

Bear with One Another

Series on "Living the One Another Life"

Ephesians 4:2 (NIV)

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Sermon Outline

- Who is "one another"?
- It is not easy to bear with one another!
- Why should we bear with one another?
- How can we bear with one another in a Christ-like manner?

Context of the Scripture

The book of Colossians was written to a church situated in what is now modern Turkey. Paul had never visited the town or the congregation, but was deeply concerned about the growing divisions in the church. While he was in prison in Rome, Paul received a visit from his friend and Pastor of the Colossian church Epaphras. Epaphras reported to him how new teaching was infiltrating the church and threatening to destroy the ministry. It was a heresy derived from several sources which denied the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as Head of the church. The name modern scholars give to this false teaching is Gnosticism.

These teachings were brought by some visitors to the Colossian church, promising a new "Spiritual fullness and freedom". Gnostics taught that all physical matter was innately evil but the mind (or soul) was intrinsically good. In other words Gnosticism saw no relationship between body and soul; they divorced the material world from the spiritual world, and believed that however men behaved physically that had no bearing on their spiritual welfare. It was a predominant worldview in the days of the early church. During the 1960s this spirit re-appeared during the hippie era, the days of flower power and free love. It was the beginning of the modern drugs culture, and the stepping-stone for eastern mysticism into western society. The hippie philosophy divorced morality from spirituality, it severed the body from the spirit, and the result was sexual promiscuity. In rejecting Christianity, it led to a permissive society. Even today, four decades on, we still see the fruits of this permissive society in a world full of violence, sex and drugs.

These teachings led to strife and conflict in the Colossian church, so it is understandable that Paul devoted the overall theme of Colossians to unity in the church and Christian body. It also addresses inter personal relationships, as our text for today shows. Colossians 3 appeals for open truthfulness with one another and for a spirit of forgiveness and mutual tolerance. Let us examine how Colossians 3 applies to us at Westlake today.

(I) Who is “one another”?

“One another” implies more than one person, and usually involves a relationship. The phrase “bear with one another” implies conflict of sorts. Relationships are important to Jesus. In His Sermon on the Mount, there is no other element of life which he addresses more often or in more depth, than relationships. It could be a couple, parent and child friends, or members of the same national community. Here at Westlake we are part of an international community. Just as the Colossians and Ephesians were a network of relationships, which represented friends, family and co-habitants; we have the same rich social network at Westlake. Our recent survey showed that we are:

- 30% Swiss
- 30% North American
- 32 % European
- Rest made up of Africa, Oceania, Asia
- One quarter of us have more than one nationality
- More than ¾ are married
- More than half of the church members spend 10 nights and more away from home due to duty travel. You can imagine the level of collective jet lag and sleep deprivation we have in the room

Facebook and other social networking sites have sparked research to better understand who the “one another” is in our lives. Prof. Robin Dunbar, an Oxford Professor has found through extensive research that:

- 40% of our limited social time every week is devoted to the 5 most important people we know (who represent only 3% of our social world)
- No matter what the social networking sites allow us to do, we can only maintain 150 meaningful relationships, online and off – what has become known as “Dunbar’s number”. Average number of friends on Facebook is 120-130
- If we move away, our emotional closeness to someone declines by around 15 % a year in the absence of face-to-face contact, so that in 5 years someone can go from being an intimate acquaintance to the most distant layer of our 150 friends. Just imagine what impact it has on a relationship if you are away most of the year, and when you get home – you barely become yourself again before you depart on the next voyage.

So more than likely, the person or persons we might have difficulty bearing with, only number about 5 people in our lives - it might be our spouse, child or children boss, colleague, boyfriend or girlfriend or someone sitting right next to you in church!

Also bear in mind that you might be the person someone else might find difficult to bear with. We find it difficult to see the problem in ourselves. Often we mistakenly change the Mosaic command, endorsed by Jesus, that we love our neighbour as ourselves, into a command to “love ourselves as well as our neighbour”.

(II) It is not easy to bear with one another!

