

Church Theme Learning Series - Session #9

CONNECT WITH ONE ANOTHER IN ONE'S NEW SELF

Belong & Serve



Connect & Grow

Remarks:

- The purpose of this study material is to develop a deeper relational and spiritual connection between believers at different ages for walking together and progressing along the growth journey of being disciples of Christ.
- For Personal Devotion, please refer to pages 1 - 6. With a dual purpose of preparing for group gathering, the questions are the same as for Group Discussion.
- For Group Discussion, please refer to pages 1, 7 & 8. Depending on the situations of different groups, group leaders may choose and pick the questions suitable for their groups. Group members are also encouraged to share their experiences related to this bible passage for helping others regarding its application.

Bible Verse

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

Introduction

Colossians chapter 3 is the climax of Paul's teaching on the "heavenly life." He challenges believers to put off the old self and put on the new self, no longer treating one another according to their former identity, but living out the renewal of Christ within them.

This renewal does not happen in isolation, but through the shaping of one another within the community, especially expressed in the act of "bonding together." Such bonding is not merely outward cooperation, but an inner recognition and mutual building up that flows from the heart.

Yet in today's church, we often face difficulties such as cultural differences, generational gaps, language barriers, and differing styles, which make "putting on the new self and being united" a real challenge. Paul reminds us that "putting on" is not something that happens naturally, but a conscious choice of faith. Have you ever experienced distance between people in church, family, or workplace? **This passage helps us learn how to put on the new life in Christ, to treat one another with kindness and patience, and to let the word of Christ dwell richly within us.**

PART ONE

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:12, NIV)

Chosen, Loved, and Made New

◆ Starting from Identity, Not Behavior

Here Paul uses rich Old Testament language of identity: “God’s chosen, holy, and dearly loved.” This was a typical description of Israel (see Deuteronomy 7:6–8), but now it is applied to the believers in Colossae, showing that the church is God’s new people recreated in Christ.

This highlights that transformation of a believer’s life does not begin with moral conduct, but with identity. We were not chosen because we were good enough, but because we belong to God; therefore, we are called to live in a way that matches that identity.¹

◆ “Putting On” Is a Choice of Renewal, Not an Instinctive Reaction

The verb “put on” (ἐνδύσασθε) is in the imperative form, implying **a conscious action of clothing oneself, a daily intentional choice.** This echoes Colossians 3:10’s “put on the new self,” showing that **the life of faith is not a one-time event but a continual journey of spiritual renewal.** The five virtues listed — compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience—are not natural responses when relationships are smooth, but concrete choices to respond with the heart of Christ even amid misunderstandings, conflict, or hurt.²

◆ The Layered Relationship of the Five Virtues

1. **Compassion** (σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ): literally “bowels of compassion,” emphasizing empathy and deep sympathy from the heart, not superficial kindness.
2. **Kindness** (χρηστότης): gentle goodness, expressed in active deeds of care and help, not just words.
3. **Humility** (ταπεινοφροσύνη): contrary to the Greek cultural value of the time, humility is an honorable trait in Christ — valuing others and laying down one’s own will.
4. **Gentleness** (πραΰτης): strength under control; not striking back in conflict, but choosing not to harm even when one has the power to do so.
5. **Patience** (μακροθυμία): enduring tolerance, slow to anger, bearing with others’ weaknesses and offenses with long-term love and forbearance.

These five virtues are like layers of clothing believers are called to put on, and in verse 14, “love” is given as the binding force that unites them all into a complete testimony.

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT, p.147.

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, pp.270–271.

1. Have you ever thought of “putting on the new self” mainly as moral improvement rather than as the natural outflow of your new identity in Christ? How does this passage help you reset your focus of faith?
2. In your current relationships—at home, in your small group, or in church—which of these virtues (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience) is hardest for you to practice? Are you willing to entrust this area to God and ask Him to shape you?

PART TWO

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13, NIV)

From Grievance to Forgiveness: Rebuilding Community in Christ

♦ The Journey from “Grievance” to “Forgiveness”

Tensions among believers are not rare exceptions, but a reality of community life. Paul does not deny the existence of conflict; rather, he assumes such friction will happen and, with the word “must”, gives an imperative exhortation: choose to forgive one another and become restorers of Christ’s body.

The phrase “bearing with one another” (ἀνεχόμενοι) literally means “enduring” or “tolerating,” carrying the sense of choosing to carry the burden even when the other person has not yet changed. The phrase “forgiving one another” (χαριζόμενοι) refers to “gracious pardon,” not a cold act of forgetting, but an active response of grace toward the undeserving.¹

In church life, true reconciliation is not conditional on “waiting for the other person to change first,” but is made possible because Christ has already forgiven us. In this way, we too can choose to bear with and forgive, participating in God’s work of rebuilding His people.

♦ Who Is the Subject of “As the Lord Forgave You”?

In some ancient manuscripts, the subject is “Christ” (Χριστός), while in others it is “the Lord” (ὁ κύριος). Though the wording differs slightly, the meaning is the same—pointing to the One who forgave us through the love of the cross.

