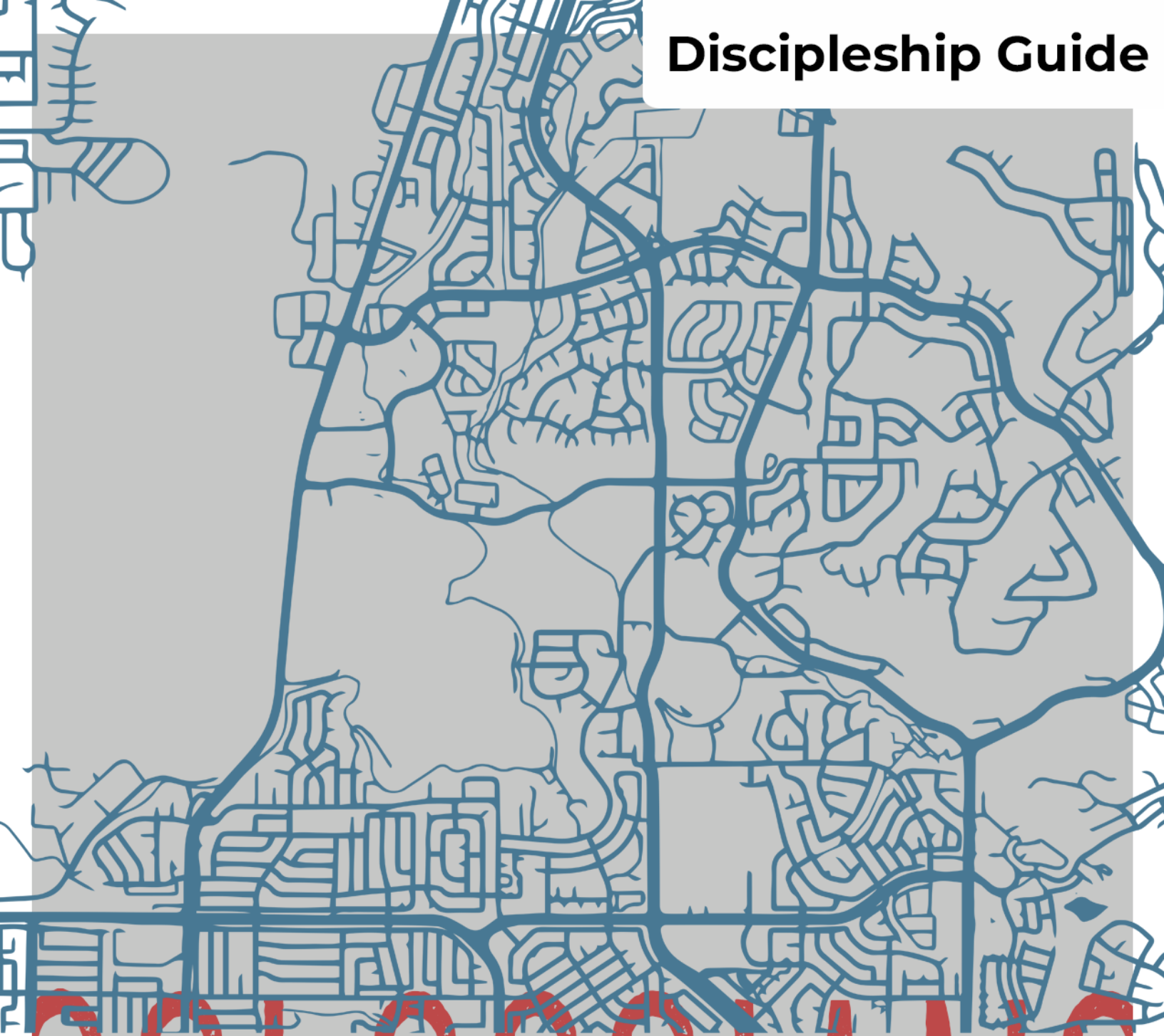


Discipleship Guide



EVERYONE FINDING EVERYTHING IN JESUS

COLONIAN

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Important Info | 4 |
| Colossians & Philemon | 5 |
| Study Resources | 6 |
| Colossians 3:1-11 | 7 |
| Colossians 3:12-17 | 11 |
| Colossians 3:18 - 4:6 | 16 |
| Colossians 4:7-18 | 20 |
| Philemon 1 | 23 |

Introduction

Colossians is a New Testament letter that celebrates the new life available through faith in Jesus. In this letter, we're instructed to reject any false teaching and human rules that create barriers between God and us since we receive - not *achieve* - the new life in Jesus. Regardless of your location or life stage, everything you need can be found in Jesus as you participate in the new creation that Jesus has brought through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The mission of God's family, then, is to witness about this reality by proclaiming the good news of Jesus and living lives that demonstrate trust in Him.

