

Kurigasawa Baptist Church Sunday Worship Sermon, January 18, 2026

“Love One Another” Colossians 3:12–14, Rev. Kazumitsu Kimura

This morning, we listen to God’s Word from chapter 3 of Paul’s Letter to the Colossians. The city of Colossae was one of the cities of Asia Minor, located about 200 kilometers inland from the Greek sea, the Aegean Sea. It lay along a commercial road running eastward from Ephesus. In this region, there was a valley where two rivers met, surrounded by rich pastureland. Nearby were other prosperous cities such as Laodicea and Hierapolis.

The church in Colossae was not founded directly by Paul himself. Rather, it was established by Epaphras, a disciple of Paul, during the three years Paul stayed in Ephesus. It is believed that Epaphras also planted the church in the nearby city of Laodicea around the same time.

The regions of Greece and Asia Minor that Paul visited during his missionary journeys were under the strong influence of Hellenistic culture. “Hellenism” refers to Greek-style culture or Greek ideology. The Greeks themselves called their people Hellenes and believed that Greek civilization and thought were superior. In some ways, this cultural situation worked to the advantage of spreading the gospel. Throughout the Mediterranean world, a common language known as Koine Greek was used, and the New Testament was written in this language. Because Greek functioned as a common official language, the gospel could be preached anywhere without a language barrier. This was a great advantage for the spread of Christianity.

However, at the same time, Hellenistic culture stood in direct opposition to the Hebrew culture that produced the Old and New Testaments. The Bible proclaims one true God, strictly forbids the worship of idols, and demands a high ethical standard of life. Greek culture, by contrast, imagined gods who behaved like humans in mythological stories, and it was considered normal to represent gods through magnificent temples and sculptures. Furthermore, prostitutes served in those temples. The Greeks also looked down on foreigners, calling them “barbarians,” a word that later became the origin of the English word “barbarian.” In such a cultural environment, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ was an extremely difficult task. Even in our own country today, it is not easy to proclaim the gospel in towns where traditional temple and shrine worship is deeply rooted. The situation in Paul’s time was no different.

Despite these challenges, churches were established throughout Greece. Why was this possible? It was because the teachings of the New Testament broke down ethnic and cultural barriers and removed obstacles to evangelism. The gospel proclaimed universal truths that anyone could believe and follow.

Several barriers were removed. First, the barrier of nationality and ethnicity was broken down. There was no longer a division between Jews and Greeks. Second, the barrier between men and women was removed. Even in our country today, the birth of the first female prime minister is considered historic. In Old Testament times, women were placed in extremely weak positions, sometimes not even counted in population numbers. However, this was not the case in the early church. In the churches of Philippi and Corinth, women served as leaders and supported Paul’s missionary work, while men supported them. Gender equality was already a reality in the church 2,000 years ago.

Third, the church broke down the barriers of social status and class. In Greek society, alongside free citizens, there were large numbers of slaves. Many became slaves as prisoners of war or because they could not repay debts. It is said that slaves outnumbered free people in Greece. When such slaves accepted the gospel and became believers, they began to serve in the church—preaching sermons, leading worship, and guiding hymns. When free citizens later joined the church, social status was set aside. The free became learners, and slaves became teachers. Positions were reversed. Before God, differences of social status and class disappeared. This happened frequently in the early church.

In the passage just before today's text, Paul writes, "You have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self." He continues, "There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all." To put on the new self means to die to the old self and be born anew. A Christian is one who lives in this new life.

Allow me to share a personal story. Last June, our first grandchild was born. At the maternity hospital where our second daughter gave birth, clothes were prepared for newborn babies, and in the photograph, our grandchild was wrapped in a knitted sweater. The baby looked almost like a caterpillar, and we could not help but laugh. What a newborn wears to look most adorable is not a trivial matter.

When the Bible urges us to clothe ourselves with the new self, it conveys another message. It is not merely about outward appearance. It means a complete inner transformation—a change of heart so profound that one's way of life is altered. When we begin a new walk as Christians, we are changed. If nothing changes and life remains exactly the same after becoming a Christian, it has no meaning. Faith should transform our lives.

I recently spoke with a woman who was baptized last Easter. She said that every day is now filled with gratitude and joy. She told me, "If I had known it would be like this, I should have been baptized much earlier. I wonder what my life was until now." Indeed, when we come to faith, a new life begins.

The second is kindness—tenderhearted, thoughtful goodness. Jesus was not merely gentle; he was kind in a way that bore others' burdens. When Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens," and added, "My yoke is easy," the word "easy" carries this sense of kindness. A yoke joins two oxen together so they may share the burden. Kindness means bearing burdens together.

The third virtue is humility. This word does not appear in classical Greek literature and gained significance through the Bible. Christian humility comes from recognizing that we are created beings before God and that all people are equally God's children. There is no room for pride.

The fourth is gentleness. This does not mean never becoming angry, but rather having self-control—knowing when anger is appropriate and when it is not.

The fifth is patience, or forbearance. The original meaning suggests being "slow to anger," allowing time before reacting. By delaying anger, our response becomes calmer and more peaceful.

Through all of these virtues, we see that Christians are not people who live only for themselves. From such a way of life, peace is born. Peace begins when we move toward one another for the sake of the other's well-being. To love one another is to make up for one another's shortcomings.

With this spirit of love, let us continue to walk together in the new year, forgiving one another.

Let us pray.