
The Practice of Christian Fellowship

Colossians 3:10-17

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The difficulty with long texts in short pieces...

I want to express my appreciation to the elders who worked hard to expound on the overlapping texts. It is my prayer that their labor in the Scriptures for your good and God's glory is well received and much appreciated.

The main question posed to us is: will we live with each other as Christ's people in a way that is gospel-grounded, Christ-centered and God-glorifying?

What Christ did for us through the cross and resurrection are realities. We cannot feel them. We cannot experience them except by believing them by faith. This is the gospel for our Christian life. Paul is driving this home. Now the exhortations move into the sphere of our relationships. What concerns him and us is our fellowship, our partnership as believers. How will we live the Christian life together as God's people in our church, in our homes, at work, in the world?

The Root of Our Fellowship in Christ (v.10-11)

⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

The Precept (v.9a)

In our relationships, here is first what God demands. He demands truthfulness and honesty with one another. This is stated as a negative, "Do not lie..." The Lord requires that we not to lie to one another. This is part of the New Covenant ethic. It is higher and deeper than the Mosaic Law which focused on the legal aspect of not bearing a false witness in court. We are not to lie to one another as Christians.

This is the last of a cluster of sins that we are to put off: ⁸ *But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.* ⁹ *Do not lie to one another*

But there are not just commands without a reason. The reason is rooted in...

The Past (v.9b-10a)

We do not lie because God has transformed us. We are to not lie because we have believed truths about Christ's work for us. This is the logic of the Bible that seems to escape most modern Christians. What God in Christ did in the cross and resurrection has radically transformed us.

Here, this is a past tense action. Don't lie to each other because you have already put off the old person, the old self and put on the new person, the new self. This is something that happened to you at your conversion. That happened to each of you. You have had your old put off and your new put on. Now, it still entails responsibility to put off and put on. But Paul locates this important prohibition in something that has already happened to you.

We can think of it this way. You have a past reality - something that has been accomplished. That reality leads to and empowers your present responsibility. "Put off and put on", because you "have put off and put on". You put to death (mortify, v.5) what you have already been separated from by the cross's death and the Spirit's circumcision (2:11). You put on what the resurrection has created in you, that is, the life of Christ through the Spirit (2:13). You are to seek and pursue all that is in heaven in Christ (3:1).

Now, this is what it means to preach Christ (Colossians 1:28–29):

²⁸ Him [Christ] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

To only talk about Jesus in all His wondrous glories, is not fully preaching Christ. To only talk about Jesus and His death and resurrection and ascension to heaven, is not fully preaching Christ. To preach Christ we must proclaim the *realities* and the *responsibilities*. Colossians 2:6 through 3:17 are full of "therefore" and "since" and imperatives that are grounded in and arise from the indicatives. What do I mean? The truths about who Christ is and what He has done must be wrapped tightly around the commands for the Christian life.

Live a transformed life... because, you have been transformed. Do this and don't do that because you have already believed what is true.

It is only when we say, "Since Christ has died and was raised for you and since you have put off the old person and put on the new person, then you must put off lying and put on telling the truth," then and only then have we truly proclaimed Christ.

But you are not alone in this.

The Process (v.10b)

Through all of this God is at work. Here is what God is doing. Your new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. There is a process of renewal, of transformation, that is taking place. Your new person, over the course of your Christian life, is being more and more conformed to Christ. We are being remade in His image. The original image of God in you, marred and corrupted by the fall, is now being made new in you.

There are then three facets of the Christian life to keep in mind:

The once-for-all application of Christ's death and resurrection to you at your conversion. This is a spiritual putting off the old self, old person, and putting on the new self, the new person. This is completed at the time you were regenerated. This is Christ's work for you.

The transforming process that is going on during your life as a Christian where the new self is continuing to be conformed to the image of Christ. This is done by the renewing of your mind as you grow in knowledge, faith, obedience and wisdom. This is Christ's work in you.

The moment-by-moment responsibility that we have to put off the old self's thinking and behaving and put on the new self's thinking and behaving. This enabled, empowered, and engaged by believing the truths about Christ's work. This is Christ's work lived out through you.

We need all three. The Christian life in God's will and wisdom is the outworking of all three in the particulars of your life. It will be in the daily details of decisions that drive your attitudes and actions. Each of you have to come to some understanding of who and what the old you is like. Each of you have to work out what the new you is going to be like. This is what living the Christian life means.

