



COLOSSIANS
RELATIONSHIPS
COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

MAIN IDEA

The relational expression of gospel transformation is practiced through accountable relationships.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- **When was the last time you had a conflict in your workplace?**

- **When was the last time you had a conflict with a close friend or family member?**

- **How do our relationships shape the way we address conflict? For example, how is conflict with your spouse or child different than conflict with your coworker?**

Conflict is a natural consequence of living in relational proximity to other people. You likely don't have much conflict with people you don't spend any time with. This is why it is important to properly address and deal with conflict. Since the church is a community, conflict is bound to arise.

For example, sometimes different segments of the church feel their needs are being mishandled or even ignored altogether. The church community has to find a way to resolve the conflict by meeting needs with compassion and commitment to their shared mission. The Bible is honest about relational conflict but also provides a means for us to address it in a way that honors Christ. We find one such example in Colossians 3.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read Colossians 3:12-14.

- **Based on these verses, what attributes should characterize a follower of Christ? What attitudes should we display toward one another?**
- **How are these traits different from the ones mentioned in verses 5-8 of this chapter?**
- **How does the gospel redefine the way we relate to one another?**

The gospel redefines and restores our relationships. People who become new in Christ are to put on the new virtues of Christ. Paul addressed the Colossians with three descriptive terms. They were God's chosen ones. Through faith in Christ, they had taken their place among God's people. Believers are holy—set aside for God's service and for moral purity. They also are loved and abide in God's love. Paul's descriptive terms offered strong motivation for believers to incorporate these qualities into their lives and community.

- **How do each of these qualities have both an individual and corporate application? Give an example of each.**
- **What does it mean to bear with one another? How does the gospel restore our relationships and make this possible?**

Paul listed five attributes of believers as new creations in Christ. Compassion conveys the idea of feeling so deeply for others who are hurting that a person shares their pain. Kindness is considering others' good to be as important as your own. Humility is a healthy view of oneself. Gentleness has the sense of strength that is controlled and channeled constructively. Patience literally is "longsuffering"—enduring difficulties, slights, or wrongs over time without retaliating.

- **What stands out to you about the phrases Paul used to describe relationships in Colossians 3:13?**
- **What do you understand "bearing with one another" to mean, and how is it connected to forgiveness? What reason do Christians have to forgive one another?**

In calling us to bear with one another, Paul meant Christians are to go beyond quiet resignation to forgive whatever grievances they may have against one another. Believers have been forgiven fully by Christ (Colossians 2:13-14), and the forgiven are obligated to become forgivers. The standard for this forgiveness is Christ Himself. Bearing with one another means putting up with one another, or enduring offenses patiently. Our commitment is not based on our desires but the gospel that restores us from the inside out.

Forgiving is literally “acting with grace,” and forgiving one another is certainly one of the best ways to extend undeserved favor. Paul pointed out that this is a God-like quality. Because He forgave in Christ, we are to extend forgiveness to others. The more we reflect on and grow in our understanding of how much God loves us and how much He has forgiven us, the more we want to treat others the same way.

- **Paul used the analogy of putting on clothes to explain the gospel transformation that happens to a Christian. What is the last garment that covers everything else? Why is this so important?**

Our commitment to one another stems from our identity in Christ and our desire to follow Him. That commitment means sometimes we must compromise to see Christ’s mission go forward—not in a way that compromises the gospel message but in a way that exemplifies it. Christians take the initiative to model the virtues listed here because they were modeled for us in Christ. For example, Christians forgive others because of their personal experience of Christ’s forgiveness. We are all forgiven sinners guided by love, which is why love is the last and most important garment. Above all, Christian communities are ones of love (John 13:34-35).

Paul insisted that believers are to put on love—a determined goodwill that seeks the other’s best interest. Such persistent goodwill is the perfect bond of unity. We cannot do this of our own accord; we must be changed by Jesus to live this way.

> Have someone in your group read Colossians 3:17-19.

- **What does it mean to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts?**

 - **What does it mean that you have been called to this peace?**
-

If we don't control our hearts, who or what controls them?

- **What does it look like when a group of people are at peace with one another? How has Christ made us one?**

Christ has called believers to His peace, which is best understood as spiritual wholeness under His lordship. The phrase “in one body” implies our oneness under Christ’s rule as the head of His body, the church. Believers allow Christ’s gift of spiritual health to exercise control, which causes us to be thankful.

- **What does verse 16 teach us about godly wisdom?**
- **How do we get this wisdom, according to Paul’s teaching?**
- **What did Paul teach is the overflow of spiritual wisdom?**

Wisdom is rooted in the God’s Word. God has given us Scripture as the primary way we discern how to live for Him in our broken world. Colossians 3:16 also reveals that we get this wisdom through teaching and admonishing one another. We are dependent on each other to fully understand God’s Word and to hold one another accountable for the study of it. The third thing Paul taught is the overflow of wisdom is worship. When we put on godly wisdom, we are reminded of His wisdom and glory.

- **How is corporate worship an expression of our commitment to God and to one another?**
 - **What is our worship supposed to be like, according to verse 16?**
-

The peace of Christ determines our actions. Focusing on this peace helps us live in harmony with Jesus and with other people. Worship does a similar uniting work in our lives. So Paul admonished believers to let the message (literally, “word”) about the Messiah dwell richly among them.

To help the Colossians understand, Paul pointed to three on-going activities that should guide our worship: teaching, admonishing, and singing. Teaching refers to instruction in Christian living. Admonishing involves warning against false teachings and encouraging one another. Singing joyfully is the expression of worship and praise. Our worship is not separate from our life in community with other believers in discipleship. Rather, both are vital and support one another.

