

Colossians 3:12-17 CC 29th May 2016

So there I was standing on the terraces which is what real football fans still do when they go to watch football. I was talking to the guy next to me about the game. I don't know who he is but I have seen him at games before. He announced to the crowd it was something like 507 and he turned to me and said "without us it would have only been 505". As you can see Kettering Town fans are astute and deep thinkers! However it got me thinking so at least one Kettering Town fan is a thinker. I asked myself "does it really matter that I am here?"

I had driven that day down to Dorchester about 80 miles to be with other supporters but did it really matter?

Now you may say of course not and they could still have won even if I hadn't been there and that may be true but certainly for home games I am contributing to the wellbeing of the club by being there and if every supporter thought "well it doesn't matter if I go" the club would go out of existence. But I want to be there even on the very rare occasion when we lose I still want to be there. It is part of me. It matters to me and I believe I matter to it.

On these Sunday mornings we are thinking of a very different group of people. We are, as it were, sitting with a group of Christians, the church in Colossae, in the front room of the house of a man called Philemon as another man, Tychicus, who was a friend of Paul, is reading to them a letter from Paul.

Paul has said a lot about the relationship to God the Father through Jesus to reassure them that they had heard the truth and the whole truth in the gospel and were on the right path. But now, as we began seeing last week he is explaining how that works out in practice and in these verses today we begin to see how being a follower of Jesus should affect the way we relate to other Christians.

In the middle of v15 it says "as members of one body". That is how Paul thought of the church, of their church in Colossae and ours here in Chineham.

However perhaps they had the same thoughts I had on the terraces "does it really matter that I am here?" Perhaps as you sit here this morning you have the same thoughts.

What Paul had to say to those Christians in one sense doesn't answer that question but as he writes to them about how they were to relate to each other as Christians we can see an answer to the question of why we are here this morning.

What Paul has to say to them in these verses continues from the previous verses about how they should live as those who have been raised with Christ and now about how they should live in relation to each other.

1. In Christ everything is different v11

“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” I wonder as Tychicus read those words if the listeners didn’t look round and think but there are Gentiles and Jews here, there are slaves and free. But hopefully they and we don’t miss the point Paul was making in the words “but Christ is all and is in all”.

“You have been raised with Christ” (3:1). We have new life in Christ. He is our life. He is Lord of our lives. He is everything.

So the first point is that Jesus is all, he is King. That should affect the way we think and live. It should affect the way we think about other people and especially other Christians and the way we live with other Christians.

The second thing is that Jesus is in all that is he is in every Christian. So that again should affect the way we think and relate to other Christians.

“Does it really matter that I am here?” Well yes, I am here because Jesus is King and the King’s word speaks of me being a member of one body so clearly he wants me to be with that body. But then also Christ is in all so I am here to be with others in who Christ lives and by being here to encourage them in Christ and to be encouraged by them as I continue to follow Jesus.

Having set the pattern that in Christ everything in life is different and especially how they and we think about and relate to other Christians Paul goes on to spell that out in very practical terms.

2. What I might do v12 -14

In these first three verses I think he is speaking to Christians as individuals.

I was listening on the radio on Thursday morning to a discussion about the problem in Jose Mourinho starting as Manchester United manager being held up over image rights negotiations. Apparently Chelsea hold his name as a trade mark. This led to an interesting question of “what do you see as your image?” Things like “50 and in shape as long as round is a shape” came back. So I wonder as you sit here this morning what is your image?

If you are struggling to answer can I give us a clue and it is that we have the same image “as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved” (v12).

Friends that immediately knock three negatives on the head. The idea that I’m not important, I’m not good and I’m not special.

As you might have guessed I am a bit sporty but even I at times have been in that awful situation where teams are being picked and I’ve been worried that no one will pick me! I’m not important good enough valuable wanted and so on. How many more put me down can I think of? Many of us are there in life aren’t we? There is nothing special about us. We are not, thinking of Mourinho, the special ones. But actually we are. We are chosen by God to be his children. We are through Christ holy and acceptable to him and we are dearly loved. That is your image in case you weren’t sure.

However it is not just to be an image, a front a façade. Paul calls them with Jesus as King, as those who are chosen, holy and loved to live it out.

He called them to do three things:

a. clothe yourselves with compassion, b. bear with each other and c. put on love

a. clothe yourselves with compassion. You Mr, Mrs, Miss, Dr, Rev, other, Christian, living with Jesus as King because you are chosen, holy and loved, well then having v8 got rid of anger rage, malice etc now put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. That is, deal with each other as Christ deals with you.

