

Let Peace Rule

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Date: 26 April 2015

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[0:00] Turn in your Bibles, please, to Colossians 3. Colossians 3, and tonight we'll be reading verses 12 through 17.

! Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace, and be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Well, tonight we're going to look at Colossians 3, and verse 15.

When I began the week, my intention was to cover verses 15 through 17, but as I got going, I realized that that was just not going to be doable, and so what we're going to do is just look at verse 15 tonight.

[1:35] And as we begin, I want to ask just a question of, why should you care about what Colossians 3.15 says? And I have five reasons that you should pay attention.

And care about what it says. The first is, it's God's word to you. You know that, but it's good for us to think about that. It's God's word to you. This passage is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

We need taught. We need rebuked. We need corrected. So, like, a bone that needs put back in place.

We need to have our spiritual bones put back into place. We need corrected in our thoughts and our actions. We need trained, disciplined in righteousness. So this verse is a drill sergeant of the best kind putting us through our paces to turn us into the soldiers that God wants us to be, to be disciplined soldiers.

That's the first reason. It's God's word to you. Two, it's about living in a body. It's about living in a body, a spiritual body.

[2:49] And so it's about something that you do. It's not something that you do every now and then. It's something that you're doing right now. It's not something you do every so often.

It's something that we do together week by week. So it's about something that is relevant to you right now. Number three, why should you care about what this verse says?

Because a lot of churches are totally missing the reality of what this verse says. They are a church. They have a name. They have a sign out front.

They meet every week. But the reality is miles away from what Paul has pictured here, what God has for us. And we don't want to be like that.

We don't want to have a sign out front, a name, of being alive, of being a church. We want the reality of what God is talking about. We want the reality of what God has for us.

[3:48] Number four, the way grace fellowship is going to fall apart is going to be when a group or some significant majority loses what Paul is talking about here.

There might be other factors, but when we lose what we have here, we are going to lose everything. We're as good as done.

We can't afford to miss what Paul is telling us in this passage and expect to survive. Number five, your present joy and comfort depends on it.

Your comfort and joy of living in a body, living together. And we do get comfort and joy from that, don't we? Of being here, of meeting, of singing together, of hearing from each other, of conversing, of having real spiritual fellowship.

Well, the more we cherish and understand and obey Colossians 3.15, this place will be a place of blessing. To the degree that we do this, it will be a place of blessing.

[4:49] It will be a place of restoration and revival and oasis in the desert. And so the more we get this, the more comfortable and even enjoyable our Christian life will be.

Because we'll be living as God intended us to live. So much of the word of God does speak to that reality.

The degree of our joy in getting to heaven is very much dependent on how much we obey and trust along the way. So are you listening?

God is speaking. He has a helpful, useful word for us. A word about something that we do here.

About something that affects us. So he's coming to make us happy in the Christian life.

Blessed. He's seeking to preserve us. To give us grace. And so now he comes and he's ready to teach us. Are you listening? Are we ready?

[5:50] Now, what Paul has been saying is that when we come to the Christian life, something amazing happens.

We put on the new man. We take off the old man. We put off the old man. And we put on the new man. And what we saw was that is not just something that's personal to me.

That is a new humanity. It's not in Adam anymore. It's now with Christ at its head. And so those old divisions, those old things that separated us, those places where we argued, what we took pride in, what we boasted in.

What we said, this is my righteousness. I am good because of this. I'm Greek. I'm Jew. I'm black.

I'm white. I'm rich. I'm poor. In today's society, it's what's your sexuality even?

So all those things that we used to take pride in that we would say, this is my righteousness. This is why I'm a good person.

[6:54] Or this is why you should listen to me. Or this is why I'm important. That whole way of thinking, of looking to ourselves for our goodness and our righteousness, has been taken off, thrown away.

And we have now put on a new humanity where the perspective is totally different. Instead of looking inward as to why am I a good person?

Who am I? It's now outward. Now we put on a new humanity where Paul says Christ is all and is in all. So the center of gravity has gone away from me, and now it's on Jesus Christ.

And so now my eyes used to be here, but now I'm looking out there to him. Now, that's the humanity, this new humanity. It's not focused on me anymore.

