

The Reign of Peace

Colossians 3:15

21/05/2023

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Let's look at Colossians 3, and particularly Colossians 3:15 is where our attention will be this morning. But I would like to read verses 12 through to verse number 17:

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

This section of Paul's epistle has been very much geared towards helping us understand our place in the body of Jesus Christ. This new man belongs to a new community, and in this new community, he has certain responsibilities that affect the way he lives in his relationship to those who are in the same community. He's called upon to put to death sins of lust (verse number 5). In verse number 8, he's called not only to put to death, but to put off, and he's to put off anger and put off those sins that are connected with anger.

But it's not only that he's meant to put off certain things, but God expects us also in the church of Jesus Christ, in our lives, to put on love. That love which is manifested in verse number 12 in these wonderful qualities of tender mercy, of humility, of kindness, of meekness, of longsuffering. A kind of love that bears with one another, a kind of love that forgives one another, a kind of love that when anyone has a complaint against another, they forgive even as Christ has forgiven us.

And we are to do this because we have been forgiven and loved by God when we were unlovable. And therefore, he says, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on love." You see, love is the bond of perfection.

It's the glue that binds the church and brings it to maturity. And Paul is concerned that God's people will be a people that have this love clothed upon, clothed upon with this love and reflected in their life with one another.

But now, in verse number 15, Paul goes on to show that this love should affect the peace that is in the life of the church. You see, that love which we are to put on should lead to peace. In fact, the fruit of love in the church should be the result of peace in the church. And Paul was concerned that the church of Jesus Christ would have the reign and rule of peace over it, that it would not be a church filled with wars, it would not be a church filled with fighting or backbiting, but rather a church that is filled with peace. And Paul, in this passage, is concerned that God's peace would be in God's church. And so, he speaks to us of the reign of peace.

Now, peace is so important. Peace is this tranquility that exists in the life of the church amongst the people of God, this peace of God which we'll look at, but it's so important for the growth and for the effectiveness of the church in the world.

The city of Rome, or should I say the Roman Empire, from about 20 BC till about 180 AD, had what historians called the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. It was a period of time in the Roman Empire where the Roman government would secure peace for its citizens. It was a time where there was not really much internal warfare that was going on in the city and in the empire of Rome. Rome basically had relative tranquility within its empire during that time, and the government promised that there would be safety and that people could live out their occupations and their life with relative peace within the land. They sought to guarantee security and they sought to guarantee law and order in the Roman Empire.

Now when we look through history, that was the time in which the Roman Empire expanded, had a lot of infrastructure built, was economically booming, and trade was flourishing during that time. It obviously ended up in the expansion and the great building up of Rome.

What Paul is concerned about is not about the Pax Romana per se; he's concerned about the Pax Christiana. He's concerned about the peace of Christianity. He's concerned about the tranquility that should exist within the body of Christ because if there is no tranquility, if there is no peace within the assemblies of God, in the assemblies of Jesus Christ, he knew and understood, as well as we know and understand, that it will affect the effectiveness of the church in each other's lives, in the edification of the church, and in its reaching out obviously to the lost.

Jesus supports this when He says, "No kingdom divided against itself shall stand." You see, we may have war like Rome did during that time with enemies, but what Paul was concerned about, and what Rome was concerned about, is internal war because internal war weakens the church of God and affects its warfare without. And Paul is trying to encourage the church here to be a church that is ruled by peace, a church that has this peaceful tranquility that exists within its life and within its walls.

And so, what is this peace of God here in verse number 15? He says to us here, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you also were called in one body, and be thankful." Well, what is this peace of God?

Now, I'm going to give you two views as to what the peace of God people think the peace of God is and give you the reason why I think it is the second view. Some people have suggested that the peace of God in this passage was the peace that was promised by Christ. You see, and this is a true peace. When Christ was about to leave His disciples, He said, "Peace I give you, peace I leave you, not as the world gives, give it I unto you. So do not let your hearts be troubled, do not let them be afraid." And so many have thought that this peace refers to, even as Paul refers to in Philippians 4:7, that peace of God which passes understanding that keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And the argument here is that Paul was desirous that the peace of God would be in their hearts, that they would know the presence of God's peace in such a way that that peace will guide them in their decisions, will guide them in their life together as a Christian community. Now, I don't want to say that there's no truth to that. There are other scriptures and those that I shared with you that actually mean those very things that I have told you. I just don't believe that that's what's referred to in this passage here.

