

The Gospel Creates a New Community

Colossians 3:12-14 & Colossians 4:7-14, 18



Scripture

^{3:12} Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

^{4:7} Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. ¹⁰ My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) ¹¹ Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. . . .¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Main Idea

Paul is often isolated and put on a pedestal as a super-Christian. Yet one of the most striking aspects of Paul's life was the fact that he intentionally lived in community – he always had friends with him. We get a glimpse of how his friends loved him through sacrifice and commitment in the passage above. This passage is an example of how Paul put into practice one of his most important theological beliefs – that the gospel creates a new community. Paul consistently taught that the power and presence of Jesus are most powerfully unleashed when believers commit to live their lives together in community. Here we find Paul living out his theology that community centered on the gospel is the essential context for our spiritual growth.

Discussion

Q1: Paul highlights the different ways each of his friends uniquely ministered to him and to others. Share about how God has used a friend to encourage, serve, suffer with, comfort, pray for, or care for you and how that friend's actions brought you closer to Jesus.

A1: It will be helpful here to guide the group through the passage by reviewing the 'nicknames' given to these friends in the sermon and to the unique way each played an important role in Paul's life, spiritual growth, and mission.

- Tychicus – "Go-to-guy". He was a faithful, reliable encouraging presence (cf Eph. 6:22)
- Onesimus – Disciple of Paul's, Paul invested his life into Onesimus' for his spiritual growth. He was a faithful servant.
- Aristarchus – Lifelong friend, suffered with Paul, comforting presence. (Acts 19:29)
- Jesus Justus– "Shadow" – we don't know much about him but he was also a comforting presence to Paul.
- Epaphras – "Soulmate". He was a spiritual shepherd, devoted to praying for others, passionate about others knowing Christ.
- Luke – physician and theologian – He sharpened Paul intellectually and ministered to physical needs.
- Mark – "reconciled friend" – Once estranged he became of the people Paul wanted with him before his death. (Acts 15:36-41) (2 Tim. 4:11)

- Demas – "Judas". Demas deserted Paul in his greatest time of need. (2 Tim. 4:10)

Q2: Which of the above characteristics (of Paul's friends) do you most value and appreciate in a friend? Why?

A2: This is an open ended question but try to encourage people to expand on why they value/appreciate the characteristics they point out. This is a helpful exercise in demonstrating how we long for spiritual friendship and how important each type of friend is in our overall spiritual growth.

Q3: Why is it so important to our spiritual growth to have people with the above characteristics as a devoted friends?

A3: It may be helpful here to briefly rehash the list of friends and their characteristics. The driving force of this question is that we don't just need friends to laugh, to enjoy life, or to fill a need for companionship – we need friends to grow spiritually. And we need a variety of friends, a community of friends like Paul.

So, if the group gets stuck here, just go through the list picking certain people to highlight and ask, "How might a friend like this help point you to Jesus and encourage you to live in light of the gospel?"

Q4: What are some of the barriers we face in developing devoted friendships? What can be done to overcome these barriers?

A4: There are a number of answers that can be given here. Time, busyness, different stages of life are usually offered as barriers. It will be important here to many or most of the things we consider barriers are the result of our choices (we aren't 'innocent victims'). So the question becomes is it worth it to make lifestyle changes for the sake of friendships/community? Paul's life, indeed the whole bible, would say "yes" – whatever it takes don't live the Christian life in isolation.

It may also be helpful to your group to point out how Demas shows us the 'risk of friendship' – the pain of betrayal and broken relationships. Many have been scarred in close relationships and fear the pain of intimacy and community. How can we remain committed to developing friendships even though there is risk involved? Demas deserted Paul. He betrayed Paul at Paul's greatest time of need, at the point in his life when he most needed encouragement and the presence of a friend (2 Tim. 4:10).

Q5: Look at Colossians 3:12-14 above. Paul emphasizes that the only way we can become more compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient with one another is to realize we are dearly loved and forgiven in Jesus. Why do we need to realize this first in order to become a truly loving friend?

Q5: Knowing Jesus as our True Friend is the only way we ourselves can become truly loving friends. Friendship requires 1) Loving people sacrificially and faithfully 2) Loving people like this when they wrong us, hurt us and mistreat us. Only when we realize Jesus loves us sacrificially and without condition can we be free from the relentless pursuit of looking for, even demanding, that kind of love from our friends/spouses. Only when we realize that Jesus loves us even though we have wronged him and deserted him can we love friends who hurt and disappoint us.

In short, the source of love, the reason for our love is not what we "get" from others. The source and reason for our love is what we have been given. When we are constantly looking to "get" from our relationships, we end up bitter, disappointed and hurt – because we are all sinners. When we are free from having to get ultimate significance and meaning from friends/loved ones, we can serve them and receive their good as a gift and forgive their 'bad' (knowing our 'bad' has been paid for at the cross).

Prayer

Spend some time sharing needs. Pray that friendships would develop and that the love and forgiveness that are ours in the gospel would move us to become sacrificial and committed friends.