

**Healthy Church**  
**Session Nine: Fellowship**  
**Commentary**

**John 13:34-35**

13:33–35. The words where I am going, you cannot come offer the only saying in John that appears three times with the same wording (7:33; 8:21). Imagine the confusion of the disciples at this point. They did not have the luxury of knowing the opening verses of chapter 14. They could only ponder what the Lord meant until he continued his teaching with further explanation.

Love extended leads to discipleship and denial and perhaps even to death. But the sacrifice itself should not be the focus for the disciples, but the motive behind it. These verses lay a strong groundwork for John's three epistles. This is a new commandment and a new object. Not just "love God" or "love me," but love one another.

In 1 John this theme of loving one another appears in 2:9–10; 3:11–18; 4:7–12, 19–21; and 5:1–3. It was not only a new commandment and a new object, but a new mode (as I have loved you) and, perhaps most difficult and shocking of all, a new judge. Verse 35 can be identified as the key verse of this chapter. God allows the world to judge whether people are truly Jesus' disciples by the way they behave toward one another. Sadly, the church has not done very well on this point. Perhaps this accounts for some of the struggles the gospel has had for almost two thousand years.

In the 1960s when Christian folk music was becoming popular, we often sang a song that repeated the phrase, "and they'll know we are Christians by our love." Not by the size of our buildings. Not by the frequency of our attendance. Not by the multiplicity of religious duties we observe. Not by the ostentation of our public worship.<sup>1</sup>

**Hebrews 10:24-25**

10:24. The third exhortation calls us to responsibility to one another. The appeal to consider demands concentrated attention. The goal of this attention was to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. As Christians we have a corporate responsibility. We must help others who stumble and falter. We must concentrate on the needs of others and not on our individual salvation only.

We can spur people toward either good or bad works. Hebrews calls us to lead others to a practical expression of love and an attractive display of unselfish deeds.

The three important virtues of faith, hope, and love are mentioned in three consecutive verses (see 1 Cor. 13:13). Faith provides assurance. Hope promises an incentive to obedience. Love provides a foundation for prodding believers to godly living

---

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

10:25. To spur other believers forward in the Christian life, followers of Christ must meet together. Some of the readers of Hebrews were neglecting to meet together for worship, and this limited their ability to give and receive encouragement toward good works.

Christians who meet together with the aim of promoting godliness and love for one another can be remarkably successful in their ventures. Regular fellowship with believers is an essential ingredient in Christian growth. The readers of Hebrews knew that the Day of Christ's return was drawing near. The closeness of this day compelled them to stimulate one another in an outburst of energy and concern.

Persecution may have led some believers to drop out of the fellowship. The remedy they needed was to begin meeting again. The verses following in 26–31 showed the final outcome of neglecting to meet with other believers. Such careless living could produce a contempt for Jesus and a renunciation of Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

### **Colossians 3:12-17**

3:12–14. Verses 12–17 contain the virtues that stand in contrast to the vices mentioned in the preceding verses. With the old discarded, the character of Christ is to be displayed in its place. The transformation process includes more than don'ts. There are some dos as well. Since the old humanity has been put off and the new community has been put on, believers are therefore to clothe themselves with the kind of behavioral apparel that fits their new life. The famous story "The Emperor's New Clothes" by Hans Christian Andersen has many possible applications for believers. One of them would be the simple lesson that we are not to be foolish like the emperor and take off our old clothes and put nothing back on. Before listing the appropriate attire, Paul reminds believers that they are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. These are exalted titles formerly used as designations for the nation of Israel (Deut. 4:37; 7:7–8) but now applied to the new community in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

William Barclay has an insightful comment on the nature of the virtues listed now:

"It is most significant to note that every one of the virtues and graces listed has to do with personal relationships between man and man. There is no mention of virtues like efficiency, cleverness, even diligence and industry—not that these things are not important. But the great basic Christian virtues are the virtues which govern and set the tone of human relationships. Christianity is community" (Barclay, W. *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. The Daily Study Bible, rev. ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975, 188).

The first piece in the believer's fashionable wardrobe is compassion, which refers to "heartfelt sympathy for those suffering or in need." The next item in the believer's wardrobe is kindness, the friendly and helpful spirit which meets needs through good deeds. This is the concrete action of compassion. If the believer is to be fully dressed, other Christlike characteristics are to

---

<sup>2</sup> Thomas D. Lea, *Hebrews & James*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).

be worn as well. The believer is to be clothed with humility, which is a proper estimation of oneself (Rom. 12:3). Humility is not a self-debasing attitude (like the “false humility” of 2:18 and 2:23) but an attitude that is free from pride and self assertion. The believer is to be clothed with gentleness, sometimes translated “meekness.” Gentleness has been described as “power under control”; the picture of a powerful horse under the control of its master is a helpful image. The attitude behind gentleness is an attitude of refusing to demand one’s rights. The believer is to be clothed with patience which is the capacity to bear injustice or injury without revenge or retaliation.

The idea of putting up with the abuses and offenses of others continues with Paul’s call to bear with each other. Believers are to go beyond quiet resignation positively to forgive whatever grievances [they] may have against one another. Believers have been fully forgiven by Christ (2:13–14), and the forgiven are obligated to become forgivers. The standard for this forgiveness is Christ himself.

Paul saves the most important item of clothing for last. Without love, all the other virtues may amount to mere moralism and little else (a thought found also in 1 Cor. 13:1–3). When love is present, there is harmony and unity in the community. It is not clear whether love binds the virtues together, completing a lovely garment of Christlike character, or whether love binds the members of the community together in mature oneness. Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional. Both ideas make good sense.

3:15. To maintain perfect unity (v. 14) believers are to let the peace of Christ rule in [their] hearts. Rule literally means “to act as umpire.” The Colossians were told earlier not to allow false teachers to “act as umpire against” them (2:18). However, when disputes arise, the believer is to let the peace of Christ make the call. Whatever will lead to peace must be the deciding factor so that peace will be preserved.

3:16. If believers are to be transformed into the character of Christ, the word of Christ should find a home in our hearts. It should not come and go, show up occasionally, or be something we visit like a vacation spot. As Eugene Peterson translates this phrase, “Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives” (MSG).

The parallel between Colossians 3:16–4:1 and Ephesians 5:18–6:9 must not be missed. The structure and terminology are almost identical. The Ephesians passage exhorts believers to be filled with the Spirit, whereas the Colossians passage exhorts believers to let the Word of Christ dwell in them. The two concepts must be synonymous. The external results are the same. The internal effect is the same. The believer is to be “under the influence” of the word of Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. The reason for the Colossians’ emphasis on Christ is expected in a book so devoted to his centrality and supremacy. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in hearts to God (v. 16). When the word of Christ finds a comfortable home in individual believers and in the new community, there will be teaching

(positive instruction), admonishing one another (negative correction), and thankful worship, evidenced by singing and gratitude.

3:17. The life transformation process is to include any and all areas and activities of life. In all places, in all ways, the believer is to honor the name of the Lord Jesus. Genuine spirituality is not found by following false teaching which leads away from Christ. Genuine spirituality is found in having our lives transformed into the character of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Max Anders, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).