Paul’s logic is clear: **our forgiveness does not come from personal virtue, but from the experience of being forgiven by Christ.** Only those who have experienced forgiveness can truly enter into the process of forgiving others—and through it, find freedom.²

♦ Three Faith Steps from Inner Wounds to Healing

1. **Acknowledge the existence of grievance:** Do not suppress or sugarcoat the problem, but honestly face the brokenness of the relationship.
2. **Be willing to bear with one another:** Even when the other person has not changed, choose patience and understanding, bringing each other’s weaknesses before God.
3. **Learn to forgive as the Lord forgave:** Not because the other person deserves it, admitted fault, or changed, but because we too have received the grace of “undeserved forgiveness.”

These three steps are not a one-time event, but stages in a spiritual journey — moving faith from mere knowledge into the lived reality of relational healing.

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT, pp.148–149.

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, p.272.

3. When you think of a broken or strained relationship, is your first response to avoid, to retaliate, or to invite the Lord to intervene?
4. Is there someone you feel does not deserve your forgiveness? Quiet your heart and listen as the Lord says to you: “As I forgave you, so you must also forgive.”

PART THREE

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.
(Colossians 3:14, NIV)

The Binding Power of Love

◆ Love is not just another virtue but the key force that integrates all virtues

In the original text, the phrase “above all these” (ἐπὶ πᾶσιν δὲ τούτοις) carries the sense of “as the summary” or “the highest point.” **Love is not merely listed alongside the five virtues, but is the binding power (σύνδεσμος) that brings them together into one whole, like a belt fastening all clothing to hold it in place.**¹

The word “perfect unity” (τελειότης) can also be translated as “complete bond,” emphasizing that **love enables believers’ character to reach maturity and fullness.** Without love, even if virtues like compassion and kindness are practiced, they may only reflect self-discipline or social strategies, rather than truly shaping a community that belongs to God.

◆ The strength of the church is not sustained by systems, but by love

In many modern churches, we often rely on systems, structures, and task orientation to maintain teamwork, while neglecting that true unity comes from mutual love. Paul points out that **it is love that binds everything together, bringing harmony from within.**

When the attitudes among members of a group or congregation stem from love rather than obligation or courtesy, such a culture carries a heavenly attraction, making people experience that “the body of Christ” is not just an organization but a true family.²

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT, p.149.

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, p.273.

5. Have you ever tried to maintain relationships through rules, discipline, or pressure? What reminder does this passage give you?
6. In your current family, small group, or church, how can you more actively “put on love” to connect others and promote unity?

PART FOUR

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Colossians 3:15, NIV)

Let the Peace of Christ Rule in Our Hearts

◆ “The peace of Christ” is not emotional calmness but relational harmony

The verb “rule” (βραβεύετω) in the original is a sports term, meaning “to act as judge or umpire.”¹ In other words, when we face conflict, emotional tension, or relational friction, we are to let the peace of Christ be the referee, guiding our responses and actions.

Here, “peace” does not refer only to inner calm, but to the harmony of relationships in Christ (see Eph. 2:14–17), namely the unity of being “called in one body.” Thus, Paul is not primarily encouraging private tranquility, but reminding the community: in all disagreements and tensions, let Christ’s lordship and peace set the standard for our hearts.

◆ Gratitude as a spiritual habit that sustains unity

The phrase “and be thankful” may seem secondary, yet it appears three times in Colossians 3:15–17, showing its importance.²

A thankful heart interrupts cycles of complaint and self-pity, shifting our focus from “what I lack” to “what God has already given.” It also helps us be less critical and more appreciative toward one another. In community life, a culture of gratitude is essential soil for unity.

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT, p.150.

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, pp.274–275.

7. When negative emotions or relational tensions arise in your heart, what usually “rules” over you? Are you willing to invite the peace of Christ into that situation?
8. When was the last time you sincerely gave thanks for someone else? In your family or small group, how can you more intentionally cultivate a “culture of gratitude”?

PART FIVE

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (Colossians 3:16, NIV)

Let the Word of Christ Dwell in You Richly

◆ “Dwell in you” means not just memory but deep internalization and interaction

Paul speaks of letting “the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (ἐνοικείτω), a term that conveys permanence and being deeply rooted.¹ **This does not mean occasional Bible study or listening to sermons, but allowing God’s Word to occupy our thoughts, emotions, and will, shaping our choices and responses.**

If God’s Word remains only at the level of intellectual memory and never penetrates the heart, it cannot become the source of life. In contrast, when the Word “richly” dwells within us, it produces wisdom and overflows into teaching and admonishing one another within the community.

◆ The integration of song and Word: Worship as discipleship

Paul mentions “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” showing that early Christian worship was diverse and instructive.² “Psalms” likely refers to the Old Testament Psalms, “hymns” to songs of praise, and “spiritual songs” to spontaneous songs inspired by the Spirit.