It's now the center is Jesus Christ, and he is all. And he is in all. And so now Paul is going to tell us in verses, in these passages, what does that mean for us?

[7:57] And in verses 12 through 14, he's talked about how that transforms how we live with sinners who are weak, who are needy. Unfinished people, sinful saints.

But we could even say more than that, just sinners in general. How does it transform how we live with them? Now, in verse 15 through 17, he's going to talk about how that transforms how we do the Christian life together.

How we do body life, community together. And then in 18 through 4.1 there, you see how it's transforming work and family.

So this new humanity transforms every part of your life. And so now Paul is going to talk about what we do here. And he says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

Now, the word rule there is what we would say is an umpire, a referee. It wasn't so much a kingly idea as someone who is calling the shots in the Olympic Games.

[9:02] So he's judging the events. So the umpire who's making the ruling, he calls what's in and what's out. What's foul, what's fair. What you can do, what you can't do.

What's allowed, what's not allowed. In swimming, a judge decides if you're in the lane, you're following the rules, you're making your turns properly.

You understand what he's talking about. Now, that's what he's saying. Now, you get the idea. Now, who's the right umpire in the body of Christ?

Well, Paul says the peace of Christ. Let the peace of Christ take that position, that place of authority in calling what's in and what's out.

Now, Paul is not here talking about the feeling of peace in our hearts. A lot of people think that's what he's talking about, but that's not what the context bears, and that's not what he is talking

about.

[10:02] He's not talking about a subjective feeling of peace. Instead, he's talking about the reality of peace that Jesus Christ has established as he himself has brought us together in one body.

So, again, don't read this and understand it as he's talking about that feeling of peace that we have. We sang about it this morning, and that is real, but that's not what Paul is talking about here.

It's the peace that we have together in Christ, of this coming together that we have in him. And so, at the time of Jesus' birth, the Mediterranean was enjoying what was called the Pax Romana. The Roman peace. So, Rome had subdued all the nations around it, and now the nations, instead of fighting against each other, everywhere was peace.

The armies had established peace in the empire. And that's the kind of peace that Paul is talking about here. The end of conflict among people.

[11:03] Where we're not going to war against each other anymore. Instead, I look out and there's peace. Now, Paul talks about that kind of peace in Ephesians chapter 2.

And so, I want to turn back there. I've turned a few pages back to Ephesians chapter 2. And look at verse 14. And Paul very much helps us to understand what he's talking about in Colossians by what he says in Ephesians.

So, Ephesians chapter 2, verse 14. And I'm just going to read this paragraph here, 14 through 18. For he himself, speaking about Jesus Christ, he himself is our peace, who has made the two one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. And in this one body, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

[12:31] Now, that's the peace that Paul is talking about in Colossians. So, there used to be nothing but conflict between Jew and Greek. That dividing wall, that barrier of hostility.

So, here in Ephesians, he's talking about Jews and Greeks. But in Colossians, he's talking about all the different divisions and conflicts that divided us.

So, back in Colossians, he talks about, you know, now there's no longer Greek or Jews, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all. All those social, economic, ethnic divisions are now broken down.

And so, the divisions and conflicts that we used to have are gone, because Christ has established peace. Now, how did he do it?

Well, Ephesians says he did it by satisfying the law. By taking the law out of the way as a means of justifying ourselves. Of saying, I am a good person.

[13:32] Now, as long as there, the law was in place as a way that you could be justified, or as long as people thought of it that way, where my justification, my goodness before God, depends on who I am, and what I've done, on me, then I am going to fight with you.

That's the way it's going to be. I'm going to, I, because if I am good, because I am the way I am, and I do what I do, and you're different than I am, and you don't do the same things that I do, then I'm going to hate you when I see you.

Because, I'm going to argue with you. I'm going to argue with people who disagree with me. And the reason I'm going to do that is because my life is on the line.

My identity is on the line. My righteousness, my goodness is on the line. And if you are different, or if you disagree with me, then that is an implicit and unspoken condemnation of what, how I'm doing, of why I'm living.

That is why people take such offense to saying, you have sinned, or what you're doing here is wrong. Because it's a condemnation of them. And so, that's why people divide up into different groups, and they think, well, I am this way, therefore I am good, and if you're different from me, then obviously you're not good.

