

Intro

There's idealists. People with lofty visions. We can end world hunger. We can have world peace. "all we are saying is give peace a chance." Like it's that easy. People who are somewhat impractical. People who represent things as they could or should be, but not as they actually are.

And there's realists. People who look at things as they actually are. Our world is a broken place. Hunger, injustice, oppression, suffering are pervasive. People who accept situations as they actually are and seek to deal with the problems that exist. People who represent things as they actually are, not what they could or should be.

Which one are you? Where do you lean? Are you a combination of both?

Paul suggests we should be both. Paul holds out the ideal ("perfect harmony") while dealing with troubling realities: sin that needs to be killed, completeness that's lacking, renewal that's in process, believers will sin against each other requiring forgiveness.

How should we live between the ideal and real? Paul says...

BIG IDEA: Live your identity in the local church.

READ PASSAGE (3:5-17)

Body

Recap

- 1) The Christian life is all about continuing...continuing how we began...continuing with Christ at the center... continuing in faith and repentance.
- 2) The Christian life is all about moving towards maturity, completeness...no area of life untouched by God's word.
- 3) You build on the foundation...you don't stop at the foundation.
- 4) Methodology matters...there's right and wrong ways to do spirituality.
- 5) Live consistent with who you are...died with Christ, raised with Christ.
- 6) Kill sin.

Passage Focus

Saved for community in the local church.

Identity is lived out in community.

Point 1: Identity: chosen, holy, beloved (3:12)

Identity

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. (3:11)

As a Christian our identity isn't ethnicity, social status, job type, race, political affiliation, educational level, economic status, etc. Our identity is in Christ. In 3:12, Paul gives us three ways we should self-identify: chosen, holy, and loved.

Identity drives conduct

We ought to put on "*compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience*" because we are "*God's chosen ones, holy, and beloved.*" Live out your identity in Christ.

Chosen

Our identity is chosen.

Chosen by who? God.

Chosen for what? Salvation. Forgiveness of sins. Newness of life in the Spirit. Eternal inheritance in the new heavens and new earth.

How can we know we are chosen?

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. – 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

- 1) If the Spirit effected change in our lives.
- 2) If we received the gospel with “full conviction” (“completely certainty” or “full assurance” – 2:2).
- 3) If we became imitators of those who taught us the gospel.
- 4) If we became imitators of the Lord (Jesus).
- 5) If we received the gospel = embracing, believing, and trusting its content.
- 6) If we have joy in God.
- 7) If we became proclaimers of the gospel.
- 8) If we turned from idols to serve God = repentance.
- 9) If we’re waiting for Jesus’ return and final salvation = faith.

If these things are true of us, we rejoice that God has chosen us for salvation.

Non-Christian

If you can’t honestly say these things are true of me, repent and believe. Turn from rebellion to trust in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Then you’ll be able to say I was chosen by God.

Positionally holy

Our identity is holy.

God’s holiness means he’s separated from sin and flawless. And distinct (a different sort of being) from all of creation.

God confers holiness on things that aren’t inherently holy like himself: ground (Exod 3:5), the Sabbath day (Exod 20:11).

God also declares polluted sinners holy. On account of our relation to his Son Jesus. If we’ve trusted in Jesus’ death and resurrection our sins have been forgiven. Jesus took the punishment our sins deserve and wiped out our debt. Then Jesus’ perfect righteousness/obedience was imputed (credited) to our account. The unrighteous (believers, you and me) counted righteous in Christ.

That means I’m holy not because of myself or the things I’ve done. I’m holy because Jesus’ perfect righteousness is credited to my account.

Practical holiness

In addition to being declared holy, God gives us a new heart so that we may experience renewal = practical holiness. That's what our passage is about. Practical holiness in the local church.

beloved

Our identity is loved by God. An object of God's affection and commitment and ongoing acts of kindness.

*Surely goodness and **mercy** [normally translated "steadfast love"] shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. – Psalm 23:6*

We become God's beloved through faith and repentance.

for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. – John 16:27

Identity

Chosen, holy, beloved. This is why we put sin to death and put on righteousness. We live our identity in the strength God supplies (risen with Christ – Col 2:11-13).

Point 2: Compassion and kindness in the local church (3:12)

Virtues that take place in the church

The immediate context is relationships in the local church, not how we conduct ourselves as isolated individuals. That isn't to say that these don't matter outside the church. That's to say God saves us to live in community with other Christians in particular ways. Paul is expressing the local church ideal. The way things should be.

"Here" (3:11) = in the local church. The community where Jesus is all and Jesus indwells all.

"one another" (3:13) = Christians interacting with each other.

The "one body" to which we were called (3:15) is the local church.

Some assumptions

This interaction can only be true of us if we spend time together. Regular gatherings, in each other's homes, seeing each other in the broader local community.

Virtues that reflect God's character

"the new self...is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (3:10) = with being born again comes renewal in the sense that we become more like God.

Or do you presume on the riches of his [God's] kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? – Romans 2:4

God saves us to imitate his kindness (same word in 3:12), forbearance (noun of the verb used in 3:13), and patience (same word in 3:12).

Put off...put on

The opposite of the sinful practices in 3:5-9.

- 1) Compassion and kindness, not malice and slander.
- 2) Patience not anger.

3) Forgiveness not wrath.

Put on = characteristics not yet present or characteristics not yet fully formed (moving towards completeness).

Not comprehensive

A sample of actions and attitudes that should be present in the local church. Here examine these actions and attitudes. In other words, the rest of the sermon is pure application.

What's the purpose of these virtues?

Immediately, the purpose is peace in the local church (3:15).