All three were used for mutual teaching and exhortation. **Worship is not just an emotional outlet but a response to truth and a means of shaping life.** Every time we sing to God with thankful hearts, we are reminding one another that God’s Word is among us.

¹F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT, p.151.

²Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, pp.276–277.

9. Do you truly let God’s Word dwell in your heart, or does it remain only at the intellectual level? What Scripture has recently guided your actions?
10. When you join in worship, are you more focused on the emotional experience, or do you also recognize it as a moment of encounter with God’s Word? How do you view singing as a part of discipleship?

Group Discussion

Chosen, Loved, and Made New (Please read Colossians 3:12)

Paul reminds believers in Colossians that transformation does not begin with behavior but with identity in Christ — chosen, made holy, and loved by God as His new people. This identity calls us to “put on the new self” daily and intentionally, choosing the mind of Christ even in misunderstandings, conflicts, or wounds. The passage presents five progressive virtues: compassion flowing from the heart, kindness expressed in action, humility that lays aside self, gentleness that restrains from harm, and patience that endures with others. These virtues are like layers of clothing, ultimately bound together by love, which unites them into a complete testimony and reveals the life of Christ’s new community.

1. Have you ever thought of “putting on the new self” mainly as moral improvement rather than as the natural outflow of your new identity in Christ? How does this passage help you reset your focus of faith?
2. In your current relationships—at home, in your small group, or in church—which of these virtues (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience) is hardest for you to practice? Are you willing to entrust this area to God and ask Him to shape you?

From Grievance to Forgiveness: Rebuilding Community in Christ (Please read Colossians 3:13)

Paul acknowledges that grievances and conflicts in Christian community are not exceptions but realities. Yet believers are called to choose forbearance and forgiveness to repair these fractures. “Bear with each other” means to endure and carry one another even before change occurs; “forgive each other” means extending grace to the undeserving, not merely forgetting. True reconciliation is not conditional on the other person changing, but rooted in Christ’s prior forgiveness through the cross, enabling us to join in God’s work of restoring community. Whether manuscripts read “Christ” or “the Lord,” the focus is the same — the One who forgave us. Our forgiveness flows not from personal virtue but from experiencing His pardon, which frees us to forgive sincerely.

3. When you think of a broken or strained relationship, is your first reaction to avoid, retaliate, or invite the Lord to intervene?
4. Is there someone you feel does not deserve your forgiveness? Quiet your heart and hear the Lord say: “As I have forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

The Binding Power of Love (Please read Colossians 3:14)

Paul emphasizes that love is not just one virtue among others but the power that integrates compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience into maturity and wholeness. Like a belt that holds clothing together, love brings stability and completeness. Without love, these outward virtues risk becoming self-improvement or social skills, unable to form a truly God-centered community. Unity in the church does not come from systems or structures but from love that binds us together. When relationships are motivated by love rather than duty or courtesy, the church becomes a place with heavenly attraction, where people encounter the body of Christ as a true family.

5. Have you ever tried to maintain relationships with rules, discipline, or pressure? What does this passage remind you of?
6. In your family, small group, or church, how can you more actively “put on love” to connect with others and promote unity?

Let Christ’s Peace Rule in Our Hearts (Please read Colossians 3:15)

The “peace of Christ” Paul describes is not mere emotional calm but the harmony and unity among believers through Christ. This peace acts like a referee, determining our responses in conflicts and tensions (Col. 3:15; Eph. 2:14–17). Believers are called to live as one body, submitting relationships to Christ’s rule, not just seeking inner serenity. Paul also highlights gratitude as a vital spiritual habit that sustains unity. Gratitude interrupts cycles of complaint and self-pity, shifts our focus to God’s grace already given, and cultivates a culture of appreciation rather than criticism. Such a thankful spirit becomes fertile soil for unity.

7. When negative emotions or relational tensions arise, what usually “rules” in your heart? Are you willing to invite Christ’s peace into that situation?
8. 8. When was the last time you sincerely gave thanks for someone else? In your family or small group, how can you more intentionally cultivate a “culture of gratitude”?

Let the Word of Christ Dwell Richly Among You (Please read Colossians 3:16)

Paul urges believers to let Christ’s Word dwell richly — not merely as knowledge but internalized deeply, shaping thoughts, emotions, and choices, and producing wisdom in community life. When the Word richly indwells us, it becomes the wellspring of true discipleship. Paul also connects worship with the Word: through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, believers not only praise God but also remind one another of truth and are formed by it. Worship thus becomes more than emotional expression; it is discipleship in practice, making God’s Word tangible in the life of the community.

9. Do you truly let God’s Word dwell in your heart, or does it remain only at the intellectual level? What Scripture has recently guided your actions?
10. When you join in worship, are you more focused on the emotional experience, or do you also recognize it as a moment of encounter with God’s Word? How do you view singing as a part of discipleship?

Application Questions

11. In your family, small group, or ministry, where do you need to “put on the new self” more actively? How will you seek God’s help?
12. If you had to choose one action this week to live out the spirit of this passage, what would it be? Would you share it so others can pray and walk with you?