Statistics show that, in general, we are not very successful in bearing with one another on earth. In the secular world, there is:

- **Divorce rate:** Hovers around 50% for most countries. In Russia and the surrounding countries above 60%. In Switzerland the divorce rate is 40%
- **Intentional murders:** more than half million per year worldwide
- **Wars:** A sobering experience is to visit the Red Cross Museum in Geneva and look at all the current wars in the world. We have almost never had a war-free year in the existence of the world. Our generations experienced the last part of the Second World War including the genocide of 6 million Jews, We have also experienced the Rwanda and Burundi genocides and even today we are closely watching the Egypt and the Middle East conflicts.

In the Church world: 33% of the global population of 7 billion claim to be Christians. There are 38 000 denominations. Clearly not an example of unity in the church.

It is not easy being human. We are both miraculous creations, but also prone to mistakes and conflict. How does this come about? It helps to understand the human body soul and spirit. Our anatomy and physiology play a major role in who we are and how we behave. We are made up of a very complex mixture of water and protein. Our bodies contain the most wondrous senses, bones, muscle, nerve and fibre. Our souls represent a unique mind, will and set of emotions for each of us. The spirit is the most difficult to grasp, and by the way also the most difficult for atheists to explain. How did our spirits come about? Stephen Hawkins claims in his last book that we were created by a combination of the law of gravity and spontaneous combustion. How then do you explain the spirit of man, within which the Holy Spirit resides? Where does our sense of intuition and guilt come from?

To understand why we can have conflict with one another, let us look at a select number of uniquely human issues that can make us difficult to bear with:

a. Age & Cultural differences

God created us and our lives to form a very unique symmetry. We are at our physiological peak at 24 years of age, but then relatively low on wisdom levels. From a physiological point of view, we are then at our strongest to bear children, make war, climb mountains or be chess champions. However, at that age we do not have the benefit of experience and wisdom. As George Bernard Shaw said: "*Youth is wasted on the young*". Often conflict is inter-generational, especially in the church – so let us always bear in mind the role of age, when dealing with conflict .Cultural and language differences also impact our lives and make it hard to bear with one another. How many of you have felt that the inability to speak French make you feel like an idiot, and changes your behaviour for the worse in a strange land'

b. Illness

Very few of us fit the definition of healthy, as defined by the WHO as:

"A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease"

How we feel directly impacts how we are. We need to remember this when we deal with other people.

3 Lifestyle factors (lack of physical activity, smoking and bad diet) lead to 4 illnesses (diabetes, lung and heart disease and cancer) which cause more than 50 % of all deaths. As we sit here, up to two thirds of us can be classified as overweight or obese, with significant effects on the way we live and how easy we are to live with, or how well we can cope with stress induced by living with others.

Of immense importance is the prevalence of mental health problems, which are often badly understood or simply not identified. Up to 10% of the global population suffers from some sort of mental health problem. On the Hamilton stress scale, the three most stressful life events are death of a spouse, divorce and relocation. Many of us here, just been through a relocation trauma.

c. Sleep deprivation

- Over 20% of adults suffer from SD

- Excessive sleepiness and decreased psychomotor performance have been demonstrated after sleep deprivation. Sleep loss may impact mood, autonomic function, and the immune system. Sleep-deprived adults may have impaired job performance and are prone to motor vehicle accidents.

(III) Why should we bear with one another?

Why should we bear with one another?

a. Because the Bible says so

Jesus instructed Peter to forgive "not up to seven times but up to seventy times seven times" (Matthew 18:22)

He taught us to pray in the Lords Prayer "forgive us our sins, just as we forgive those who sin against us (Matt 6:12)

Ecclesiastes 12:14 "For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."

Matthew 7:1-5 "Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Romans 14:10 "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God."

1 Corinthians 4:5 "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."

b. Bearing with one another will bear fruit

- **George Muller** was a famous servant of God. He founded orphanages and raised a staggering 100 million pounds during this lifetime to serve orphans and their cause. He was also a very effective evangelist. He made it a personal endeavour to win friends for Christ. One particular friend took 60 years of prayer and companionship before he finally gave his life to Christ

- **Gandhi** helped establish a relatively peaceful and united India, by not retaliating when he was beaten. Through peaceful protests, he managed to turn a nation.

