

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 3:12-17

The Christian's Experience – A Putting On – The Peace of Christ (3:15)

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Over the past few weeks we have considered with great tenacity the need for the believer to live according to his position. Because we have been raised with Christ to newness of life toward God; because we have died with Christ and our lives are considered hidden with Christ; we are because of these things to think, act and live differently. We are to consider the members of our earthy body as dead to sinful vices; we are to put off the ways of this world and put on Christlikeness; compassion, kindness, gentleness, humility, loving patience, forgiveness and love. The point: *Our position in Christ is to affect our practice for Christ.* If we are "in Christ" our lives should be increasingly reflecting Christ character. When we evaluate our lives and ask the question, do I reflect more of Christ's character today than I did last week, or last month, or last year, the answer ought to be; yes, I am progressing in Christlikeness.

Now, there is a term for such a progression in the believer's life; a word that summarizes well the entirety of Colossians 3 and yet it is not found in our text at all. That term is simply "sanctification" – [expanding idea] the process by which the believer's old nature [old habits, old actions, old thinking] is systematically put off while his new nature is systematically being put on. It is an exchanging of that which is old and replacing it with that which is new. Sanctification is the putting off of those things that make us look and act like the world and putting on those things that make us look and act more and more like Jesus Christ. Just as a newborn infant grows and matures and progresses toward adulthood; thus expressing his position as being born in the likeness of man, the babe in Christ is to grow and mature and progress in Christlikeness, thus expressing the reality of his position as being born again, in the likeness of the Son of God. And again, the expression, the demonstration, the practically living out of the believer's position in Christ is a process called, sanctification – the becoming more and more like Christ in holiness of conduct and character.

To some of you, sanctification sounds like old news; something you have heard a hundred times; yet this progressive sanctification is to be wondrous and new every morning, a mountain whose peak we are still striving after. For some of you, the idea of actually shedding off more and more of this world's attitudes and actions seems like a mountain too difficult to climb; yet I say to you, climb that mountain with me. And there in lies the point of our text. As we look at what it means to become more and more like Christ, I would have you notice that the context in which we are to experience this sanctification is not merely as individuals; and not as the result of being married or having children or of remaining single; this process of becoming more and more like Christ finds as its primary place of learning and practicing in the context of the local church. You and I, because we have been raised with Christ, are to work on, practice, live out and express to one another our increasing sanctification. If you cannot see me becoming more like Christ then we are not connected as we ought to be in the body of Christ. If no one else can see your becoming more and more like Christ, then you are not properly connected to the body of Christ.

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If I could say it this way, sanctification is a family matter; but not the family that might first come to mind. Our living out of Christlikeness involves the whole family of believers in a local church. While we are saved individually; we are not saved in isolation from one another. While we are sanctified individually; we are not sanctified in isolation from one another. If we are to become like Christ, it must be within the context of your relationships with others in the local church. Beloved, let us remember that by God's own choosing, He has begun this sanctification process in a collective community called the body of Christ. We see this, jumping ahead for a moment, in our text where we read, "**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.**" And except in very rare situations, the believer's progress in becoming like Christ is always in the company of other Christians, giving both others help and guidance as well as receive such help and guidance.

This is what we find in the very language used by the Apostle Paul in our text. As we strive to put off the old man and its vices; we are exhorted to corporately, that is together, walking side by side, arm in arm; to live out a life of spiritual progress. But the question we need to answer is this, "*how do we know if we are making progress as a church in such things?*" How is this sanctification to be measured? Beloved, it is measured by our increasing demonstrations of Christlikeness; our sanctification, our becoming less and less governed by the cares and passions of the world and more and more by Christ. This becomes the evidence that we are under new management; that we live by a set of rules quite in contrast to those of the world.

In addition then to the putting on of the eight qualities of Christ as listed in Colossians 3:12-14, to become more and more like Christ, to progress in our sanctification, is to strive also after three provisions of Christ as found in verses 15-17. These three provisions are: 1) the **peace** of Christ; 2) the **word** of Christ; and 3) the **name** of Christ. Let us begin this morning by examining the first of these possessions, the peace of Christ and note how it aids us in our pursuit of Christlikeness.

I. Let the peace of Christ rule (3:15)

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Our text begins with a call – an expectation that we submit ourselves to the **peace of Christ**. The word "peace" is extraordinarily common both OT and NT. In the OT "peace" speaks the personal wholeness or wellness of ones being. To say to some one "Shalom" in Hebrew is the wishing of health and good relationship to the other person. And so, to have "peace" or "shalom" with God is to be rightly related to God spiritually; to be in a good relationship with God. In Psalm 85:6 we read that God Himself speaks peace to His people; that is, He is the granter of peace; the establisher of what is necessary to be right with God. In the NT "peace" takes this idea of "shalom" and expands upon it. We capture some of this here in our text. Let us consider at least two things we are to be understood about "peace" from our text; both its substance and its scope; that is what it is and what it does.

