

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING

How important is the way we act towards one another in Connect Group? Why?

In today's passage we'll see how our life together as a church is a vital part of living our new life in Christ. Let's teach and encourage one another this evening!

(Perhaps read Col 3:1-17 to add some context, rather than just 3:12-17)

QUESTIONS

What does 3:1 and 3 say happened to us when we became Christians?

How should this impact our behaviour? Can we stay as we were before?

What has already happened in 3:9-10?

So how can Paul tell us put stuff on in 12 if we've already put it on?

How are Christians described in 12?

Why is it important to know our new identity before we're told to do things?

What should we put on? Do any of the words in 12 in particular strike you?

What's the gist of how we should act towards each other? (14)

What should we do if someone at church annoys us or sins against us? (13)

Is this easy to do?

How is this different to how we may have acted if we were still our 'old selves'?

Why should we forgive others?

Are there people we need to forgive now? (*Don't just talk about it, do it!*)

What is "the peace of Christ"? How might 1:20-22 define this peace?

What would it look like for this kind of peace to rule among us?

Why is it significant for the church to be called "one body"?

Is our blood-bought unity something we often think about?

Would an outside observer be able to tell we were one body rather than a set of disconnected individuals? How might we express that unity more clearly?

What is "the word of Christ"?

Since the "you" in 16 is plural, what would a group look like where the gospel dwelt richly among us?

Who does the teaching in church life?

Is that a role you take seriously? To do yourself? To receive from others?

When we sing, who are we singing to? Why are both audiences important?

Why do you think thankfulness is mentioned 3 times in 15-17?

CONCLUSION / APPLICATION

How is 17 a good summary of the passage?

What might the world think of a church like this?

Is this how we behave as a church/Connect Group? As members of that body?

In what ways could we grow? (*Be forgiving and humble in your answers!*)

What is there to thank God for and encourage us about our group?

Give lots of thanks to God! And pray for these things to characterize your group more and more. Why not sing together too?

Colossians 3:12-17



Colossians at a glance

The church in Colossae was planted by someone called Epaphras, a 'fellow servant... a faithful minister of Christ' (1:7). Paul was so pleased to hear how they were growing. But he also wanted to warn them.

There would be false teachers who might 'delude' them with their clever arguments (2:4), pulling them away from Jesus. They would make Christians feel they weren't enjoying *everything* God had to offer.

Paul wrote this letter to remind them that actually they do have ... everything! All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, and Jesus fully fills every believer (2:9-10). It doesn't get fuller than that! When it comes to knowing God, being forgiven, growing in godliness, and arriving safely in glory, all we need is Jesus!

Paul's pastoral method is therefore to exalt Jesus: if we really grasp His supremacy and sufficiency (1:15-20), then that will help us to 'continue in the faith' (1:23), the hope of the gospel that God has made public and that Paul has been proclaiming so tirelessly (1:23; 2:3). That is exactly *why* Paul says all that he says about Jesus: 'in order that no-one may delude us'.

Because, of course, we still face the same potential delusions today. There are many sections of the Christian church that are similarly – and sadly – promoting a 'Jesus plus ...' gospel today. These studies in Colossians aim to amaze us with the Jesus we first received through the gospel, not shifting from there, and strengthening us to go on walking in Him (2:6-7).

Context

Paul has been talking about the difference Jesus makes to the Christian. We mustn't shift away from Him and towards religiosity or Christ-less spiritual experience. But neither should we stay static – we walk in Him (2:6). This involves seeing that we died to our old selves when Jesus died, and that we were raised when Jesus was raised. We are now in a very real sense in heaven with Jesus, waiting to be revealed when He appears (3:3-4).

In the meantime, down on earth, we're to fix our minds on those heavenly realities (3:1-2). We have died and have put off our old selves, so we should put those old sinful attitudes and behaviours to death (3:5). Likewise, this passage now deals with the fact that we have put on the new self (3:10) and so we should put on the things which are appropriate for our new identity. In particular, this section outlines how we relate to one another as a church.

Theme Sentence for 3:12-17

Christians have put on the new self, so put on new godly attitudes and behaviour as a church.

[NB]

Commentary

- 12 Our identity as Christians precedes any instructions and is the source of all the behaviour-change outlined in these verses. Christians are "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved". We don't do these things in order to get God to love us, but because He already does. Neither do these things *make* us holy, but they are outworkings of the fact that we *are* holy in His sight.