[14:58] So we both can't be good and right if we're different. Because my goodness depends on who I am and what I'm doing. Now that's life under the law.

It turns us in on ourselves, but in Christ, Christ is all. He's all. Everything that I used to put there, now Christ is there.

Everything that I was trusting in, and leaning on, my righteousness, my goodness, my identity, all that stuff that I was leaning on and looking to, now Christ has taken the place, and now Christ is all. And Paul says, he's in all. So he's all my righteousness. He's my all in all. And so now we can be different. We can be different, but that's okay, because we both have Christ.

So Christ is my righteousness. He's my standing. He's my true identity. My life is in him. And if that's true of you, then we're at peace.

[16:03] We're in agreement. And so we can have both differences and agreement. We can have things that separate us, that we're not like each other. And yet if we have Christ, then we have peace.

Now that's the peace that Paul is talking about here. It's that situation where we've all stopped looking in ourselves, and now we're looking at Jesus Christ. And now we're not fighting.

We're not self-righteous. We're not selfish. All of that has been swallowed up. And now what we see and what we put our hope in is him, is a person. And so now we've come together because we've come together around Jesus Christ.

So you live a very different life than I do. You have a different job. You have a different personality. You have different perspectives. You have different economics and social standings. We are all over the map here.

And yet because we each are looking at Jesus Christ, we have peace. We have unity. Now, let's go, if you're not back in Colossians, turn back to Colossians, and he says, let that peace, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

[17:20] And so let that peace, let that reality of what Jesus Christ has done for us, let that be the umpire. Let that peace tell you what's in and what's out, what's important and what's not important anymore, what's allowed and what's not allowed.

So what should you say and what shouldn't you say? What you should do and what you shouldn't do. That peace is absolutely important.

Jesus bought that peace with his own blood. He died in order to give it to us. He died in order to save us from all the fractures and the arguments and the fighting that we used to live in.

And so we have to feel the weight of that. It is not a gift that Jesus gave to us without cost. And so we have to feel how important and precious and different that is.

What the body of Christ enjoys and the potential of what it can enjoy is something that the world could only dream of. And they're fantasies they think about having something like this.

[18:32] So that peace is not something to be thrown away just like that. Now Paul is saying before you open your mouth you need to ask yourself will this keep the peace?

Will this help people to feel like they're belonging? Like they're a part of something? Will this be a means for the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts? Is it calling the shots?

Is it ruling? Is it governing what I say and what I do? Now someone will say but isn't truth important? What about truth? Don't we need to fight for the truth? Sure we do but who are we fighting against? Who are we fighting against? Some Christians only fight other Christians over the truth.

they don't have time for the world out there but they sure do have a lot of fight for the people that are Christians. So what about the truth?

[19:37] Paul says speak the truth in love. Not truth without love. Not love without truth. Both things are wrong. It says speak the truth in love.

And so if you're speaking the truth doesn't help the peace then maybe it doesn't need to be said. Something to think about. Maybe it's not as important as you're making it out to be.

And if you can't say it in such a way that keeps the peace that brings people together that furthers the experience of belonging to one Savior one Lord having one spirit then maybe you shouldn't say it.

Maybe you need to find a better way of saying it. Well in the latest controversy people have said that we can't have unity without a common confession and we have to agree down to the last word. And you know to some degree that is true. But the fact is is that our unity is in Christ. It's in Christ. The peace that we have is in Christ.

[20:51] And it's not because I said so. I'm not making it up by saying it. It's not some glib happy naive dream where someone can say oh I know that's true but in reality no this is reality.

This is what Jesus has done. This is the gospel. And our unity is not around a common confession so much as it's around a common Christ. And the unity we have is spiritual.

spiritual. It's spiritual with a capital S spirit. So Paul says make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one spirit. So make every effort. When we're letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts we are going to make every effort.

We're going to leave nothing untried. We're going to leave no mile unwalked. No means left out. Why? Because that unity that peace that we enjoy is not something that we've cobbled together of our own agreement.