Are you ready? Are you ready to put off the sins that are a part of the old you? Are you ready to put into practice the virtues that are a part of the new you? Do an inventory. What sins and folly do you tend toward? What steps of faith and obedience will you take to put them off and to put on the attendant virtues?

The Perspective (v.11)

Why are we to mortify these sins, to put off these vices, to put on the attendant virtues? There are reasons from the context. But there is one more. Listen to verse 11 again:

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Why were these particular sins listed? Because they are breeches of Christian relationships and fellowship. There is a fundamental perspective that is required of us as Christians. Your primary identity is not in your ethnicity, your nationality, your language, your background, your social status. These are a part of the old realm, the world. You cannot live separate from them, but you cannot allow them to be the reason you sin against each other.

Our primary identity is that you are all in Christ. He is who we are. Our primary identity is that we are all Christians. Christ is all that matters. Christ is in us corporately. We are the body of Christ. We are the community of the church. Being a part of Christ's church is not an addition to your life; it is your life. That is true whether you recognize it or not.

This is the answer to all the divisions in society and in the church. Stop making your identity, your significance wrapped up entirely in your old self, in your

old person. All of these distinctions in verse 11 are a part of the old you, the old self. While they exist in the world and are part of the visual diversity of the church they are NOT to be your identity as the people of God.

The Relationships of our Fellowship in Christ (v.12-14)

In the context of your challenge as a diverse group of people, with the tendency to treat each other according to your old selves, what must you put on instead?

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Motivation for our Relationships (v.12a)

The Scriptures often give you motivations for their instructions and their imperatives. The command here is to "put on". But the motivation is threefold.

God has chosen you.

You have been selected by God in eternity past to be a part of His church, His body. But more is implied because of the context. In other words, God has chosen each of you. That each of you is a Christian *is God's choice*. You don't get to choose who to love as a brother or sister. Since God chose you (aren't you special) and all those around you, then you should feel a powerful urge to put on all the virtues related to our relationships as Christians.

God has made you holy.

I know we tend to think of this as a process. But not here. This is a simple declaration that God has made you a saint, a holy one. Since you are one of the holy ones, the saints around you, then you should feel a powerful urge to put on all the virtues related to our relationships as Christians.

God has loved you.

You are beloved of God. Each of you is beloved of God if He has chosen you and made you holy. You have been regenerated because you have been loved by God. Every Christian you know has been loved by God. So, think carefully about how you should treat those who are so loved by God that He chose them and made them holy. Since you are one of the beloved ones, then you should feel a powerful urge to put on all the virtues related to our relationships as Christians.

Now, if you do not feel motivated by these three truths to put on what follows, then the problem is not with the Bible. It is with you. Quite simply, Paul expects you to have a surge of initiative and desire because these are true. So, do you? If not, then think about what would motivate you and ask why that instead of what the Bible expects.

Maintenance of our Relationship (v.12b-13)

What then are we to put on *in our Christian relationships*?

¹² Put on then, ... compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other;

Here is an illustrative list of what you must put on. I do not believe it is exhaustive. But most of you would do well to start here. Thinking about the COVID time and post-COVID struggles, this was deeply needed and often violated.

Briefly, let's survey these and then ask ourselves some really hard questions.

Compassionate hearts	Are you willing, consciously, intentionally to put on a poise of heart to be compassionate with people instead of harsh, unfeeling, judgmental?
Kindness	Are you a kind person? Are you willing to put on kindness with others who are your brothers or sisters? This includes your spouses and parents...
Humility	Are you willing to put on humility? Are you able to accept hardness, correction, being sinned against, the lowly place, the unrecognized ministry?
Meekness	Are you willing to put on meekness? Are you posed to be submissive, helpful, serving even when in a leadership position?
Patience	Are you willing to put on patience? Will you be patient with people, with circumstances, with slowness of change, with all that is involved in really loving others?
Bearing with one another	Are you willing to put on a sincere desire to get along with even those who seem hard to get along with? How much of another persons' crap are you willing to put up with? How much of yours does Jesus have to put up with?
Forgiveness	Are you willing to immediately and fully forgive when you have a complaint against someone? Do you even understand why forgiveness is necessary? Do you know what it means to forgive?

Measure for our Relationships (v.13b)

...forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

This is the only one that Paul comments on. Forgiveness. You are a forgiven person. You would not be a Christian without God's forgiveness. You would not have fellowship with God without His forgiveness. God's forgiveness is purchased by the cross and centered on Christ. He always forgives.