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A. The Substance of Peace

First, the substance of "the peace of Christ." What are we to learn from this phrase? In the New Testament is it more common to read of "the peace of God" (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2). When the "peace of God" is used, it generally speaks of "peace" coming from or originating from God.

Peace with God comes from Christ

And so, like that, we are to see here that peace, true peace comes from or originates with Christ. To say it in a phrase, peace with God come from Christ. If we take this phrase, **the peace of Christ**, in the context of the letter to the Colossians, we would say that this is the peace that Christ has granted to believers on the basis of His sufficient redemptive work on the cross for us. Do you want to know what the "peace of Christ" looks like? Paul is summarizing here in Colossians 3:15 what he has already communicated to his reading back in Colossians 1:19-22. Let's read it and marvel at the "peace" that comes to us by the work of Christ on the cross:

19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile [bring together two or more formerly separated persons] all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you [made peace between you and God the Father] in His fleshly body through death, in order [for the purpose] to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach —

I so dislike being at odds with or in a broken relationship with another person. You know what I am talking about; the stress, the strain, the disunity, the isolation, the potential alienation; the cool tolerance that does not reflect the love of Christ but rather the mere idea of putting up with someone out of necessity rather than a bearing with someone out of a godly love for them. Such a feeling is a mere drop of water in the vast ocean of our broken relationship with God. According to Romans 1:18, the very wrath of God against unbelievers is even now, in its mildest forms, being revealed from heaven. But the day is coming when God's wrath will be fully poured out on all who have remained alienated, hosting in mind and engaged in evil deeds because of their refusal to bow the knee to Jesus as Lord and to cry out to Jesus as Savior knowing that unless He died for them; that unless He bore their sin on that cross, they will eternally perish. To be in such a state is to be a war with God. Yet Colossians 1:19-22 and 3:15 tell us that the believer is not in this state; Jesus is the granter of peace between God and man. We cannot create this peace. It is Christ who takes the wild-beast heart out of us and puts a new heart within us.

Peace with one another comes from Christ

The idea of peace with God through Christ however extends not only to our right and healthy relationship with God, but also is to be reflected in our relationships to one another in the body of Christ. Look with me at Ephesians 2:14-16:

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14 For He Himself [Jesus Christ] is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

In Christ, we not only have peace with God, but also, by default, are to experience peace with one another. No more hostilities between Jew and Gentiles, men and women, slave and free. Beloved, the point is this; because we are complete in Christ and Christ is the fullness of deity in bodily form, we, who are in Christ, are well, right, and in healthy relationship with God and therefore are to be in healthy relationship to one another. The pursuit of Christlikeness begins with experiencing perfect peace, first with Christ and then with all people. What are the offences of others against us as compared with those which God has forgiven? Beloved, what can others do to us at the worst that we should fear or long to retaliate against them? Jesus came to grant to us "Peace on earth and good-will toward men." And while most of the world ignores that, it is the inherited possession of every believer.

When we think about this "**peace of Christ**" we are to immediately remember Christ's Person. At Christmastime we sing of Jesus being "**the Prince of peace**" borrowing from Isaiah 9:6. Jesus is the Prince of "shalom". We remember that it is Jesus who broke the bonds of our spiritual slavery and brought us near to God. We remember that it is Jesus who reconciles us to God through His cross; but He is also the one who reconciles Jews and Gentiles, black and white, rich and poor, white-collar and blue-collar; old and young; there is no distinction in Christ; we are one in Christ; we are all at peace with Christ. When I look at this body of believers and I stop to think from all the different places we come; from all the different experiences we have had, how is it that we would ever come together to serve God and minister to one another. It is because Jesus, our Prince of peace, has brought us together. To possess the "**peace of Christ**" is to be whole or full in Christ.

Peace with God come from Christ making us right with God

But, as I have alluded to already, there is another aspect of what it means to possess the "**peace of Christ.**" To possess this peace, is to be right with God. And what do we call being right with God. We call it "*justification.*" How is it that we are declared right with God? We are declared right by faith, by believing that by the accomplishment of Jesus in bearing the judgment of God against us, that we now are at peace with God. As our text implies, this peace is a gift from and through Christ. Let us look at Romans 5:1, I know you are familiar with this, but notice the connection between being right with God (justified) and the subsequent peace with God.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

To have peace with God is to no longer be consider an enemy of God, but rather His child. To have peace with God is to no longer be under the wrathful judgment of God but rather under His blessing and care. Beloved, this peace with God is the result of our having or possessing the peace of Christ.

