

"To Be the Most Thankful People"

Colossians 3:12-17

The letter of Colossians was one of those few letters Paul wrote to where he had not been to that church yet. Another letter written from prison, Paul was fully aware of the Colossian church because of his friend Epaphras who was from Colossae. Paul says in 4:12, *'Epaphras who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends his greetings. He is always wrestling in praying for you that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.'*

Why did the Colossians need to stand firm? Because as usual, false teachers had come in and with their philosophical/ religious ideas, claimed that Jesus wasn't fully God and that salvation was based on a combination of good works, traditions and Jesus. So Colossians is a mini-theology on the authority and sufficiency of Jesus Christ, who is fully God and man, sent to die for our sins, rose again and now unites us to Himself. Jesus is the central theme of Colossians.

After thanking God for the Colossians faith in Christ Paul prays for their knowledge and love to grow and then from the middle of Ch. 1-2 he presents why Jesus is all authoritative, our Lord and our hope. His work on the cross is finished and He now sits at the right hand of God but not disconnected from our lives. In Ch. 3-4 Paul explains how Jesus makes a difference in our day to day life. He reassures us in Vv.1-4 that our life is hidden with Him, secured in heaven and awaiting His return. Vv.5-11 are a reminder that we are new in Christ and need to put off the old way of living much like we would put off old clothes before we can put on new clothes. So vv.5-11 present a list of unChristlike behaviour that we may have used to live like and definitely should no longer live like. Vv. 12-17 is the positive side of how our life should look now that we are in Christ and have put on the new self. Paul's focus however is primarily how it looks like collectively, as the local body of Christ; how we relate to one another. Because, anytime false teaching creeps into a local church it divides it and causes problems within the body. And a divided community of believers is a thankless community and has lost site of who they are and what they are called to do. Believers in Jesus Christ should be the most thankful people in the world. Paul will say three times in vv.15, 16, 17 that we are to be thankful and I believe he implies in v.12 as well. At v. 12 Paul moves from how we shouldn't act to how believers in Christ should act;

¹² *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved*

He reminds the believers who they are in Christ as a way to call them to be thankful and as such act like who you are. Because

Who I am Changes How I Live in God's Community **(3:12-14)**

Changes how I live individually which changes how I will live collectively. Paul purposely uses Old Testament covenant language for God's choosing Israel to be the group of people through whom He would work. Now God says, even Gentiles are included in the Covenant community made up of those committed to God and His Son by faith. In Rom. 9-11 Paul wrote that we who've trusted Christ by faith are now grafted in to the family tree of Abraham, a family based on faith not lineage. So, all you Gentiles who have now been grafted into the family of God be thankful God is a God who keeps His Word (read Gen. 12:1-3) and has included us in His grace by faith in Christ.

When we place our faith in Christ

God gives us a new heart in Christ (v.12)

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

God does not command us to do something without empowering us to do it. Back in 3:1 Paul said we are already raised with Christ, hidden in Christ and told Christ is our life. He commanded us to put off the old self and put on the new self "*which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator*". "Is" means God is doing something new in us all the time. How? Through His Spirit who came to dwell in us when we accepted Christ (Eph. 1:13-14). He's still using the clothing metaphor when he says clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Some or all of which we might say are not our strengths. We already know that. Because our old self is still here. So we have to put off our default sin nature of hard-heartedness, harshness, pride, uncaring and impatience. If we as believers say 'I'm not very compassionate', or 'I'm not the most patient person', we are admitting we have not allowed God to change our heart on these sin nature old man issues. I can't put on compassion if I don't off my 'don't care attitude'.

"Compassion" is a word used to describe Jesus' concern for others. Remember, Paul is speaking to our commitment to the local body and community we're connected to. The word compassion means 'from the gut'. You see a hurting person or group and we're internally moved. That's the Spirit speaking to us. While we can't meet every need that comes our way, our initial 'gut reaction' [or lack of it] to the hurting person tells us a lot how we're letting God's Spirit continue the work of renewing our heart. Notice the renewal takes place Paul said through knowledge. Knowledge of what? God's truth. Are we letting God's truth (even at this moment) speak to our new heart in Christ to shed off harshness and impatience and pride so I can make room for compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. And God gives us a new heart

So we will treat people as Jesus does (v.13)

See how v.13 is the target audience for the actions of v.12. V. 12 shouldn't end with a period but a comma because v.13 are participles describing who the actions in v.12 are directed towards.

clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience Bear[ing] with each other and forgiv[ing] one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Notice there are no conditions attached to the forgiveness. Perhaps there is a mutual grievance (complaint is too soft a word). The word means you have a legitimate grievance against someone because of the wrong action against you and one party is waiting for the other to make the first step. Who should do that? The one who is the more mature believer. It's actually pretty simple since we're called to forgive the way Jesus forgives. Did Jesus forgive us our sins before we ever accepted Him? Yes. That means we choose to forgive people the hurts they caused us before (even if they never) acknowledge their sin.

This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus – you follow Jesus and His example! When we do treat people as Jesus does us,

We model the merciful, gracious love of God (v.14)

¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

Still using the clothing imagery, I think Paul is referring to putting on one's outer garment that everyone sees. Over all these put on love. God's love is gracious (gives us what we don't deserve, forgiveness; and merciful, doesn't give us judgment, what we all deserve). This is our standard. It is high but unless the unsaved see us act like this how can they be persuaded the gospel changes anyone?

