

Relating to Fellow Believers in Unity

Colossians 3:9-11

Colossians 3:9-11 - *“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”*

Background Notes

Our background note is from verse 11: the words *“barbarian”* and *“Scythian.”*

Anyone who was foreign to the Greco-Roman culture was considered a barbarian. They were thought to be uncultured, and in a different socio-economic bracket.

The Scythians were the worst of the barbarians. They were not merely uncultured – they were wild and nomadic, and some were even savage. But some of these barbarians and Scythians were becoming Christians, and they had become part of the church at Colossae. Now even Scythians and barbarians were to be accepted as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Doctrinal Point

We must relate to fellow believers.

As Christians, we cannot be hermits, or isolate ourselves, or just do our own thing. We must relate properly, with Christian love, with fellow believers.

Colossians 3 begins the more practical half of the book: making Christ supreme and all-sufficient in our lives. How do I make Christ supreme and all-sufficient in my life?

At the beginning of Colossians 3 we studied how to gain victory over sin in our personal lives. That’s certainly of first importance. Remember the **RAM** method? **R**ealize your position in Christ; **A**spire the things of heaven; and **M**ortify (put to death) the sinful tendencies of your “old nature.”

In our last session, we discussed “putting off the old man” and “putting on the new man.” Now we move on from dealing with sin on a personal level to a wider sphere of making Christ supreme and all-sufficient as we relate with fellow believers.

If I were to draw a diagram of Colossians 3-4, the practical part of the book, I’d probably draw concentric circles – like a target, with inner rings and outer rings. We could label this diagram ***Making Christ Supreme and All-Sufficient In Our Lives***. We would label in the inner circle “*Getting Victory Over Sin In Our Personal Lives*.” Now we’re going to move out to the next ring: “*How to Relate Properly with Fellow Believers*.” Before we’re done with the book of Colossians, we will move out to wider circles, including relating to unbelievers.

Verse 11 indicates that we *must* relate to fellow believers. If we must relate to fellow believers, how should we relate? How *do* we relate? Verse 11 says that we must relate with ***unity***. All barriers must go, because all believers are one in Christ. Notice “*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all*.” A number of barriers are listed here. The Colossian believers were to tear down those barriers, and we must do the same.

“*Greek nor Jew*” has to do with *racial* barriers. All of these diverse people groups had become Christians, and there should not be any barriers in the church. The Colossians believers were to practice the unity of the Body in Christ. “*Christ is all, and in all*” - so the racial barrier had to go.

That’s true today as well. Let me ask you - Are all Christians welcome in your church? In your home? If we’re going to properly practice the unity of the Body of Christ, all Christians should be welcome.

“*Circumcised nor uncircumcised*” has to do with *religious* background. Barriers caused by different religious backgrounds must go as well. The Jews, of course, were circumcised, but the former pagans (non-Jews) were not circumcised. The Jewish people called non-Jews “the uncircumcision.” Both circumcised (Jewish background) and uncircumcised (pagan background) people were becoming Christians. They were now one in Christ, and they were to practice unity.

That barrier must go today as well. We all come from different religious (or non-religious) backgrounds, but background should not affect our unity in the Body of Christ. Different denominational backgrounds should not affect our unity in Christ. That doesn’t mean that we all have to go to the same church. Most Christians have a particular church where they feel comfortable - but let’s not let that destroy our unity in Christ! The religious background barrier *must* go, because we are one in Christ.

“*Barbarian or Scythian*” has to do with *cultural* differences. When barbarians and Scythians became Christians, they didn’t automatically drop their “uncultured” habits - and yet all the Colossian believers were to accept them as brothers and sisters! We must do that today as well.

How do you relate to a brother or sister in Christ whom you might consider “uncultured”? What about the believer who doesn’t realize he often has bad breath? Or the believer who wears synthetic fabric clothes, if you think it’s more culturally proper to wear all-cotton? Or the fellow Christian from a culture that doesn’t bathe often, or use deodorant? What about that brother who stands too close to you at church, and violates your space? Sometimes we can gently counsel fellow believers to change, but the point here is that cultural barriers have got to go! We’ve got to recognize that we are one in Christ with those seemingly “uncultured” brothers or sisters, and we have to work at practicing unity.

“*Bond or free*” has to do with social or economic status. In the 1st century church, poor slaves and rich masters were included in the congregation. Both of these groups were to recognize that they were brothers and sisters in Christ. That didn’t mean that they were to tear down the biblical master/slave authority structure (3:22), but in Christ they were **one** - and they were to recognize that.

Today there’s a wide variety of people within the church: different social status, different income levels, different educational levels, different vocations. The president of a corporation or professional men and women sit side by side with unskilled workers; people with high-paying jobs and people who are currently unemployed are included in the same church small group - all kinds of differences. We’re not to form cliques of any kind, including based on economic and social status. ***We’re all one in Christ.***

We must relate to **all** fellow believers, and Colossians 3:11 indicates that one way we must relate is with **unity**. We must recognize and practice the unity of the Body of Christ - that “***Christ is all, and in all.***”

Practical Application

Show forth the truth that ***Christ is all, and in all!***

Here’s your homework assignment! Think your situation through, and make definite plans to reach out across the barriers we’ve mentioned. Decide how you will establish some new friendly relationships in the Lord, and how you will break down the racial barrier, the religious background barrier, the cultural barrier, and the social and economic barrier.

Remember, the emphasis of Colossians 3:9-11 is not about reaching across barriers to relate to **unbelievers**, although we need to do that as we seek to evangelize. The emphasis of this passage is the necessity of reaching across barriers to relate to fellow believers - maybe in your church, maybe in your small group, maybe in your Christian college, or maybe in your university fellowship group. This will require most of us to step out of our comfort zone. It may be especially uncomfortable to relate to fellow believers who seem to us to be “uncultured,” but relating to them is not an option!

We must relate to fellow believers with unity to show forth the great truth that ***Christ is all and in all!***