The basis of godly living is that we have died and been raised with Christ (3:1-3) so we are new people. Note the past tense in 9-10: "you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Since we have already put off the old and put on the new, we should "put on" certain characteristics. Sometimes we use the phrase "put on" to refer to pretending to be something; not here. These godly things are who we really are now and to continue in sin would be pretending.

- 12-13 The things we should put on relate to how we are with one another. "One another" implies among Christians specifically. We should think more humbly of ourselves, being meek and showing kindness. This isn't just outward activity, but comes from "compassionate hearts". We see others in their struggles and are genuinely moved to serve them.

The major struggle we all face is with our ongoing sin. Our old, proud, selfish selves would have thought ourselves better than others and got angry when others sin against us (3:8). As new people, we should forgive instead. We should put up with one another's annoyances and foibles, and even when it goes beyond that to outright sin against one another, not to hold a grudge but to forgive. Again, the reason is because that is how God has treated us. We are forgiven sinners, so who are we to withhold forgiveness from fellow forgiven sinners?

In all that follows, let's not reduce these instructions to general and vague calls to be nicer nor to simply love the Church as an idea. Anyone can imagine they like the church in theory; it's the specific individuals sat next to us on a Sunday which are the problem! This is nitty-gritty stuff. Not just the worldwide church but every person in *our* church is a person to show kindness and patience to. Just as they will have to bite their tongue and control themselves to put up with us!

- 14-15 The church isn't a hippy commune, but peace and love are a big part of it! Love is the thing which ties it all together – if we just loved one another, as defined and shown by God, all the rest would fall into place.

The same goes for 'peace'. It's not 'peace and quiet' or 'peace of mind' but "the peace of Christ"; the peace which Christ has brought about. We were alienated and hostile to God but have now been reconciled to Him, since Jesus has made peace by the blood of His cross (1:20-22).

This peace also extends to those others whom Christ has reconciled and the old divisive distinctions ("Greek, Jew, circumcised, uncircumcised...", 3:11) don't apply anymore. It's all about Jesus instead. This peace is what should define all our relationships now.

The key is, yet again, in our new identity. We are now "one body", fully united with Christ and so fully united with one another. The church has been identified as Christ's body of which He is the Head a few times in Colossians so far (1:18, 24; 2:19). Our identity as one body must be reflected in how we treat one another. We aren't trying to make peace, but rather living in light of the peace which Christ has established. This is the peace we've been called to and so we must maintain it.

Thankfulness is mentioned here and always accompanies a healthy, loving, peaceful church family. Where there is ingratitude towards God, there is unforgiveness and complaining between believers. But where there is thankfulness for the forgiving, loving, life-giving, choosing, calling, peacemaking work of Christ in us, there will be a godly church too. Thankfulness is so key that it comes 3 times in the last 3 verses.

- 16 "The word of Christ" is the gospel message about Him. Of course this is found in the Bible, but it's the good news in particular which Paul is referring to here. We're told it should "dwell in you richly". Bear in mind that the 'you' is plural so, among us as a church, there should be lots and lots of gospel-talk. That will mean that when we get together, there'll be plenty of Bible and plenty of discussion about the truth and implications of Jesus' cross and resurrection.

One might imagine that this would lead to lots of up-front preaching (and that *should* play a part!) but that's not where Paul takes it. Everyone should be involved in making the word dwell richly among us as we "teach and admonish *one another*"! Doing this in all wisdom is exactly the same job description Paul gave himself back in 1:28. We should all be involved in talking about the gospel and urging one another live in light of it. Sundays and Connect Groups aren't the only places this should happen, but you can see their importance in light of verses like this.

Interestingly, one place this one-another teaching goes on is in our singing. As we sing all types of songs together, we're teaching one another. That's one reason why our songs should be full of rich content as well as having depth of feeling and good music. We sing to God with thankfulness in our hearts (not just mouthing empty words) but we also sing to one another for our mutual encouragement.

- 17 The final verse has a pretty wide scope – "whatever you do, in word or deed..." No part of our lives is left unchanged by Christ. His forgiveness, His peace, His word and now His name are all over this passage and should be stamped all over our lives. The OT speaks of things being done "in the name of the Lord" and we know this Lord God is the Lord Jesus. As the Lord of all things, all things we do and say should be done in His name, where there would be no shame in writing above those things, "In the name of the Lord Jesus."

A Passion For Life

As ever, don't forget that next term is *A Passion For Life* and that Connect Groups have an outward focus. As much as this study speaks to our life together, consider the impact of that communal life on the watching world.