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5.22, and is described as the greatest Christian grace, 1 Corinthians 13.3. Christians are called to practice a mutual love for one another. It is the link that binds each of us together.

Every one of the previous qualities in v. 12-14 will not happen unless we have love. Love is the greatest quality of the new life.

Our Challenge...

Love is a diminishing quality inside the lives of some Christians. Their relationships are plagued with bitterness, rivalry, arrogance, condescension, and strife. We must understand that our incredible blessings and gifts from God can become a source of division if misused in an atmosphere void of love. We must keep the bigger picture in view.

Love is produced within us through our surrender to the Spirit. As we work to empty ourselves of our self, the Spirit through His ongoing work of transformation adds love to our life. It is as absolute necessity that we surrender to the Spirit's work. We must not diminish or downplay any teaching on love. It is an essential. It is a basic matter of Christian doctrine. Nothing substitutes for love.

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, 1 Corinthians 13.4-7.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Why was the Christian mission of bringing people together such a radical thing in the Greco-Roman world? Is it just as radical today? Explain.
2. As you think of the barriers Christianity have removed, how do you feel? How are you applying those feelings in your relationships?

3. What does it mean that you are *chosen, holy, and beloved*?

4. What behaviors and attitudes are characterized by compassion and kindness?

5. What can you do to increase the amount of patience you exercise in your relationships?

6. How is this connected to bearing with others?

7. How apt are you to forgive others when they wrong you?

8. How is all this connected to love?