Compassion

compassion: translates two words literally meaning "bowels of mercy." Could be translated "heartfelt compassion." Meaning pity for another's suffering that touches our inner being. Physically affected. Feelings. Emotional upheaval.

Application

When painful sufferings befall our brothers and sisters, we suffer with them. Because they're our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Kindness

kindness = acts of kindness that are helpful or beneficial (not just sentimental thoughts).

Application

Compassion moves us to help our brothers and sisters. We don't merely feel sorry or pity our brothers and sisters. It's practical kindness.

For example, listening, praying with them, comforting with Scripture, easing the load financially or helping with rides.

Point 3: Humility and meekness in the local church (3:12)

Humility

humility = without arrogance, self-humiliation.

- 1) An attitude that leads us to regard others as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3).
- 2) An attitude to look beyond our own interests to the interests of others (Phil 2:4).

It's okay to have our own interests. It's wrong to neglect the interests of others.

- 3) Jesus being the chief example in taking on human flesh, veiling his divine glory, obeying the Father, and dying on the cross for sinners (Phil 2:5-8).

Humility is imitating Jesus.

- 4) Translated asceticism in 2:18 and 2:23. A wrong humility meaning submitting to manmade rules not required by God. There's a submission and self-denial aspect to humility.
- 5) The opposite of pride in 1 Peter 5:5.

So humility involves submission to God, denying self, looking out for others, and not being arrogant (pride).

Application

Humility might involve learning from one another = being teachable. Not thinking we're better or more important than other Christians because of our intellect, education, office in the church, employment title, bank account, etc. For example, thinking everyone should bend to my preferences.

Humility leads us to consider the needs and concerns of others. And to forget about ourselves.

We see that the virtues work together. Like humility and compassion lead to acts of kindness.

Meekness

meekness = interacting with others in a gentle way rather than dealing with them harshly.

- 1) The manner in which we restore those caught in sin (Gal 6:1).
- 2) The manner in which we correct opponents of the gospel (2 Tim 2:25).
- 3) The manner in which we defend the gospel when questions from non-Christians arise (1 Pet 3:16).

Application

Gentleness maintains unity and promotes the peace spoke of in 3:15. There's a right way to do the right thing. Whether correcting false ideas or counseling a struggling soul.

Point 4: Patience and forgiveness in the local church (3:12-13)

Patience

patience = bearing with others in terms of exercising **restraint**. Bearing with difficult people. Like God bears with sinners in restraining his wrath (Rom 2:4). Patience not "*anger, wrath, malice, slander*" (3:8). 3:13 fills out the meaning of patience.

"bearing with one another" = in terms of **tolerating** or putting up with others.

"forgiving each other" = undeserved mercy and pardon for wrongs committed against us.

"as the Lord has forgiven you" = imitating God's character in terms of showing mercy to sinners.

Application

Recognizing I am a work in progress too (putting sin to death, moving forward in renewal).

Let's apply forgiveness to what Paul's been talking about.

Someone gets angry with you. Bear with their failure. Forgive them.

Someone slanders you, whether intentional or unintentional. Bear with their failure. Forgive them.

Someone fails to show you compassion. Bear with their failure. Forgive them.

Someone fails to perform acts of kindness for you. Bear with them. Forgive them.

Someone is too self-absorbed to consider your interests. Bear with them. Forgive them.

Someone fails to deal with you gently. Bear with them. Forgive them.

Someone fails to bear with you patiently. Bear with them. Forgive them.

Someone fails to show you forgiveness. Bear with them. Forgive them.

This isn't to say there's never a time for confronting sin and restoring an erring brother or sister. This isn't to say there's never a time to confront hurtful behaviors that need to be eliminated. Yes, let's put sin to death. It's to say that most failure on the part of our brothers and sisters we simply bear with and forgive.

Isn't this the way we hope people will deal with us? How miserable would life be if every single fault we ever commit is scrutinized to the highest degree? Relationships would be unlivable. In marriage and friendship, quick forgiveness is critical.

We're all in the process of killing sin and putting on righteousness. Therefore, we will fail one another. We will be offended. We will be let down. Paul says the antidote is forgiveness.

Point 5: Love in the local church (3:14)

love = affection and commitment that expresses itself in kind actions.

Again, in loving our brothers and sisters, we reflect God's love for us.

What's the result of loving relationships in the local church? → "*perfect harmony*"

"*perfect harmony*" literally = "the bond of perfection." "bond" = literally a binding or a fastener that holds two things together. Kind of like the binding in a book holds the pages together.

"perfect" = maturity, completeness, perfection. Same word group as the maturity, completeness we're after (1:28).

Practically, love produces a complete or even perfect bond between brothers and sisters in the local church. Love maintains unity where sin would divide.

Application

We deal compassionately, act kindly, look out for the interest of others, deal gently, bear with others, forgive others because we first have an affection and a commitment (love) towards our brothers and sisters.

What's church membership? Formalizing our commitment. We could say church membership formalizes love since love involves commitment. Kind of like marriage formalizes love's commitment.

Consider the formal commitment of church membership. What's church membership? In one sense, it's formalizing the commitment present in love.

Non-Christian

What is Christianity?

A new humanity. Our world is broken. Sin and death reign. The church is a people already rescued from sin (forgiveness, newness of life). A people in process (renewal). And a people who will fully be rescued from the curse (glorification) when Jesus returns.

Jesus furnished proof of these promises when he rose from the dead. He implores all men. He implores you, "Find rescue in me. Find identity in me. Find community in my church."

Conclusion

We've talked about our identity in Christ: **chosen, holy, loved**.

We've talked about the virtues of the redeemed community: **compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love**.

Paul says aim for the ideal. And Paul recognizes we'll fall short of the ideal. So forgive. What binds the local church together? Love. What's love? Committed affection.