

### Relating to Fellow Believers in Grace and Love

#### Colossians 3:12-17

Colossians 3:12-17 - *“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. <sup>14</sup> But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*

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

#### Background Notes

If you're reading the King James Version, you will see that we are to “put on bowels of mercy.” Other versions will say “a heart of compassion” and “tender mercies.” The Greek word that's used here is actually the word for “intestines,” and thus the King James Version translated it “bowels.” Why “intestines?” In that time and in that culture, the intestines were considered to be the seat of affection, or compassion, or tender mercies. Thus the literal translation in the King James Version uses the word “bowels,” even though the “heart” is now considered to be the seat of affection and compassion.

This is a good example of the problems translators encounter when they seek to translate Scripture that was written in one language and culture into another language and for another culture. They face the question of whether to translate literally, and then add an explanatory note in the margin, or to “translate culturally.” In this case, the King James Version is a very literal translation.

#### Doctrinal Point

##### **We must relate to fellow believers.**

God did not save us to be Christian hermits; we must relate to other believers. The pleasant side of this is Christian fellowship and encouragement; the down side of this is that there are all kinds of different believers out there, and we have to learn to relate to them!

How are we to relate? In our last session we learned that we are to relate with **unity**. We're to cross racial barriers, cultural barriers, social barriers, economic barriers, religious barriers, and background barriers - because **Christ is all, and in all**. Verses 12-17 give us further instructions about how to relate to one another.

**a. "Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility meekness, long-suffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another" (v12-13).**

Verses 12 -13 list a number of Christian graces with which we are to relate to one another. We are to relate to fellow believers with tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, and with forgiveness.

I think we understand most of those terms, but what about "bearing with one another"? "Forbearance" is more than patience (longsuffering), and it's more than tolerance. For example, suppose you're in a tough situation at work. You're not the boss, and you just have to go along with the tough position you're in. You have to *tolerate* it, because there is nothing you can do about it. You have to be patient and tolerant, because what else can you do?

But "forbearance" is more than tolerance. "Forbearance" is when you *can* do something about a tough situation, but you don't. You refrain from reacting negatively for the sake of Christ. For example, if you're leading a Christian service project or heading up a Christian camp department, and your fellow believers on the project begin to complain, and bad-mouth you, and give you a hard time. Are you going to forbear? Forbearance in a tough situation means that you don't quit, you don't walk off, and you don't kick other people off the project - as much as is possible. To the best of your ability, you live with it. That's forbearance. We're to show that to one another as much as possible.

**b. "Put on love with the bond of affection" (v14).**

We're also to relate with love. This is the *agape* type love. It's not romantic love or emotional love, but the love of the *will*. *Agape* love is the voluntary denial of self in the interest of others.

Notice that verse 14 says **above all these things** we are to put on love! In other words, above or beyond all those Christian graces that are mentioned in verses 12-13, we are to put on love!

Here's an illustration. Have you ever seen a football or hockey player with his jersey off? He's wearing all kinds of equipment under his jersey: shoulder pads, hip pads, etc. But his jersey links him with the rest of the team. In the same way, we're to "wear" all the Christian graces of verses 12-13, but beyond all these, you put on the jersey of love. *Love is the mark of the team!* It's like the glue that holds everything together. It holds together your own pieces of equipment, and it relates you to your fellow team members.

**c. *“Let the peace of God rule in our hearts” (v15).***

This does *not* mean that we should enforce peace at any price. It doesn't mean that we should compromise on doctrinal matters to maintain peace. The idea here is to let peace rule like an umpire when it comes to close calls in non-doctrinal areas. Just as the Greek games of that day had referees to decide close calls, so when it comes to close calls in relating to one another, we should let peace be the umpire. What about the music program or whether to have chairs or pews in your church? Those are areas where you've got to let peace be the umpire. When the church leaders decide on the direction for the church, you should live peacefully with it.

We are to relate to other believers in that way. Let peace be the umpire! Live peacefully with it, even when a decision was not what you prefer, or were hoping for.

**d. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another” (v16).***

We should use the Word to relate to one another, in teaching and admonishing. How do we teach one another? With the Word! And if we need to admonish another believer, we must make sure that the Word “dwells richly” within us. Don't just quote Scripture to correct a brother or sister.

In Matthew 7:3-5, the Lord Jesus taught that before you try to “take the sawdust out of your brother or sister's eye, take the log out of your own eye”! In other words, get your own act together before you start nit-picking at other believers!

**e. *“Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (v16).***

Verse 16 teaches us that we should sing together - and not just any old song, but scriptural songs. Christians who sing scriptural songs together are generally those who relate well to one another. Singing together with grace in our hearts will tend to remove hostilities. Did you ever try to criticize or tear down a fellow believer right after singing, “How Great Thou Art” or, “In Christ Alone”? That's the idea here.

Verse 17 says that we are to do everything in the name of Christ, and here it is particularly in reference to relating to fellow believers. You can't tear down or bad-mouth a brother or sister in the name of Christ!

**f. *“Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (v17).***

In verses 15 and 17, we're told to be thankful. In the context here, being thankful has to do with fellow believers.

The familiar scripture, 2 Thessalonians 5:18, says: *“In everything give thanks.”* The context of that verse is giving thanks in all circumstances - not because our circumstances are always pleasant, but because we should be thankful that God works through our circumstances to make us more Christ-like.

In the Colossians 3 context, we're to be thankful for fellow believers. We're to thank the Lord for all fellow believers - even the brothers and sisters that rub us the wrong way! We're all in the Body of Christ, with all our faults, and God can use them for our Christian growth - if we can get our act together. Maybe God is teaching you lessons in patience, or tolerance, or forbearance with a fellow believer who has rough edges – so you can be thankful for them!

Remember our doctrinal point: We must relate to fellow believers.

## Practical Application

### Grade yourself on a relating-to-fellow-believers report card.

Let's say we have a report card with a list of eight subjects: relating to fellow believers with unity, relating to fellow believers with grace, relating to fellow believers with love, relating to fellow believers with peace, relating to fellow believers with Scripture, relating to fellow believers with singing, relating to fellow believers with service, and relating to fellow believers with thanksgiving.

Now grade yourself. You can use a letter grade, A to D, or you can use a number grade 1 to 10. What's your grade point average?

I wonder how God would grade us. If He were grading us, would God put down the same grade that you gave yourself? Well, guess what? God *is* grading us. Quite a sobering thought, isn't it?

Write out that report card. Try to grade yourself honestly, and see what your grade point average is. Then start to work on the "subjects" that need improvement!