Important Info

Colossians was written in

61 or 62 AD. Although there's *some* debate about this approximate date, it remains the dominant view among scholars.

The date is important because it shows us how Jesus was viewed hundred of miles from the area where most of His ministry took place just a few decades after His resurrection. Even in insignificant Colossae ("koh-loss-see"), which had declined (economically and socially) by the time Paul wrote this letter, Jesus was being worshiped as the almighty God in flesh who reigns over all things.

Why Colossians was written

The apostle Paul's ministry partner, Epaphras, brought bad news about the Colossian church to Paul: false teaching was beginning to threaten these believers, a teaching that basically tried to add to and take away from the sufficiency of Jesus.

Colossians & Philemon

If we carefully read Colossians and the short letter to Philemon, we'll notice several connections:

1. In both, a man named Onesimus is called a "beloved brother" (Col. 4:9; Philem. 1:24).
2. In Colossians, Onesimus, a slave, is referred to as "one of" the Colossians (Col. 4:9), meaning he was a member of the church. In Philemon, Paul mediates between this slave and his master, Philemon.
3. Timothy is the co-sender/letter carrier in both Colossians and Philemon.

The letter to Philemon shows how Paul applied the gospel to an early conflict in the church. The issue at hand is the relationship between Philemon and his slave named Onesimus. It appears that Onesimus "has wrongly left Philemon's service in order to seek out Paul to mediate between him and his master."¹

Though Onesimus was legally bound to serve Philemon (according to Roman law), Paul asks Philemon to instead receive him as a brother.

¹ G.K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, page 368.

Study Resources

Course on Colossians (online)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/colossians-introduction/>

Commentary on Colossians (online)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/colossians/>

Study Bible (NET Bible - online)

<https://netbible.org/bible/Colossians+3>

Recommended Commentaries

Beginner

Discovering Colossians by S. Lewis Johnson,
adapted by Mike Abendroth

Advanced

Colossians and Philemon by G.K. Beale in the
Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New
Testament

Colossians 3:1-11

MAIN POINT

We go where we look. We aim for what we think is most beautiful and most worthy.

Seek Jesus - all that He is, all that He offers, and all that He'll do. Though we still carry around the "old earthly life", which must be put to death, we've spiritually died and resurrected with the Lord. If that's true of us, it just doesn't make sense to aim for anything other than Him.


GROUP INTRO

Are you a "new year's resolution" type of person? If yes, what's the longest you've stuck with a resolution? If no, why not?

TEXT

1. Read Colossians 3:1-4. Is Paul being metaphorical in these verses? Support your answer with Scripture.

Leader help: Paul is stating literal truths. Spiritually speaking, our union with Jesus means that, mysteriously, we have spiritually died and resurrected with Him. We've begun to participate in the new creation and we really are hidden in Him. But because Jesus has yet to return and the world and our bodies remain broken by sin, our experience of these realities is sometimes lacking. See also Romans 8:9-11.

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2. Why is it important to know and trust that Jesus is “seated at the right hand of God”? What does this phrase mean and what are the implications of this truth?

Leader help: This has to do with Jesus’s role and power as the sovereign King of the universe. He’s in control of everything. Without knowing and believing this, we can be tempted toward despair, pride, doubt, or a lack of resilience because life is difficult.

3. This passage is built upon the indicative (truth) imperative (command) pattern seen throughout the New Testament. Separate the truths and the commands - what does Paul say is true of the Colossians? What does Paul tell the Colossians to do as a result of these truths?


Leader help:

Indicatives (truths):

they’ve died with Christ and are hidden in Him (verse 3); they will appear with Christ in glory (verse 4); God’s wrath will come against all sin and evil, but not upon Christians who used to live in sin because they died with Christ (verse 6); they’re being renewed by God (verse 10).

Imperatives (commands):


Seek what’s above (verse 1); set your minds on heavenly realities (verse 2); put sins to death (verse 5); put away sins (verses 8-9); put on the new self (verse 10).

