

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the caring way in which You deal with us; for when You remind us of our failings and expose our errors, You also hold out to us the hope of salvation and the opportunity for healing. May we never be afraid to take up Your challenge to deal with our problems so that we become better people and better servants of the Kingdom and each other. We ask this through Your name, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Hope

Remember in prayer today your own private hopes and dreams, whether to do with your work, your family, your health or any other personal concern. Seek the Lord's will.

On-going prayers

- Pray for those who suffer under bad government or dictatorship
- Pray for leaders preparing for the G20 summit in London
- Give thanks for wherever evil is defeated

Meditation

Reveal Yourself to us, Lord God, again and again;
Demonstrate Your passion for all You have made.

Through creation, reveal the authority of Your Word;
Through awesome deeds, reveal Your total control.

Through forgiveness, reveal the brilliance of Your love;
Through salvation, reveal Your eternal faithfulness.

Through healing, reveal the power of Your touch;
Through deliverance, reveal Your rule over Satan;

Through prophecy, reveal Your timeless purposes;
Through justice, reveal the impartiality of Your heart.

Reveal Yourself to us, Lord God, again and again;
Show that You care for Your world, for now and forever.

Bible Study - Colossians 3:12-17

¹² As God's chosen ones who are holy and loved, clothe yourselves therefore with sympathy and compassion, goodness, humility, gentleness and patience' ¹³ bearing with one another and if anyone has a grievance against someone, forgiving them; and you must forgive others just as the Lord has forgiven you.

¹⁴ Over and above everything is love, which is the bond which holds everything together; ¹⁵ and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, into which you were called as one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the Word of God dwell in you richly; teach in all wisdom and advise one another, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God with thanksgiving in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Review

Today's passage is a wonderful affirmation of the truths of our faith. It describes the nature of our salvation found in Christ and encourages each believer to practice forgiveness and act in love. It rejoices in the experience of God's love and also the unity of the 'body of Christ', which is the church, and encourages a fellowship of worship and learning, so that whatever is done is 'in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father ...' (3:17). Every part of this passage contains encouragement and positive advice for the Christian, as an individual and also as a part of the God's church; it is a joy to read!

Make your choice between good and evil In yesterday's reading, Paul identified the evils of the world that a believer had to 'put off' (3:8) in order to live the life of Christ. Just as such evil had to be taken off, Paul now encouraged believers to put on the things of Christ (3:12). What Paul describes in this way is very important, because moral characteristics are not a matter of natural make-up or upbringing; they are a matter of choice. Just as it is impossible to be rid of the evils and self-centredness of worldly morality without deciding to be rid of them, so it is impossible to do what is right without making decisions and taking positive action. Paul constantly warns the readers of all his letters that being good and reaping the rewards of the spiritual life does not just 'happen' to people, it comes about by accepting God's Word and following the way of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in this passage, Paul encourages his readers at Colossae to accept the highest moral calling, and now that his letter is part of our Scriptures, these words invite us to do the same. To choose to do what is right and good is God's fundamental challenge to all people, everywhere.

Be baptised We often find that in the New Testament letters, the language of 'being clothed' reflects the important practice of baptism. Baptism would have been frequent in the early days of the church as it expanded and grew, and there is evidence that one of the features of a baptismal service was the removal of old clothes symbolising the past and after the act of baptism, the putting on of a new garment as a sign of the new life. This is reflected strongly in what Paul says here, which seems highly appropriate for instructions to those who were being baptised. This is only a fruit of our imagination, but it is reasonable; the whole text sets out clearly the basic instructions that might be given to someone embarking on the Christian life.

Live with Christ and in unity The symbolism of baptism is that we die to self so that we can be made alive 'in Christ' (Rom 6:5f.). Paul said earlier in Colossians; 'if with Christ you died ... why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?' (2:20). These quotes illustrate that the talk of baptism in Paul's letters is all about life, and how to live the Gospel. The great qualities listed in verse 12, for example, demonstrate the loving characteristics of God that can only be live by choosing to live with Christ and be 'in Christ' by baptism. Paul goes on to explain that the Christian life is not just about morality; it must reflect the unity of God, for God is one. This is what lies behind verses 13-15, in which love is 'the bond which holds everything together' (3:14), based on mutual forgiveness exemplified in the life of Christ (3:13). The word 'peace' (3:15) reminds us of the ancient Hebrew word for peace, 'shalom', which contains the idea of being at one with others and living in harmony. Paul knew that unity was essential if the Christian community at Colossae was to stand firm against the heresies that beset them.

Worship the Lord Lastly, when God's people are at peace with each other and unified in the Spirit, they are not only able to exhibit the high standards of morality that reflect the nature of God, they are also enlivened in worship. Verse 16 describes the essential unity of worship that has defined the practice of Christian communities for centuries, combining the challenge of the 'Word of God' and helping one another with singing the different

varieties of 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' (3:16). Only when a church is unified in Christ is its worship effective, and the Lord's name is truly praised. This worship is an expression of the life and mission of the church of God with Jesus at its centre, the source of all its life.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss the different qualities in verse 12. Are they all truly different, or are they all basically the same quality, if so, what?
2. Is forgiveness an important part of the life of your church? How can forgiveness become an important part of the life of God's people?]
3. Is the description of worship given by Paul in this passage adequate for us today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Passages such as this are a great encouragement to us because they help us focus our Christian faith. Some find it hard to continue to be positive in today's world, when it seems that what is good is so easily trampled upon by greed and wickedness, and especially when these evils are rampant in the corridors of power and the higher levels of our society. This is not a new phenomenon, however. The world has always suffered from the machinations of evil and evil people, and God's solution to this in Christ is as equally valid today as it has ever been. There is no need for us to be defensive about what is good and right, indeed, we need to make it known in whatever ways we can, so that evil is defeated!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What does your baptism mean to you? Take out a sheet of paper or create a file on your computer and write down a list of words and phrases about what it means to you. Use this list as a guide to your thoughts and reflections in the coming days.*
- *Pray against the evils in our world that compromise all that is good. Sometimes we work so hard to try and get things right that we forget to confront evil and defeat it! Pick some evil in the world today and pray against it regularly for a period of time, and look for God's answers to your prayers.*

Final Prayer

Great and Mighty Lord; fix my hearts on You with such intensity that no temptations of the evil one can shake me. Keep my feet firmly on Your pathway, guide me securely through my troubles, and bring me safely to my journey's end in Your eternity. Through Jesus Christ I pray; AMEN