[22:00] It's because of what Jesus Christ has done. It's spiritual. It's of the Holy Spirit. It's eternal. It's in God. We didn't establish it. God the Father God the Son and God the Holy Spirit established it.

And that's why that unity can't be downplayed. That peace just can't be thrown away because to downplay it is to diminish an aspect of the gospel of the good news of what God is doing for sinners. One pastor said I don't think we need to choose between God's people and God's truth. That's a false choice. And I agree with him. That's just another way of saying we need to feel the weight of the peace that Christ established and to have it actually affect the way we live together.

Paul says let it rule. That is a strong word. Let it rule. Let it tell you what is in and what's out. Before you say something before you do something stop and think and say will this honor Christ's purpose to bring us together as one?

Does this line up with the peace that we have in Jesus Christ? Or is this going to produce division and infections and fractures and strife and destruction?

[23:26] Now is there a place for standing up for the truth and for conviction? Absolutely. But the moment we have to turn the knife against ourselves we should do it with the same sadness and the pain and fear and grief that we would have if we were amputating our own leg.

Now we're slow to cut off our fingers aren't we? Or our hands. I heard about in India if you get bit by a cobra the people just chop the finger right off because that's the only way of saving it.

But those are extreme measures. Those are things that you do in a desperate situation. Now we're slow to cut off our own fingers and our hands we're slow to damage our own bodies.

But are we as slow in cutting off Christ's fingers and hands and legs? And I'm just saying we better be.

We better be because anything else is just a slap in the face of Christ. We're cavalier about him and about his bride. So let it rule in your hearts.

[24:45] Now in just in the last few minutes I want to give some practical thoughts practical application and the first and the probably most important is that Paul tells us this begins in our hearts.

It begins in our hearts. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Christian peace, Christian unity, Christ establishes it but it begins to get worked out right here in our hearts.

Now we've seen this in Sunday school the last few weeks that arguing and anger it doesn't come completely from out there. It comes from right here. It starts in my heart.

It starts with my desires. It starts with what I want. So why are there fights and quarrels among you? Isn't it from your desires that were within you? Proverbs 4.23 says above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.

You know where your life comes from? The path of your life. It starts here in your heart and so the proverb says guard it. So where does the gospel of peace, the reality that God has called us to live together in peace, where does that need to reach in order to do us good?

[26:04] It needs to get down here, where I'm not just saying, yeah, yeah, we have peace, but I'm feeling it. I'm convicted of it. It's a conviction in my heart that this is real.

So it starts and it stops in the heart, and it wins the day or it falls apart in my heart. So church splits, association splits, church strife, disagreements that end in fractures, they start right here.

I'm not diminishing any of the contributing factors, I'm not diminishing anything else, but I'm saying if we were all perfect here, then we could deal with differences out there. The weight of what Christ has done in bringing peace has to get down to my heart, and nothing else will do.

No rules, no policies, no procedures, no good ideas, no even shared confession. If we don't have it here, then we can do everything right down according to the book, whatever book that is, and it won't work.

So brothers and sisters, this is what I'm saying, look to your heart. Look to your heart. Is the peace of Christ ruling there? Are you saying, I want to foster that?

[27 : 25] I want to live in that. I want my friends, my brothers and sisters here to know that more and more because of how I behave in the church? Or is it all your own agenda?

Your own plans, your own sense of this is what's supposed to happen, or that shouldn't happen? No, Paul says, look to your hearts. Is the peace of Christ ruling there? What's going on there? Now the second practical point, how does this come to rule in our hearts? So that's where it needs to be. Now how does it get there? And the Bible's first answer is not something that we do or can do.

I think the Bible's first answer is a person. The person of the Holy Spirit. I quoted Ephesians. Paul says, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. The peace of Christ is the peace that we enjoy in the Spirit. And so in peace we all together share in the Spirit.

[28 : 29] We all have access to Him. And so it's a peace that we enjoy as we live according to the Spirit. Galatians 5, you don't have to turn there, but Paul talks about the acts of the flesh.

Things that come out of me, out of my sinful self, out of my desires, when my focus is on me and what I'm all about. And there's a lot of obvious and ugly sins there.

He talks about sexual immorality, he talks about debauchery, he talks about nasty things. In the middle of it he says factions.