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4. Verse 4 is a massive promise. What guarantee did the Colossians have that the promise is true? How might this promise have helped them put to death or put away the sins in verses 5-9?

Leader help: Paul stated early in Colossians 1:1 that he's an authoritative ambassador for Jesus. Since he's sent by and speaking on behalf of the resurrected Lord, the Colossians could be certain about this promise. The promise depends entirely upon God's grace and truthfulness, not the behavior of the Colossians. Since they're united to Jesus by faith alone, they can be sure they'll appear with Him in glory (see Philippians 3:20-21).

APPLICATION

1. Part of Paul's strategy for living holy is blunt: when we notice specific sin in our life, we must put it to death. Of the sins mentioned in verses 5-9, which is most prevalent or tempting for you? What would it look like for us to help you put it to death and put on your new self?
2. How have you seen relationships in the church harmed or ruined by the sins of verses 5-9?

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3. As a Community Group, which do we focus on more often: God's promises like verses 3-4 or God's commands like verses 5 and 8? Why? How can we help one another focus and meditate upon God's promises?
 4. The distinctions and diversity presented in verse 11 are real and beautiful, and so is the unity we have in Christ. In your opinion, what are some threats to the unity of our local church? What might we be able to do to build unity in the face of those threats?

PRAYER

Throughout this series, you will be encouraged to pray using guidance from Martin Luther's book, "A Simple Way to Pray".

Pray that God's name would be honored in us and throughout the whole world. Ask God to destroy and root out idolatry in us and throughout the world. Ask Him to convert unbelievers so they will praise His name.

Passage to guide your prayers: Matthew 6:9

Colossians 3:12-17

MAIN POINT

What are Christians known for? What kind of community are we showing to the world around us? The church is to be a community that treats each other the way Jesus treats each of us.

In this passage we get a picture of what the banner over our lives should be: kindness, humility, compassion, forgiveness, patience, and love - all characteristics reflecting the Lord Jesus, and all characteristics that will mark the new creation.

GROUP INTRO

What's your go-to worship song when you need comfort and joy?


TEXT

1. This passage starts off with three adjectives that connect God's people in the New Testament with God's people in the Old Testament. Read Deuteronomy 7:6-8 then read Colossians 3:12. In both the old and new covenant, why does God love His people? What's the basis for God loving and choosing His people?

Leader help: God has always chosen His people based solely on His own sovereign will. His people are His "chosen ones, holy and beloved" because God wants to love them, not because of anything they do, but because He is gracious and faithful to His covenant promises.

2. How do verses 12-14 prove that people will continue to sin even after becoming Christians? How do these verses also prove that following Jesus requires participation in a local church?

Leader help: We would not need to bear with and forgive one another if we weren't going to sin against each other. We also wouldn't need to put on meekness and patience if the Christian life wasn't going to be impacted by sin.

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3. Where in Scripture do we see Jesus embodying the characteristics and mindset described in verses 12-14? Why does He think and act like this?

Leader help: There are numerous examples of Jesus embodying these characteristics throughout the Gospels. The utmost example of His meekness and love is His becoming a man and dying in our place.

As to why - Jesus is God in the flesh and is acting in line with His character as God. Some may view God as a harsh tyrant but this is not the picture of God in Scripture.

4. Verse 15 could be translated as “*The peace of Christ must rule*” and verse 16 could be “*The word of Christ must dwell in you.*” Why must we do these things? What is the impact of not doing these?

Leader help: The ultimate reason is found in verse 17: God deserves our obedience. But on a practical level we must let Christ’s peace rule in us because we experience guilt, shame, and fear due to our fallen condition. Remembering and experiencing our peace with God will empower us to fight for unity in the church. We must also continually intake the gospel so that we’re shaped and changed by it, rather than by the lies of the world around us.

5. How does singing spiritual songs to God shape us, our mission, and our theology?

Leader help: Singing praise to God together builds our unity, focuses our hearts and minds on Jesus, and helps us remember who God is and what He has done for us, thus making us want to join Jesus on His mission in the world.

APPLICATION

1. What could be different about our Community Group and church if we continually treated one another as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved?
2. One of the most important rhythms for Christians is regular participation in corporate worship. What are some ways we devalue or neglect corporate worship? How does this hinder our joy in Jesus?
3. Let's get personal: what sins are difficult for you to bear with and forgive (some examples: slander, greed, harshness, dishonor, deception, or cowardice)? How does this passage speak to your situation?