The other view is the peace of reconciliation. Now, obviously, there's some overlap here, but it's not entirely overlap. If the peace of the calm serenity of soul is to rule our hearts and minds, meaning by our obedience that peace increases and by disobedience that peace decreases, then that's a personal inner subjective experience that Paul is saying, "Let it rule your heart in the way you live. So be sensitive to it." Which I said is true, but I don't think it's referred to in this passage.

The peace of reconciliation is different. And the peace of reconciliation is the gospel's peace, the peace that God purchased to reconcile us to God. The war that existed between God and man, between man and man, which obviously will result in not having inner peace, I understand that. But this principle of peace, this truth of peace, this truth of reconciliation, Paul is saying here that let that peace rule the church of God.

The peace that was purchased by the blood of Christ in Colossians 1:20, if you want to read that together with me. Colossians 1:20 says, "And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." This is the peace which is the peace of reconciliation, which was purchased through the blood of Jesus Christ upon the cross.

And I believe that in this passage, Paul is saying that God wants this peace that we have experienced in reconciliation to be the peace that keeps the body of Jesus Christ together as one, bond and reconciled together in one body. And the reason why I believe this is because the context is referring to this community. Remember in verse number 11 of this passage, it says clearly here that in this community there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Paul has been trying to help them understand that their old Adamic distinctions that they had before they came to Christ are not to be brought into their relationship with one another in Jesus Christ. They are to live in peace. They are to not let those things rule their behavior, but rather let Christ, who is all and in all, rule their lives and their conduct.

And in verse number 12 and verse number 14, when he talks about putting on love, he wants them to live in a way of peace. That love that you put on is meant to be marked by humility, marked by this meekness, and marked by this patience and marked by this conduct whereby we forgive one another, we bear with one another. And in verse number 13, as I said, forgive and bearing one another, that's part of that one another aspect in the community.

And then finally, I think for me, the nail in the coffin is verse 15 itself. It says, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts," and then it says, "to which also you were called in one body." So he's saying that this peace you were called to, and you were called to this peace in one body.

So Paul is concerned not necessarily in this text for the inner peace that exists within our soul in the midst of war and warfare, as many of God's people do and have experienced, even when being burnt at the stake, per se. But I think what he's concerned about is the peace and tranquility that should exist within the church, in our relationships one to another, in how we are to relate and respond to one another because we have been called to peace, not a personal peace alone, but called to peace in one body. It concerns the body of Jesus Christ.

Now this peace is in verse number 15 said to be, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." It's meant to be in all of our hearts, and it's meant to be ruling in our hearts. And this peace is the peace of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I want us to understand this, that our Christianity is a Christianity of peace. What I mean by that is this: that our gospel is set in scripture to be a gospel of peace. Not only is it said to be a gospel of peace, but it's also said to be God, the God that we serve, is said to be a God of peace.

And the Savior who saved us is said to be the Prince of Peace. And the gospel that we preach is called the gospel of peace. And the kingdom that we are part of is called the kingdom of peace, for the kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but in righteousness, in peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. And so this kingdom that is in the kingdom of peace, to which we belong, is marked by a king who is the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus.

As it says of Him in Isaiah 9:7, "Of the increase of His government and of His peace there will be no end." He is the Prince of Peace whose kingdom is a kingdom of peace, who will usher in everlasting peace. The Bible teaches us that, in fact, in the consummation of His kingdom, in the final day, all will be peace. The peace of God on full display, manifested throughout the entire creation. God at peace with man, man at peace with God, man at peace with man, and the creation at peace with one another.

In fact, in Isaiah 65, it says that the lion will eat grass like an ox. It even says to us in that passage that the wolf and the lamb shall feed together. What's the point? The point is when Christ comes in His kingdom and the consummation of His kingdom arises, all shall be peace. As it says in Colossians 1:20, "He will reconcile all things to Himself, that is in heaven and that is on earth."

The Bible teaches us that Christianity and the gospel have this concept very deeply rooted in its message: a message of peace. Man, who is at war with God in the kingdom of darkness, needs to come to be at peace with God. The God who made them, who man has now warred against, now pursues men in reconciling peace to bring them into a relationship of peace with Himself.