Factions. When separate buying groups fighting against each other, that's comes from here. It's not a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work.

So you see Christians fighting against each other. It's not a sign that truth is winning. It's not a sign that the Spirit is at work. It's a sign that we are living by the flesh.

[29 : 33] That we're thinking about what I want more than what Christ wants. And it's not what he wants is not governing what I say and how I say it. And I'm not living by the Spirit.

Because he goes on to tell us what comes out when people are living by the Spirit. Well the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace.

Now I just want to say that Christian peace we can do all sorts of practical things to help it. And we do need to have a common confession and good policies and good procedures and things like that. There's a place for all of that. But Christian peace doesn't come first from the best laid plans of mice and men. It comes from a totally different other direction.

It comes from the Holy Spirit working in my heart convincing me of the truth of the gospel. It comes to us through the Holy Spirit bringing Jesus Christ to me and making me feel that and understand it and become convicted of it.

[30 : 41] You can read Philippians chapter two. He talks about if there's any encouragement and believing all these things that you've enjoyed then be like-minded. And then he goes to what Jesus Christ has done.

Though he was God he died. Now how does that come into my life and actually change me?

It's through the person of the Holy Spirit. So the gospel makes the gospel so real that it makes the peace of God, the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

So we begin to feel it. We begin to operate thinking I want to keep that peace. So what do we have to do? We need to pray for the Holy Spirit to come and work in our lives.

We can't do it on our own. We need his help. And so the answer is desperate prayer. Prayer. prayer. We need him to open our eyes. We need him to show us Christ.

[31 : 43] We need us to feel the weight of the gospel. We need him to powerfully assert himself in our midst. And so if we have peace now, and I think to a great degree we do, and I'm so thankful for it, if we have peace now, it's because of the Holy Spirit.

And if we will have peace in the future, it will be because of him. So let's not grieve him. let's earnestly seek him.

Let's earnestly and carefully live with him. He's here to give the blessing of peace, but we can't afford to grieve him away. now, if we don't have him, we're doomed.

If he withdraws, the friction will be so great that we will blow this place up. And instead of a sanctuary, this place will become an arena where we come to fight each other.

And so don't let that happen, Grace Fellowship Church. Don't let that happen here. Well, where does that peace come from? It comes by the Spirit, and it flows from the cross.

[32 : 58] So, look at Christ as he's hung on the cross. And he's facing his father's anger for us in our place.

He's there because we couldn't live up to God's standard. God's God's God's best things were not good enough. And the cross shows us something.

It shows us that we don't have anything to boast in and of ourselves. We don't have anything personal to hold on to or defend that is so important that it's worth condemning my brother or sister. And so the cross piles all that we've done, all of our best things, it piles it all up and it says it's not good enough. It's not good enough. It's not weighty enough, it's not worth enough.

And so the spirit of, or the son of God's death shows us that personally we don't have anything worth fighting and killing for. My name, what I've done, who I am.

[34 : 09] But what we couldn't do, Christ did for us. And so that spirit of me, me, me, mine, mine, mine, it died when Christ died for you.

So he died establishing peace, that's how important he thought it, that's the length that he went to achieve it. So we have to feel the weight of it, and we have to guard it, and we have to appreciate it.

So let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, peace. Since as members of one body, you were called to peace. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, please teach us your own heart.

Teach us your own kindness and mercy and slowness to anger with your truth.

Teach us how to hold the truth. Teach us how to suffer for the truth's sake and to be patient and long suffering just as you are.

[35 : 27] Teach us to walk in peace with our brothers and our sisters, to forgive as the Lord forgave us, to suffer and to bear just as you bear with us.

We thank you for your great patience. Long, long we went astray, going our own way, blind to you and careless, and it was only your grace that called us and only your grace that saved us.

Will you remind us of that again? And then let that so work in us that we would be peacemakers ourselves.

Holy Spirit, please come and write these things in our heart and teach us what it looks like in day-to-day life and day-to-day practice here. Help us to guard the truth and love the truth, but help us to love it in such a way that we also love our brothers and sisters.

And I just pray that you would honor yourself in our midst, protect us from ourselves. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.