

# And be Thankful

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## **Text:**

Colossians 3:15-17

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

## **Introduction:**

This paragraph paints a portrait in words of a church that has put off the old and put on the new. If I were an artist I would try to put on canvas what the Apostle has put on paper. He has given us a vivid description of a functional Spirit-directed church where the members first, individually, and then, collectively, have put off the old man with his sinful patterns of behavior, and have put on the new man with his Christ-like patterns of behavior. It is a beautiful portrait he has painted with words, and it would make an arresting painting if we could transfer what he says in these three verses into one single image, and engrave that image into our imagination. If we could do that, we would have an image of a church as it should be.

The first thing that we should retain is that the exhortations of this paragraph are prefaced upon the commands to put off the old self and to put on the new Christ-like self. What he commands us to do only makes sense if we are consciously rejecting the old sinful way of life and intentionally seeking to live the new life of the Spirit. All that he commands us to do is only possible in the realm of the new man. In the realm of the old man the commands are not only impossible, they are illogical.

A second general observation is that this passage is addressed to a church, to a body of believers. We have been stressing this all throughout this letter. All of the “yous” are plural. We have pointed out that the new man has both an individual and a collective sense. There is the individual renewed in the image of Jesus Christ, but there is also the new community, the church, where individuals who have been renewed now interact with one another on the basis of the reality of new life in Christ. In the present passage Paul encourages us to live out the new life that we have received in Christ by interacting with one another in a new way. He has already hinted at this in the previous paragraph where he has commanded us to forgive one

another, to put up with one another, and to put on love which “binds everything together in perfect harmony.” We must never forget that the Christian life is a life lived in community. Christ calls us as individuals, but he does not call us to live solitary lives. He calls us and places us in a body of believers, and then commands us to “love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13:34). He says that when we do this we convince the world that that the Father has sent him. (John 17: 20-21).

A final general observation about this text is that it contains three exhortations. and to each exhortation Paul adds a command to thankfulness. Notice what he says:

- In verse 15 he exhorts us to let “the peace of Christ” rule in our hearts, and then adds, “and be thankful”, or more literally “and become thankful”.
- In verse 16 he tells us to “let the word of Christ dwell among us in all its richness”. We are to do this especially by teaching and exhorting one another through the things that we sing, but again we are to sing with “thankfulness” in our hearts.
- Finally he exhorts us to do everything that we do “whether in word or deed” in “the name of the Lord Jesus”, and once again he adds “giving thanks to God the Father through him”.

So Paul exhorts us to three actions, and each of these actions is to be accompanied with thanksgiving. By thanksgiving he implies both a thankful heart and the open expression of thanks. This is a major theme then in this passage, but also in the entire epistle, and in Paul’s epistles in general. Every chapter of Colossians contains teaching about the importance of a thankful heart. We have already seen in Chapter 1 that Paul prays that as we are spiritually strengthened we will “give thanks to the Father” (1:12). We noted in chapter 2 that the central exhortation of the entire letter was: “As therefore ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, being rooted and built up in him, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (2:6-7). Paul’s last exhortation in chapter 4 will be “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (verse 2).

The reason that Paul so stresses a thankful heart is that he knows that it is the great antidote of sin. As ingratitude is often the beginning of sin, gratitude is often what preserves us from sin. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul lays down his argument for universal guilt. At the beginning of that argument is the fact that all men know God, but instead of seeking him out they reject him and seek out gods of their own making. The motivation of their rejection of God, he says, is an ungrateful heart. This is what he says in verse 21: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

So, often the beginning of our rebellion against God is our refusal to be thankful to God. Like spoiled children we reject his provision, and become covetous, and refuse to be thankful. This in turn leads to self-pity, and we use self-pity as a justification for other forms of sin, and before we know it we find ourselves in a downward and self-destructive spiral of sin that began with ingratitude. On the other hand that spiral can often be stopped before it begins by simply giving thanks. This is the reason Paul insists that all that we do must be done with thankful hearts and with acts of thanksgiving. This is the great antidote. It keeps us on track because it is a constant reminder that all that we have derives from God, and that without him we are nothing and can do nothing. The most important thing we can do to cultivate spiritual growth and development both individually and together is to be constantly and intentionally thankful.