The Bible teaches that those who are of the world are people that are not of peace. In fact, they do not have peace. Their kingdom is a kingdom of darkness, and the Bible teaches us that destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known. The Bible teaches us also that the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

The unbelieving world is not at peace; they're at war – war with God, war with one another, war within their communities. They don't know how to live in peace because they are ruled by lust, anger, and pride; they're not ruled by love. They do not have the new man in which they can put on love and live in true humility before God. And so they're troubled.

But what do they do? The unbelieving world does not admit the fact that we are at war with one another and that we don't have peace. They heap to themselves teachers having itching ears that say, as they said in the day of Jeremiah, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. You see, the children of Israel in their apostasy were away from God, but they didn't want to admit it. They didn't want to believe it. And so when the prophet Jeremiah said, "Judgment is coming, judgment is coming, you are not reconciled to God," what did they say? "We don't want Jeremiah. We don't want his message." Who did they want? The prophets that said, "No, no, there's peace around the corner, peace."

But Jeremiah said, "God said there is no peace, a false peace, a false sense of peace, convincing themselves that they are not in danger of the judgment of God." But when we come with the gospel of truth, we come preaching to them peace. And when we come preaching to them peace, they say, "We have peace." And we say, "No, you don't have peace. In fact, you are at war with God, and God is at war with you, and you need reconciliation."

You see, because sin entered into the world, it disrupted the peace that God had created at the beginning. And man has been led and moved by sin, and man has had problems with one another and cannot live with one another and cannot cohabit with one another in a way that is reflective of true peace. And until a man or a woman comes to understand God's reconciling peace and until they come to understand the Prince and know the Prince of Peace, they will never know how to live in peace with one another. The old Adamic distinctions will continue to remain: the uncircumcised and the circumcised, the bond and the free, the barbarian, the Scythian, the Jew, and the Greek will continue to war and war and war and war and war until God comes and destroys the wicked and sets up a reign of peace forevermore.

But as a sinner bows in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, they experience reconciling peace. They are brought into a relationship with God, and therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). You see, my friend, Jesus Christ sent His Son into the world to bring peace, reconciliation. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them (2 Corinthians 5:19). And it's so important for us to recognize that because we who have tasted the reconciliation of God need

to realize that we are to be a people of peace.

In verse 15, Paul says, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15). The word "rule" means to sit or to be an umpire or to sit as an umpire. It actually has its usage outside of the New Testament in reference to athletic contests. And obviously, as the athletes would either wrestle or box or run, there was a judge, there was an umpire that would sit, as it were, overseeing the contest, ruling the contest, blowing the whistle when there's foul play, stopping the game, disqualifying certain actions, certain behaviors, approving certain actions, approving certain behaviors.

And so, the umpire would sit there, and he would watch, and he would rule the game by watching the athletes as they're running their race or in their contest to make sure that they were running according to his rule. And what Paul is simply saying here in this passage is, "Let God's peace, let the peace of God, the peace of reconciliation that God has purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ, let that truth reign. Let it sit as umpire in the church of God. Let the peace of God call out foul plays amongst the church. Let it watch over the church. Let it rule the church. Let it judge the actions and the behavior of God's people in the life of the church. Let the peace of God sit as judge. Let it be our umpire. In fact, he commands us to make it our umpire."

It was Lightfoot who said this: "Whenever there is a conflict of motives or impulses or reasons, the peace of Christ must step in and decide which is to prevail." Do you get the image here? Here is an umpire that is watching and observing the behavior and actions. And what Paul is saying, "Let him rule. Let His word be final, as it were. Let His word guide. Let His word lead the actions. Let His word pull up the next response, the ways, the attitudes, whatever it may be that causes conflicts, troubles in the life of the Christian church." And he says this in verse 15, "Because we have been called to this peace" (Colossians 3:15). So in salvation, we've been called to live a life of peace and to be a people of reconciliation. And he says, you've been called to this. This is not an option. This is not something that the Christian church can decide on what they want for this. This is the commandment of God that the Christian people be a people that live in peace and harmony and in tranquility with one another. And should I say, even as much as lies in them, to live at peace with all men in the world. This is not something that is optional.

In 1 Corinthians 7:15, even in the context of an unbelieving spouse leaving a believing spouse, Paul says, "Hey, God has called you to peace. There's not much you can do about that. As sad as it may be, God has called you to peace. Don't make war. Show that you are a person of peace, a person that delights in reconciliation, a person that is humble and waiting and willing

to receive the unbeliever that's departed. Show that love, that peace, that you are committed to peace in your relationship even though they may be committed to war."