PRAYER

Throughout this series, you will be encouraged to pray using guidance from Martin Luther's book, "A Simple Way to Pray".

Ask God to not count our ingratitude against us and to forgive us for our numerous sins. Ask God for grace to forgive those we can't imagine forgiving, and ask God to forgive those who have sinned against us.

Passage to guide your prayers: Matthew 6:12

Colossians 3:18 - 4:6

MAIN POINT

How do you know if someone has “been raised with Christ”? You look at the ordinary relational spheres of family, work, and Christian mission where the characteristics of 12-15 will show up, because normal life is where Christ shows up.


GROUP INTRO

What’s the best job you’ve ever had? What made it good? What’s the worst job you’ve had? What made it awful?

TEXT

1. Being a new creation through faith in Jesus means we’re able to live new. Read Colossians 3:17-19. How does a wife submitting to her husband honor Jesus? How does a husband loving and being gentle toward his wife honor Jesus?


Leader help: These actions honor the way God has created us and how He has structured His world, the family, and marriage. Within the family, the husband is to be the sacrificial, loving leader, and the wife is to submit to him in a way that is consistent with being faithful to Jesus. The parallel passage in Ephesians 5:22-33 brings more clarity to these commands. Notice that Paul does not say husbands must demand submission; instead, they must be gentle.

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2. Read Colossians 3:20-21. How does the obedience of children and the kindness of Christian fathers reveal some aspects of the new creation?

Leader help: There will be no resistance to or rejection of authority and structure in the new creation. So obedience now partially reveals the beauty of God's order. The kindness of fathers toward their children partially shows God's character - He is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (see Exodus 34:6).

3. In verses 22-25, Paul turns his attention to the sphere of work. What are some ways Christians should work differently? Why would these different ways of working honor God?

Leader help: Paul reminds us of truly godly motivation: we should work with a fear of the Lord and with genuine desire to do our jobs well - whether it's raising children, digging holes, or sitting at a desk. If our true aim is pleasing God and looking forward to His grace and blessings, instead of trying to look good to others, we're showing that He really is trustworthy because we're believing He will do good for us.

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4. Describe how prayer, wisdom, and gracious speech impact evangelism.


Leader help: Only God can change a sinner's heart, give true wisdom, and help us speak with honor and love. Without God's help through prayer, we may be able to speak about Jesus, but we won't evangelize in a way that honors Him and His grace.

5. Where in this passage are we pointed to the gospel of Jesus? How do the promises we see here empower the new-creation lifestyle Paul is calling the Colossians to?

Leader help: Paul highlights that Christians are awaiting an inheritance. This is true because we're united to Jesus by faith, and He has earned the inheritance of a new, sinless creation, free from suffering and evil. We don't earn this through our obedience or goodness, we receive it as a gift.

APPLICATION

1. In America, we sometimes view marriage and parenting as private matters, but the Bible calls us to transparency in these areas. In your own life, are you open about the successes and struggles in these spheres? Why or why not?

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2. How might we be able to point others to Christ through our actions and attitudes within family, marriage, or work?
 3. In your own family, marriage, job, or evangelism, where do you need the grace of God to live like a new creation? How does God's love for you impact this sphere of struggle?
 4. How can we grow together in our ability to "answer each person", aka, lovingly present the gospel and answer questions about Jesus?

PRAYER

Throughout this series, you will be encouraged to pray using guidance from Martin Luther's book, "A Simple Way to Pray".

Praise God for how He has created you, body and soul, and how He gave you life through your parents, sustained you, nurtured you, and educated you.

Passage to guide your prayers: Exodus 20:12

Colossians 4:7-18

MAIN POINT

This conclusion shows that Paul's motivation to write to this small-town church was love. Do we share Christ's care and concern for others when they're faltering or tempted or do we assume someone else will step in?


GROUP INTRO

Describe a time when a warning helped you avoid disaster or danger.

TEXT

1. Why does Paul say he sent Tychicus and Onesimus to the Colossians? How is this an example of godly leadership and sacrifice?

Leader help: To bring encouragement and good news to the Colossians. The fact that Paul is in prison yet still so concerned to help and encourage the Colossians shows his Christ-like leadership. He also puts together a team and requests that they travel a vast distance just to bring encouragement.