- Likewise **Nelson Mandela** came out of jail after 28 years and essentially forgave his oppressors, by not turning to violence and retribution.

c. Because Jesus bears with us

When I read the gospels, we can be encouraged by how many times the disciples made mistakes. Despite the fact that Jesus was right there with them, they managed to make life difficult for one another. Yet Jesus still included them in His mission.

Sometimes He felt, as a human, human exasperation:

When the disciples feared the storm at sea, "he said to them, 'why are you timid, you men of little faith?' Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm. **Matthew 8:26**.

His kindness ought to be a catalyst, a motivation, an example for us in treating others with kindness:

Luke 6:35 "but love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the most high; for he Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men."

In **Matthew 18:23-35** Jesus told the parable of a man who was forgiven a debt to his master amounting to millions of dollars and then going out to prosecute a man who owed him a few cents. He applied the parable having the master say, "you wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" **Matthew 18:32, 33**.

Ephesians 4:32 "and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

(IV) How can we bear with one another in a Christ-like way?

a. Expect Conflict and Tensions

Assume that God has allowed the conflict or person(s) who aggrieves you. It might not be immediately clear why God has allowed this to happen, but discuss it with him in prayer. In time, you should be able to see what He accomplished through each challenging situation that you faced. Pain, suffering, and heartache mature us spiritually and equip us to help others more effectively. This kind of attitude helps us not to become bitter with God and others, but rather to seek for growth in adversity or conflict.

b. Understand it

Make a big picture diagnosis of the who, what and why you find it difficult to bear with someone.

Recognize the cause. Make sure that you are healthy in body, soul and spirit. If not, find help in making a diagnosis. Conflict may result from different opinions, a personality clash, miscommunication, or jealousy. A person who is angry with someone else—or even with God— can easily be taking it out on you in your relationship. Other conflicts have their root in rebellion against authority or emotional baggage from childhood or previous relationships.

Consider the consequences and effect of conflict. Consider what an ongoing conflict will do to your health, family, work situation or life in general. Count the cost. Make sure that your reaction is appropriate, proportionate and in line with how Jesus would have handled it.

When conflict is not dealt with properly, it affects most areas of our lives. Unresolved disagreement divides our minds, contributes to health problems, and hinders our emotions. It causes unnecessary pain and disappointment. If you are holding on to anger towards another person, you can't truly love anyone. Unresolved conflict also blocks our fellowship with God and delays our personal growth.

c. Delay Immediate Reaction

Make no attempt to justify yourself immediately. When people are furious, they can't listen to your perspective. If God leads you to defend yourself, wait until the other person finishes. Then he or she will be more likely to hear your side.

Ask the Holy Spirit for discernment. Since disagreements have various causes, begin by seeking God to learn the source in each situation.

Identify areas of weakness. When you and I know our limitations, we can be more sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in that area. In all cases, be careful when you are too hungry, angry, lonely tired
(*H.A.L.T.*: don't allow yourself to become too **h**ungry, **a**ngry, **l**onely, or **t**ired)

d. Rely on God, through the Holy Spirit to make you able to bear with one another

Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13: "God is faithful [and] will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also." Claim this promise when temptation strikes.

Ask the Holy Spirit to guard your mouth and rely on its power. [Psalm 141:3](#) says, "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." Don't blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. Carefully consider what you are going to say, and leave time for God to provide you with wise answers ([Luke 12:12](#)).

Live a victorious life. By setting "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" ([Col. 3:2](#)).

Build a defense by reading God's Word. Study the Bible, and ask the Lord to build spiritual principles into your life as a protection against temptation. Don't reason with Satan; speak biblical truth, following Christ's example ([Luke 4:1-12](#)).

Forgive the one responsible for the conflict. Even if their the other person's analysis was totally wrong, forgive the individual for bringing strife into your life ([Eph. 4:32](#)). Jesus provided the perfect example of this. During the crucifixion, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" ([Luke 23:34](#)).

Conclusion: Conflict may be inevitable, but you and I can choose how to bear with one another. If you are unable to live with or come to an agreement with another person, don't feel like a spiritual failure. No one can force another person to reconcile, but you can choose to walk in forgiveness anyway. Ask God for wisdom, and He will be faithful to guide your steps.

Colossians 3:13 (The Message)

12-14 So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

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