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Now, if you are listening carefully to what I am saying, you will note that once again we have a statement of position. If we are in Christ, we possess this peace of Christ and therefore are at peace with God. But the command of our text is not the pursuit of a position. We are not being asked to pursue, or to work to gain the peace of Christ. This is already our possession if we are in Christ. We are not called to manufacture or create peace; rather, the pursuit we are called to here is to allow this possession of peace; this position of peace; to affect your practice. Read the text with me again as we read in Colossians 3:15; **"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts..."** This **"peace of Christ"** is to what? It is to **"rule in your hearts."** In other words, we are to purposely consider that because we have the peace of Christ – this right and healthy relationship with God the Father and with one another, this peace is to affect all of our thoughts and actions. It is to affect our attitudes our actions and even how we make our every decision. Everything we do, no matter how seemingly small or trivial, is to be rooted in the reality that we possess the peace of Christ. This is the substance of peace; let us consider the scope of peace.

B. The Scope of Peace

Since we have this peace of Christ, we are to see it **"rule in [our] hearts."** The command **"rule"** here means to judge, to preside over; to be in charge or in control. The word "rule" can be pictured as an umpire, one who is making the decisions concerning balls and strikes; between being safe and being out. I like how the Complete Jewish Bible rendered this verse saying, Let the peace of Christ "be your hearts decision maker." Everything is to be judged and determined in light of your position in Christ. I love how Charles Spurgeon illustrates the idea here:

The figure is that of the umpire or arbitrator at the games who, looking down on the arena, watches that the combatants strive lawfully, and adjudges the prize. The peace of Christ, then, is to sit enthroned as umpire in the heart; or if we might give a mediaeval instead of a classical shape to the figure, that fair sovereign, Peace, is to be Queen of the Tournament, and her "eyes rain influence and adjudge the prize." When contending impulses and reasons distract and seem to pull us in opposite directions, let her settle which is to prevail. We may make a rude test of good and evil by their effects on our inward repose. Whatever mars our tranquility, ruffling the surface so that Christ's image is no longer visible, is to be avoided. That stillness of spirit is very sensitive, and shrinks away at the presence of an evil thing. Let it be for us what the barometer is to the sailor, and if it sinks let us be sure that a storm is at hand. There is nothing so precious that it is worthwhile to lose the peace of Christ for the sake of it.

This is the scope of peace – it is to extend to everything we do; it is to be the governor of our experience, particularly with one another. Beloved, by the Holy Spirit, we have been called to experience, to put on this peace in the body of Christ. Notice what the rest of the verse tells us **"to which indeed you were called in one body."** In other words, it is the peace of Christ that is to characterize our lives together as Christians. The church is to be recognized in a world of chaos by its ability to experience and demonstrate the peace, the wholeness, the fullness of Christ in her midst.

The church is to be unique when compared to the world. Because we possess the **peace of Christ**, we should not look like anything else that can be found in the world. This is why

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we painstakingly work our way through the word of God. Our primary purpose here is not to entertain the masses with music, drama, story-telling and the like. We are here to know and experience the depth and greatness of our God. The world knows how to entertain, but the church is to be about edification; the building up of faith. The world knows how to amuse itself; but the church is to be about adoring God for who He really is as revealed in the Book. The church is to be known for its being ruled, umpired, and controlled by the peace of Christ, or as one has described it, “that calm of mind which is not ruffled by adversity, overclouded by sin or a remorseful conscience, or disturbed by the fear and the approval of death” [quoted by Curtis Vaughan, Colossians: A Study Guide Commentary, 101].

The peace of Christ is to govern all that we do. What health is to a physical body, the peace of Christ is to the spiritual body. It is the demonstration of balance and order. As we gather from week to week and even day to day, where the peace of Christ governs, there worries, fears, and anxieties that can crush others will flee from the believers. When two or more people who are resting in Jesus Christ come together, even if there is chaos all around them, yet you find them resting in the perfect peace of Christ.

If you want to grow in Christlikeness; if you want to experience more of the life of Christ, then do you pursue this call to **“let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body”**? How do you know? Notice that little tag at the end of verse 15. For if you are allowing the peace of Christ to rule in the hearts and minds of the congregation, then the inevitable result is that you will have a thankful heart. You will be constantly thanking God for the people and activities of the church. As one preacher of old said, “As physicians judge of the condition of men’s hearts by the pulse that beats in their arms and not by the words that proceed from their mouths; so we may judge of the thankfulness of men by their lives rather than by their professions.”

If you are not thanking God for the people and activities of the church, then you are not pursuing the call to let the peace of Christ rule and are therefore not on the full road to Christlikeness. But someone may say, “but I am not being ministered to; or my needs are not being met.” Are you complete in Christ? Are you well with God because of Christ? Then you should have the mind of Christ and seek to meet the needs of others; that is what the peace of Christ produces, the ability to minister to others compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, loving tolerance and forgiveness. Then we become more thankful that God uses us to minister to others rather than complaining about not being ministered to. We can be thankful, knowing that this thankfulness arises out of the reality that we are living in the grace of God and expressing the grace of God to others. And this then is living in light of the possession of the peace of Christ. Beloved, will you **“let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body”**?

Soli Deo Gloria

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