So knowing and reminding ourselves who we are in Christ, secure, forgiven, loved, changes how we should live individually and in community. And now Paul wraps up this section with four commands on how to do this in vv.12-14. Because while I know who I am should change how I live, I don't always know what I need to change in order to live the way God wants. So Paul gives us four key principles in vv.15-17.

Who I am Changes How I Think About God's Community **(3:15-17)**

The first command is,

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace

V. 15 sounds awesome because I really like the idea of the peace of Christ ruling my heart – but frankly I'm not sure what the peace of Christ is? The definition of *Irene/peace* is not the absence of tension or strife but "freedom from worry". Why is that the peace of Christ? Because Jesus is perfectly secure in God. His relationship is secure in God – as is ours. He knows the Father met all His needs during His ministry on earth; and He'll do the same for us. He knows all our needs and our concerns. Cast your cares upon Him because He cares for you. Let His peace, His contentment, His joy rule in your hearts. That word rule is a term that describes a judge's verdict. When worry and anxiety creep their way into your heart, what does Jesus say? Let your security in me settle in your heart and give you contentment. Don't let people and circumstances overrule Jesus' authority and rule, yet we often do.

Let my security in Christ help me to 'judge' God's people wisely (v.15)

When people bother you the only way we'll act with compassion, kindness and forgiveness if we're secure about who we are in Jesus. People criticizing you? Are they correct? If so humble yourself. If not what does Jesus say about you? You're chosen, beloved, precious in His sight. They can't shake our relationship with God anymore than anyone can shake Jesus' relationship with God. When we're tempted to judge or criticize another, see them as Jesus sees them, with eyes of compassion. If they truly need gracious confrontation then do so with humility and grace. If we're not sure then give them the benefit of the doubt and don't let them make you feel insecure. They can't make us less secure with God, so why let them make us feel insecure because they are acting unChristlike? Our secure position in Jesus gives us contentment even when discontentment knocks at our door.

Second command:

¹⁶ *Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit*

The idea of the word dwelling is that the Word would live with you wherever you go. Jesus lives with us wherever we go so we need to let God's words stay with us wherever we go. These verses are practical. We're told to prepare beforehand with this Word so we'll know how to speak God's Word to people. It's great to read it to start the day but if we mentally leave it at home and separate God from our day to day life we will lack peace, and struggle in our relationships. So Paul says to

Let the Word of Christ help us to encourage God's people when we're together (v.16)

When I hear believers say they only go to church to hear a good message or to hear good worship, I inwardly cringe because they don't get why we're supposed to come together. Paul is talking about worship in v.16. We come together to learn from the Word how to praise God and encourage God's people. Church gatherings of any kind are opportunities to share the Word with each other so we are built up in the faith. And our singing is a source of encouragement so that we leave strengthened and secured in our relationship with God and each other knowing how to serve one another better and reach a lost world.

Let the Word take residence richly. Let it sink in daily. If dwelling on the Word changes the way we speak to one another when we're together, it will certainly change the way we speak to and about everybody. When we're in the Word of God and allowing it to live in us – meditating on it, memorizing it – God's words will form our words to one another. If our speech is more harsh and complaining and blaming, we're showing how little we let the Word of God dwell in us. The outside evidence gives away what's happening on the inside.

All these commands are in the present tense. That means we are to keep doing them every day. The third one is to

Let my purpose in Christ guide my life (v.17)

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,

Doing something 'in the name of Jesus' means to do it in His authority or power or as if it's about Him. So then the challenge for us is to look after everything we do and ask God, 'Lord, how can I make this about Jesus somehow?' If it's sinful we won't get an answer because we know we should stop doing that. But I think the real challenge here is to think about the basic things we do; work, raise a family, recreational activities – how can we glorify God or make them Christ-focused somehow.

All three of these commands deal with our attitude. My actions (vv.12-14) won't change until my attitude changes. How I think about myself, people and the Lord. The fourth command permeates all 3 of these commands and that is that we will think more Christlike about our community of believers

As we consciously thank God for saving me and uniting me in His family (vv.15-17)

¹⁵ *And be thankful.*

About the peace we have in Christ because we are saved and connected to a local church body

¹⁶ teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Because we're not alone and God has placed us together in a uniquely gifted family of believers with whom we are to glorify God and Jesus together in all we do

giving thanks to God the Father through him.

For what? Giving us an eternal purpose in life beyond what everyone thinks life is about. I.e., getting a good job, a nice home, some kids and grandkids and planning for a good retirement. All nice things but not really our purpose in life. Because if our purpose in life focuses only on "things on earth", not "things above" (3:2), we have missed the point of being saved. Giving thanks to God through Jesus because it is through Jesus we are saved and have a future beyond this existence.

Prayer - Thank you Lord for our salvation. Thank you Lord for what Jesus has done for us on the cross, dying for everyone knowing some will not come to you. Thank you Lord for giving us a church family in which we can explore this and grow in this Christian life together. Forgive us when we only come for ourselves and not to encourage others. Forgive us when we misjudge one another and make each other feel insecure. Help us to build each other up as we come together and look for ways how we can do that during the week, whether its actual contact or at the very least praying for one another that in whatever we are doing we should be glorifying God. Thank you Lord for these words in Col. 3:12-17 when we have realized we have the most to be thankful for and therefore should be the most thankful. And people notice that. They notice our encouraging spirits and Lord willing they will ask us about this hope that we have. I pray we are ready to tell them about Jesus.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net