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2. Read Acts 15:36-40 then read Colossians 4:10.
What's the significance of Paul's comments about Mark?

Leader help: This is Paul seeking to restore someone he previously was disappointed in. It's reasonable to think that Paul's restoration of Mark played a role in Mark later writing the Gospel that bears his name. Thus, setting aside our frustrations and extending forgiveness and seeking reconciliation can bring about impactful ministry opportunities.

3. Read verse 16. What is the significance of Paul's instructions to share the letter with the Laodiceans and vice versa?

Leader help: Paul thinks his letter to this small local church in Colossae could be beneficial to the Laodiceans, revealing that he viewed his writings as authoritative and necessary beyond just the initial recipients. This letter may have been to the Colossians, but it was for Christians beyond this one local church.

4. From these verses, how would you summarize Paul's attitude toward the Colossian church?
Why?

Leader help: It's evident that Paul loves the Colossians. The very fact that he wrote a letter demonstrates how seriously he took the false teachings they were faced with, and how much he wanted them to thrive and keep following Jesus.

APPLICATION

1. How can we emulate Paul's expressions of grace and personal connection with one another? Any ideas on how to make this a regular rhythm for us?
2. When's the last time you publicly honored someone? Why do you think this is somewhat rare for us?
3. Who in the church has shown you that they care about your faith and discipleship? How did this point you to Jesus?

PRAYER

Throughout this series, you will be encouraged to pray using guidance from Martin Luther's book, "A Simple Way to Pray".

Thank God for His infinite compassion and how He has come to you in such a fatherly way without you asking, prompting, or meriting, offering to be your God and to care for you.

Confess and acknowledge your great sin and ingratitude through countless acts of idolatry.

Passage to guide your prayers: Exodus 20:2-3

Philemon 1

MAIN POINT

In this brief letter Paul asks a man named Philemon to treat his outlaw slave Onesimus as a brother in Christ. Only in Jesus is there heart-level transformation of individuals and relationships.

**Note: The connection between Colossians and Philemon is found in Colossians 4:7-9. There, Paul says he's sending two of his ministry partners - Tychicus and Onesimus - to Colossae.*

Onesimus is also mentioned in Philemon. Onesimus was apparently a slave under Philemon who left his service. Now Paul is asking Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother in Christ.

GROUP INTRO

What's the most adventurous thing you've ever done?

TEXT

1. Who is this letter to and why was it written?

Leader help: This letter is to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church that met in Philemon's house. Paul's reason for writing is seen in verses 8-17: he wants Philemon to treat his bondservant Onesimus as a brother in Christ and to receive Onesimus as if he was receiving Paul.

2. How would you describe Paul's attitude toward Philemon in verses 1-9? In what way does this attitude mirror that of Jesus?

Leader help: Paul is meek and gentle, just as Jesus describes Himself in Matthew 11:25-30.

3. In what ways does the gospel transform relationships, as seen in the interactions between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus?

Leader help: The gospel transforms how we view ourselves (Paul's an apostle of Jesus and could command Philemon to do what he asks, but decides to humble himself just like Jesus humbled Himself) and how we view others (Paul has great respect and honor for Philemon and treats him as a brother) because in the gospel we recognize our own sinfulness and God's gracious love.

4. How does this letter help us understand God's grace and the equality of believers in Christ?

Leader help: Since Jesus accomplished redemption, relationships between believers have been leveled - we are family, all under the lordship of Jesus. And Jesus does not elevate any of us above one another; instead, He calls us to adopt the mindset of a servant and to consider the needs of others before our own needs.

APPLICATION

1. What kind of principles for conflict resolution in the church can we draw from Paul's approach to this situation?
2. Why might Paul's approach and attitude here be difficult for you to adopt in times of conflict or relational tensions?
3. When you're wronged or offended, what helps you move toward forgiveness and reconciliation? What keeps you stuck in resentment or bitterness?

PRAYER

Throughout this series, you will be encouraged to pray using guidance from Martin Luther's book, "A Simple Way to Pray".

Thank God that He hears all of your prayers. Ask God to help you pass safely through all of the wickedness and evil around us. Ask God to help you not be fearful or hopeless, but firm in your faith.

Passage to guide your prayers: Matthew 6:13