And so must you. A forgiving attitude, a poise of forgiveness, is a way of thinking we put on. You should be quick to confess your sins against one another. You should be even quicker to forgive offenses, complaints, and sins against one another. You do so, not on any grounds but that those sins have already been dealt with at the cross. When you refuse to forgive you are effectively saying, "The cross is not enough. I want my own justice..."

Now, is there anyone in this room whom you have not forgiven? Is there anyone in this room you are not poised to forgive? Start with your spouse. They are your closest brother or sister. How do you know that you are unforgiving? Who do you avoid? Who are you bitter against? Who will you not serve under or not serve with? Who would you rather see something bad happen to them rather than something good?

The Mastery of our Relationships (v.14)

How is all this possible? What could possibly cause you to respond to others in the ways we ought?

¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Put on love. Yes, not put on a feeling... the affections will be a part of it but are not the core of it. Love is the willingness to serve and sacrifice for others, even those who are against you. Love is a choice. Love is something you do, not something that happens to you. Put on... love. God's kind of love.

What is the results of believers putting off and putting on *in the context of relationships*? Harmony. Love then binds people together in harmony. When harmony is broken between people, then love has waned or died altogether. When harmony exists even when there are differences, then love has prevailed.

Sadly, many, many breaches of harmony during the last two years are evidences of not putting on love as the bond that binds us together.

The Responsibilities of our Fellowship in Christ (v.15-17)

Three central commands follow as our responsibilities in our Christian life and relationships.

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And **be thankful**. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with **thankfulness** in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him.

The Peace of Christ (v.15)

First, you are to allow the peace of Christ to rule in all of your hearts. This is not a text on personal guidance. This is a text about corporate oneness. You are to allow the desire to be at peace to govern each of your hearts so that we all strive for peace. This is the peace of Christ. This is the kind of resolved oneness that is exhibited by Christ, comes from Christ, and seeks to glorify Christ.

Now do not think that you are exempt. If you have been called into the one body of Christ, then you have summoned to live in peace with one another. Peace faking and peace breaking are deep breaches of the peace of Christ in the body of Christ.

What must accompany the peace of Christ? Gratitude. Gratitude is the answer to grumbling and complaining. A grace filled heart will be a gratitude expressing heart.

The Word of Christ (v.16)

Second, we must allow the Word of Christ, in all its richness, to live at home in you (all). This is both individual and corporate. You must allow the Word settle down and live at home in your inner being. Whether it is the Scripture you read, the Word you hear preached or taught, or the Word spoken and sung to each other. Being a Word filled people will lead to fruitful instruction and admonition. It will replace complaining and grumbling and criticism.

The overflow of the Word in us and among us will be Word-filled singing. There will be a way of not only singing to God but also singing about Christ to each other. From our Word filled hearts and Word filled gatherings will flow Word filled songs in a variety of styles, tunes, and songs. The Word filled praise will be infused with gratitude for who Christ is and what He has done for each and all of us.

The Name of Christ (v.17)

Here is the guide, goal, and glory of the Christian life. In everything, *in everything* you do, you do it for the glory of Christ. Now Paul is thinking about our relationships together, our fellowship as Christians. So, in everything we do as individuals, do all to the Lord's glory. In all we do as a church, do all to the Lord's glory.

What brings glory to the Lord? When we proclaim Christ in the fulness of these texts. When we put off our old selves and put on our new selves, when we live with each other as servants and sacrifices, when we put off the old sins and put on the new virtues, when we are filled with Christ's peace, love, and Word, then we bring glory to Jesus. As we aim our lives to the glory of Jesus, then we will do so with gratitude.

Did you hear it? Every sentence in this paragraph is infused with gratitude, thankfulness to Christ.

Reflect and Respond

We have done much gospel-grounded, Christ-centered teaching from Colossians. It is the message of the book just as it is the message of the Bible. Now, the question is: do you believe what you have heard so that you can understand it and live it?

Have you put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk and lying to one another? Take personal inventory... Think of a "who am I..." with each of those.

Are you being renewed more and more to be like Christ? Are you being transformed? Are you making progress in Christlikeness?

Are you putting on a compassionate heart, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another and have a complaint against someone, forgiveness and love?

Are you struggling to fellowship or serve with anyone in the church? If so, why? What will you do about it now? By the way, "Nothing..." is the wrong, sinful answer.

Brothers and sisters, will you love, live, serve, sacrifice, and forgive one another as God in Christ has loved, lived, served, sacrificed, and forgiven you? Do you truly want the gospel-grounded, Christ-centered, cross-taking life that glorifies God?