We have been called to peace, in so much that Jesus Himself says in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." If there is ever a title that has so much value, it is that one. Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God, that we should be called the sons of God. And you know what Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God."

The people of God are to be marked by the peace of God, by the rule of peace, and the reign of peace in their lives. And Paul goes on, not only to say that the kingdom of God is peace in Romans 14, but he said, "Let us pursue the things which make for peace." God wants peace in His church. God delights in peace in His community. God delights in peace in our relationships with one another.

And so, in verse number 15, Paul explains to us how we can keep the peace, how we can preserve the peace that we've been called to. He says in verse number 15, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you were also called in one body; and be thankful." And be thankful. The word "thankful" is the present middle imperative. It simply means, you yourself be constantly thankful. Be a person marked by thankfulness. Live in the spirit of thankfulness. Live in a state of thankfulness.

You know, the internal wars that existed within the nation of Israel, the internal wars which resulted in God's judgment on the nation, was the result of their discontentment. It was of their bitterness. It was of their pride. It was of the fact that they had lost sight of thankfulness. They were a people that were murmuring against God. They were murmuring and backbiting against God. You see, they could not see the wilderness with the eyes of thankfulness. They looked at the wilderness and questioned all the mercies of God. They looked at their troubled season of life and questioned all the things that had happened to them, saying, "Is this really been of God? In fact, things were better back in Egypt."

And the things that God had so graciously given to them, think about those things. He furnished a table for them in the wilderness; manna fell from heaven for them to eat day by day. Water gushed out from rocks miraculously so that they could drink fresh streams of water. God led them through the wilderness, and He said, "Your shoes did not wear out. Your clothes did not wear out." God had looked after them; He cared for them. Not only that, He saved them. He brought them out of Egypt with a mighty

hand, opening the Red Sea, seeing the glories of God before them.

More than that, God gave them His presence, His Shekinah glory, manifest over the tabernacle, the cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to guide them, to lead them. God was amongst them; God was good to them. God even gave them a leader that was considered the meekest man in all the earth. I mean, you couldn't be, in some respects, in a better situation. God has done so much for them; God has blessed them.

But it depends on which side of the coin you look at. When you've been eating manna from God, and it passes three weeks, it's not as exciting anymore to see it fall from heaven. Water gushing out of rocks, blessings of God, the bestowment of God's grace in your life, the salvation of God loses its beauty. Beauty—I mean, it never loses its beauty, but your eyes become dim, doesn't it? Dim to the realities of the blessings and the mercies of God that He has bestowed upon us in Christ Jesus.

And so, what did they do? Well, they slandered. They said they despised the very things that God gave them, the very things. They despised the manna; they despised the water; they despised the food. They said, "We want leeks; we want onions; we want garlic. Hey, let's get a leader who's going to take us back all the way to Egypt." They despised God's servant; they despised everything that God had graciously given to them. And what did God do? He overthrew them in the wilderness. Why? Because of unthankfulness. They lost sight of the mercies of God; they did not live in the spirit of thankfulness.

And Paul says to us, as God says to them, "Hey, don't do that. Don't do that. Be thankful. Preserve peace in the Christian community by living in a way that's thankful." Yes, I know your brother and your sister are frustrating, and what they do just gets on your nerves. But live in peace, put on love, be humble. Realize that you are a product of the mercy of God, and they are a product of the mercy of God. See the trouble that they may bring into your life through the eyes of thankfulness as an opportunity to pray, to help, to see God do a work in their lives. Don't look at them as a burden or as a hindrance; don't look at one another as a problem. Live in peace; be thankful.

It's so easy for us to lose sight of that, isn't it? When we first come to Jesus Christ and we find other Christians, they're the only people we want to hang out with. We want to see them every day; we want to talk to them; we want to pray with them; we want to read Scripture together; we want to be in church. And then, all of a sudden, as the years go on, we find out, "Hey, these guys aren't perfect after all." Look in the mirror, right? Who is?

And then we become unthankful, and we start to question. We start to wonder. We start to look at all the things that are bad in them, and we forget the fact that they are a product of mercy, just like we are.

And Paul's saying, just be thankful. Be thankful that you have someone that you can call brother. Be thankful that you have someone you can call sister. Be thankful and live in peace. You see, thankfulness promotes peace, and thankfulness carries on peace. And you can know whether or not you're going to be a person of war or soon going to enter into a war by the level of thankfulness that currently exists within your heart.