These should be characteristic of our new life in Jesus. That we are gentle with each other. We are patient with each other's weakness and failings. We are kind in what we say to and about each other. It is very practical isn't it and while it may make us feel bad because we don't always do these things the point is to encourage us so that "you also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:4&5) It is these characteristics of the person who is in Christ that helps knock off the sharp edges so that we can rub along together and can be built together.

But it is not just our character but our actions

b. bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Here is really where the rubber hits the road. What can I do to help strengthen the unity of our church here at Christ Church? What can I do to forward us "like living stones are being built into a spiritual house"? I can forgive others against whom I might have a grievance. I can remove the barrier that stops me having full fellowship in Christ with them.

I recognise that for some of us the wrongs that have been done to us by our brothers and sisters in Christ and by those who are outside the church community may be great and you may well ask "how can I forgive that?" My answer is that humanly I don't know and all I can do is say that when God calls us to do something he is the one who gives us the strength and grace to do it. I once read a story from Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who survived the holocaust. She told how she had heard an unbelievable speech by a person in reconstructed Germany, about how God had forgiven him. After the speech, he put out his hand to her and said, "Sister, God has forgiven me." She recognized him as one of the guards in the concentration camp where her sister died. She said, in effect, "I could not raise my hand to shake his, but in that awful moment I realized how much God's mercy and grace had been extended to me. What I could not do by my own strength, I did by the strength of God."

If today you are asking what should I do as a result of the sermon then this is it. But if you can't think of anyone you need to forgive don't worry there are other things coming later.

c. put on love. Love is the greatest characteristic for the Christian because it is the greatest characteristic of God. If we would love each other then we would find our unity growing. Yes some of us make it hard for people to love us and it needs working at but let me encourage you to work at it because Christ is all and is in all”

3. What might we do? v15-17

I think there is a change as we move to v15 and Paul addresses the church as a whole, the church in Colossae and the church in Chineham.

What might we as a church do to help us be built together in unity?

a. let peace rule in your hearts. The community of faith should be marked by peace.

If we go back to 1:21, “once you were alienated from God and were enemies”. We were at war with God but “now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body” (1:22). God has made peace with us. So in the light of the peace that each of us has been given we should allow that to control us to rule in our hearts. God has made peace with us and in gratitude we live in peace together as we forgive one another, as we bear with one another as we show kindness and compassion to one another.

I remember when I was at theological college working in the grounds one summer and a friend and I were tasked with repointing a wall. It was a very long wall. We understood the reasons. We knew that the mortar we were replacing would prevent water getting into the gap between the bricks freeze and then force the bricks apart. How the devil loves to get between Christians and force us apart and disrupt the unity to which we who are God’s chosen people have been called.

Are there things that are setting you at enmity with your Christian brother or sister? Then deal with it. Get it sorted. God got it sorted with you so you get it sorted with them.

b. let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. That is what we are doing this morning and do every Sunday because it is the word of Christ from the Bible dwells amongst his people that Christ speaks to us of himself and of how he would have us live. The church should be built on and shaped by the word of God as it dwells within it.

If you have someone come and stay in your home you will understand how that affects the way things are and what happens. Having someone dwell with you changes things. The picture here is similar. As the word is shared amongst us, and the reference to “teach and admonish one another” gives the idea of more than sermons, so Christ our King speaks to us and we are brought under the Lordship of Jesus as his word works in our hearts and minds.

If you are still asking “does it really matter that I am here?” then here is another positive answer so that you can share with the rest of the body as we hear God speak to us and encourage us to grow together.

c. as you sing. So the worship team can wake up now. I think these words about singing psalms, hymns and songs go with the word and that part of the way we allow the word to dwell is to sing but also I think Paul is saying that singing is something that unites us. It means we are singing from the same hymn sheet – is that not an expression of unity? I love the fact that as God’s chosen people we are meant to be a singing people. If you are still asking “does it really matter that I am here?” yes it does because we can sing together.

“He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to almighty God” (Ps 40:3). We are meant to sing and as we sing of our God we sing truths from his word which build us as his people and build us together. There are few places today where just ordinary people sing. Perhaps on the terraces but definitely when we meet as God’s church. We are greatly blessed here at Christ Church in those who lead us in worship and I know many value and appreciate their ministry. So be here come as members of one body come Sunday by Sunday by so that we can worship together, so that we can let God’s word well in us and so that we can share the peace we have in Christ and we do it all

d. with gratitude...giving thanks to God the Father. What can we do to grow in unity? We can thank God for who he is and what he has done.

Paul finishes these verses where we started with the word all. All you do, do it in the name of Jesus who is all and in all.