So as we look at the three commands of the text remember that all of them must be performed “with thanksgiving”. In fact, all that we do for Christ and for one another must be done out of a thankful heart. This will keep our “good works” good. It will keep our spirits sweet and protect us from cynicism and bitterness.

Let us now look at the specific commands:

## I. Let the Peace of Christ Rule

Let me explain what Paul is getting at here by reminding you of two things he has already said. First, remember what we saw in chapter 1 about the reconciling work of Christ. Recall what he says in verses 19-22:

“For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.”

In this passage Paul is stressing that Christ through his death on the cross has created peace between God and humans. This is one of the great themes of Paul’s preaching and of the gospel. He even calls the gospel, the gospel of peace—the good news that God has reconciled us to himself by the cross of Christ. In Romans 5 he prefaces his treatment of the Christian life with these words: “Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God.”

Secondly, remember with he has said just a few verses previously in 3:9-11: “seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all.”

In the new man Christ makes the old animosities disappear. The things that divided us outside of Christ become meaningless in Christ. This is the reason Paul writes in Ephesians 2:13-16:

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby”

We cannot create peace, Christ alone is the creator of peace—peace between God and man, peace between man and man, he alone is the source of “peace on earth, goodwill toward men”. What we can do is recognize the peace that he has procured, and let it rule over us. The normal state of affairs in the body of Christ should be a state of peace. Paul says we were called to peace. Any other state in the church is abnormal and outside the will of the one who has called us. We have stressed that sin is the destruction and disruption of God’s *shalom*. The work of salvation is the restoration of *shalom*. The church is the precursor of God’s kingdom of peace. When the Prince of Peace shall be King of Kings then perfect peace shall reign universally, but in the waiting time the peace of the Prince of Peace should already rule over those who have recognized him as King.

## II. Let the Word of Christ Dwell

Again this exhortation contains a striking image. Christ’s peace governs us as his word dwells among us. It is probably better to translate “let the word of Christ dwell among you.” It is not the word of Christ dwelling in the heart of the individual believer that is in view here, but the word of Christ dwelling in the midst of his church. This image is that of a group of attentive listeners all tuned to the same voice, all attentively listening to the voice of Christ so that they might do the will of Christ. It is in this way that Christ truly becomes the head of his church. When we are all listening to his voice, and doing his will then his peace will rule.

In this verse Paul emphasized one specific way in which the word of Christ dwells in our midst. He says that we should teach and admonish each other as we sing “Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thanksgiving in our hearts.” Often we do not think of our singing in this way. We may think of it as entertainment that precedes the teaching or the serious part of our worship, but Paul says that it is central to our being taught and led of Christ. Allow me to make one observation about this and then to suggest a couple of reasons why Paul would give such an importance to singing.

The observation is that if the word of Christ dwells in us by what we sing, then we should be careful that what we sing truly reflects the word of Christ. It is easy to choose our music on the basis of other criteria—because we like the melody for example, but in the church the primary purpose of music is not to entertain, but to instruct. We could spend a lot of time here discussing what Paul means by “Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”, but one thing is certain whatever we sing should communicate the word of Christ. It should speak to us as Christ himself would speak to us.

The first reason why music is so important as a means of communicating the word and the will of Christ is that what we sing is easily remembered. While Bible passage can only be memorized with conscious effort probably none of us ever remember consciously memorizing a hymn or a song, and yet we probably can sing dozens of hymns from memory. A second reason why singing is so important in this respect is that music speaks directly to the heart and moves the will more powerfully than simple spoken words. It breaks down our defenses and motivates us to action. This fact is a double-edged sword. It means that music can motive for good or evil, giving us all the more reason to give careful attention to what we sing.

### **III. Do All in the Name of Christ**

Paul closes by simply saying whatever you say or do, do it in the name of Jesus with thanksgiving. This command gives us a good test. Can I do what I am doing or say what I am saying and truly preface it with the words: “In Jesus name”, and then give God thanks for giving me the opportunity to do or say it. Try that next time you are about to engage in a questionable activity, or say something that you are not sure you should say.

In conclusion I would simply call your attention to the centrality of Jesus Christ in this passage. We have seen all through this letter that he is central to everything. He is central to the life of the Church. The church is the place where the peace of Christ rules, the word of Christ instructs and the name of Christ is honored. Some day, as we have seen, he will have the preeminent place in the entire universe; for the present he must hold that position among his people, the church.