If you find yourself mumbling and complaining and murmuring, and in your prayer life, it's more filled with complaint than it is of thanksgiving and praise and adoration toward God, get ready. War is just around the corner for you. Because as we meditate on the things that we lack more than the things that we have, we become a people that are unthankful and are ready to fight and war because you lust and you have not, and so you war.

And Paul's saying, don't do that. Be a people that live in the spirit of thankfulness. Be a people that live for the glory of God and for the unity of the community which God has placed you in.

And in closing, my friend, let me just encourage you with a few thoughts to think upon, a few questions to ask ourselves in regards to these things. Let me ask you first, what concerns you most? What concerns you most right now in the church, in your marriage, in your family? The things that make for peace or your own preference?

Many times, we exalt our preferences or our traditions or the things that are dear to our hearts. We exalt them above peace, above reconciliation, wherein scripture, He says you let peace rule. You don't let your preference rule. You don't let your own desire rule. You subject all those things to the reign of peace so that the peace of God's reconciliation can rule in your family, can rule in your household, can rule in the life of your children, can rule in your marriage, and it can rule in the church of God.

That you think, when you wake up and when you go about your day, you're asking yourself the question, "What are the things that are going to make for peace today?" And I'm not talking about compromising God's truth because that never ends in true peace. I'm talking about living in a way, as much as lies within you, peaceably with all men, to pursue that life of peace, to let the peace reign in your heart, to be like that umpire.

Let me ask you this, in your thought life right now, what voice are you

listening to? The voice of reconciliation or the voice of war? You see, in your heart, in your mind, as you think of a certain person, as you think of a certain circumstance, as you think of a certain situation, in your heart, do you listen more to the voice of warfare, the voice of fighting, the voice of contention, the voice of strife, or do you hear the voice of reconciliation?

The rule of reconciliation, saying, "Hey, take it easy, that's your brother in Jesus Christ. Yes, challenge him, but do it peacefully, do it in love, do it with humility." Galatians 6:1, "If you see a brother overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted."

Yes, stand, but stand with grace. Yes, stand, but stand in love. You see, what ends up happening in our lives is we narrow down our theology to consist of certain doctrinal truths, not realizing that this is a doctrinal truth in scripture. He's saying, "You let this truth of reconciliation, which is essential to the gospel, rule in your heart."

You want to live a gospel life? Live a life of peace. You want to live unto the gospel and to the glory of God? Live a life of love. You want to reflect the tender mercies of God? Be a person of tender mercies. This is our theology; this is part of our theology; this is living out our theology.

Because if you believe in true reconciliation, that God reconciled you to Himself, you should be a person that is pursuing reconciliation with others. It was read to us earlier on, now in this sermon, in this service from Ephesians chapter 2, that when Jesus Christ came and died, He came not only to redeem men individually, but it says in verse number 11 and onward that He might break down the middle wall of partition that's between us and He might, therefore, make peace. And it says, "He is our peace who has brought us together, one in Christ." Do you understand how this is so essential to Christian life?

It's amazing how the church of God can uphold truth so highly at the expense of peace. I'm just simply saying that's a truth that you need to uphold with whatever else you're upholding because it's Bible, it's biblical, it's what God expects from His church. In fact, it's what we're meant to reflect by our life. Who's sitting over as an umpire over your affections? Don't make excuses to justify war. Jesus is very firm on this. He says, "If you have ought against your brother, leave your gift at the altar and go reconcile."

We might have all our theology of worship perfectly down pat, but you know what Jesus is saying? "I don't want your worship if you don't have reconciliation. Go sort it out. It's great that you've worked it all out. It's great

that you got it all good. But is there peace in your life? Leave your gift at the altar. Come and offer it later, but sort out the problem first because God's concerned that we live in a way that reflects His gospel, that we are peacemakers."

We often quote that passage that says, "Without holiness, no man will see the Lord." You know what the first part of that verse says? "Pursue or follow peace with all men and holiness, for without which no man will see the Lord." We don't follow peace at the expense of holiness, but we don't follow holiness at the expense of peace because, you know why? True holiness encompasses peace. This is holy living. This is living for the glory of God.

Let me encourage you, dear people of God, let the peace of God rule. Let it reign, and ask yourself, "What is governing my relationships?" Let's pray.