- **Verse 17 seems to be Paul’s conclusion. What does it mean to do something “in the name of” Jesus?**

- **What does it look like when you commit your whole life to doing all in word or deed in the name of Jesus?**

Paul urged believers to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. “Name” is a synonym for person. Thus, the phrase is the same as “in Christ”—in close relationship with Him. The words *in the name of* can mean “in the authority or power of.” Jesus supplies power for Christian living. The title “the Lord Jesus” stressed that believers are to represent their Savior and Master well in their daily lives. Our commitment to Christ transforms our lives.

APPLICATION

- **How does your daily behavior reflect your new life in Christ?**
- **What are some ways others might identify that your life has been changed by Christ?**
- **Which actions or attitudes in these verses is most difficult for you to express? Why do you think that is? How will you seek growth in this area?**
- **How can we encourage one another in this pursuit?**
- **What is your story of how Jesus has restored your life?**
- **How could you use your story to share the story of Jesus with someone?**

PRAY

Pray that God would restore our lives as we recognize the truth that things above are better and more satisfying than the things of earth that capture so much of our attention. Ask for the grace to live out our mission and ministry together as the gospel restores us.

Historical Context of Colossians

Purpose

Paul wrote to counter the “Colossian heresy” that he considered an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The false teaching is identified as a “philosophy” (2:8), presumably drawn from some Hellenistic traditions as indicated by the references to “his fullness” (1:19); the “elements of the world” (Gk *stoicheia*, 2:8, 20); “wisdom” (2:3, 23); and “self-made religion” (2:23). In addition, the false teaching contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11); “human tradition” (2:8); Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation (2:16); the “worship of angels” together with “access to a visionary realm” (2:18); and harsh human regulations (2:21–23). Paul addressed this syncretistic philosophy by setting forth a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by noting appropriate implications for Christian conduct.

Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

3:12-14. Verses 12–17 contain the virtues that stand in contrast to the vices mentioned in the preceding verses. With the old discarded, the character of Christ is to be displayed in its place. The transformation process includes more than don'ts. There are some dos as well.

Notes:

Since the old humanity has been put off and the new community has been put on, believers are therefore to clothe themselves with the kind of behavioral apparel that fits their new life. The famous story “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen has many possible applications for believers. One of them would be the simple lesson that we are not to be foolish like the emperor and take off our old clothes and put nothing back on. Before listing the appropriate attire, Paul reminds believers that they are God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved. These are exalted titles formerly used as designations for the nation of Israel (Deut. 4:37; 7:7–8) but now applied to the new community in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

The first piece in the believer’s fashionable wardrobe is compassion, which refers to “heartfelt sympathy for those suffering or in need.” The next item in the believer’s wardrobe is kindness, the friendly and helpful spirit which meets needs through good deeds. This is the concrete action of compassion. If the believer is to be fully dressed, other Christ-like characteristics are to be worn as well. The believer is to be clothed with humility, which is a proper estimation of oneself (Rom. 12:3). Humility is not a self-debasing attitude (like the “false humility” of 2:18 and 2:23) but an attitude that is free from pride and self assertion. The believer is to be clothed with gentleness, sometimes translated “meekness.” Gentleness has been described as “power under control”; the picture of a powerful horse under the control of its master is a helpful

image. The attitude behind gentleness is an attitude of refusing to demand one's rights. The believer is to be clothed with patience which is the capacity to bear injustice or injury without revenge or retaliation.

Notes:

The idea of putting up with the abuses and offenses of others continues with Paul's call to bear with each other. Believers are to go beyond quiet resignation positively to forgive whatever grievances [they] may have against one another. Believers have been fully forgiven by Christ (2:13–14), and the forgiven are obligated to become forgivers. The standard for this forgiveness is Christ himself.

Paul saves the most important item of clothing for last. Without love, all the other virtues may amount to mere moralism and little else (a thought found also in 1 Cor. 13:1–3). When love is present, there is harmony and unity in the community. It is not clear whether love binds the virtues together, completing a lovely garment of Christlike character, or whether love binds the members of the community together in mature oneness. Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional. Both ideas make good sense.

3:15. To maintain perfect unity (v. 14) believers are to let the peace of Christ rule in [their] hearts. Rule literally means “to act as umpire.” The Colossians were told earlier not to allow false teachers to “act as umpire against” them (2:18). However, when disputes arise, the believer is to let the peace of Christ make the call. Whatever will lead to peace must be the deciding factor so that peace will be preserved.

3:16. If believers are to be transformed into the character of Christ, the word of Christ should find a home in our hearts. It should not come and go, show up occasionally, or be something we visit like a vacation spot.

The parallel between Colossians 3:16–4:1 and Ephesians 5:18–6:9 must not be missed. The structure and terminology are almost identical. The Ephesians passage exhorts believers to be filled with the Spirit, whereas the Colossians passage exhorts believers to let the Word of Christ dwell in them. The two concepts must be synonymous. The external results are the same. The internal effect is the same. The believer is to be “under the influence” of the word of Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. The reason for the Colossians’ emphasis on Christ is expected in a book so devoted to his centrality and supremacy. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in hearts to God (v. 16). When the word of Christ finds a comfortable home in individual believers and in the new community, there will be teaching (positive instruction), admonishing one another (negative correction), and thankful worship, evidenced by singing and gratitude.

Notes:

3:17. The life transformation process is to include any and all areas and activities of life. In all places, in all ways, the believer is to honor the name of the Lord Jesus. Genuine spirituality is not found by following false teaching which leads away from Christ. Genuine spirituality is found in having our lives transformed into the character of Christ.