

## **Peace With Each Other**

Prince of Peace Series - Part 2

Colossians 3: 12-17

Jesus came to bring peace to all those with whom God is pleased. But how does that happen? Looking at Col 3: 12-17 we look at Paul's analogy of putting on clothing to see how we, through His strength, bring peace to those around us. We explore the controversial statement that you can't have peace with God if you do not have peace with others.

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Prince of Peace - Series Connection/Advent

The Savior— yes, the Messiah, the Lord— has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others— the armies of heaven— praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and **peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.**” Luke 2:11-14 (NLT)

Last week Steve introduced this series by talking about Peace with God, and introduced us to the idea of Shalom - a holistic peace.

Today we're going to explore another nuance of this idea of Shalom.

I want to start by giving you my big idea for this message. It's a little bit controversial - so let's get it on the table up front, and then I'll unpack it for you. Here it is:

### **You Can't have peace with God if you do not have peace with others**

I want that idea - that challenge - to sit with you for a few minutes. It may be making you uncomfortable already - that's good! But before I unpack this, I need a volunteer..

### **What do you wear to show that you are Canadian?**

So what do you wear if you want to show that you're a Canadian? Maybe it's a Raptors sweater. Not into basketball? Then a Maple Leafs jersey? Too local? Maybe you have a backpack with a Canadian emblem on it. Don't travel? Hmm - well given the season, maybe it's a Tuke, or gloves. And of course you wouldn't be a complete Canadian without snow boots. We'll wrap this all up with a great winter coat - Canada Goose brand of course, a snow shovel and, to top it off, a Canada flag!

### **Today's Passage: Colossians 3:12-17 (NIV)**

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord

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

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 message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 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.

The central line of this passage is at verse 14: And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

But what does it mean to “put on” love? To use Paul’s metaphor of clothing here I want to suggest that love here is like a transparent plastic coat - it lets all the other layers be seen. If we have clothed ourselves as Paul has suggested, we HAVE put on love! So let’s explore this a bit deeper.

### **New Clothes**

First, I want to talk about new clothes. In verse 12 he says “**Therefore**, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves...**”

Whenever you see a “therefore” in the text you should ask what it’s therefore - it is always pointing us back to what has just been established as the reason for the next statement. In this case, we look back to verses 5 through 11.

***Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature:** sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. **You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves** of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have **taken off your old self** with its practices and have **put on the new self**, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. (Col. 3: 5-11; displayed but may not read)*

Here, Paul is telling us to put to death our old ways, and rid ourselves of negative ways of interacting and instead we are to “put on the new self,” but Paul does say what this new self looks like - at least, not there. He tells us in the following section - the one we are looking at.

So when he says “clothe yourselves” he is showing us what the new creature in Christ is to look like. We should no longer look like the old selfish ways, where we live for ourselves and our own desires, but instead, we should be self-less and act positively towards others.

But the analogy of clothing breaks down in modern society. We hear clothes and we think of a wardrobe - a collection of clothes that we can take off and put on depending on the season, event or even our mood. We think fashion - in today and gone tomorrow. But that is not what Paul is thinking here. He's thinking permanently. So when he says "put on the new self" and "clothe yourselves" he is asking us to make a permanent change to our behaviour - not to merely choose our actions or behavior based on our situation.

### **God's Chosen People**

In verse 12 he says "Therefore, **as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved**, clothe yourselves..."

This phrase, "Chosen people" seems strange. Are the Colossians favored above all others? No, not really. Paul is using language from the Hebrew Scriptures - language used to describe Israel. And Paul is now using that to describe the Christian Church - including those at Colossae. Here's how Moses speaks to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.  
(Deuteronomy 7:6, NIV)

Paul is reminding the Christians at Colossae - all of them, Jews, Greeks and Romans together - that they are part of God's Covenantal people. But hang on Peter, you might be thinking. Aren't the Church and Israel separate? Aren't they two distinct peoples?

Well, Paul certainly didn't think so. He describes how the true Jew pledges allegiance to Jesus the Messiah, and non-Jews who do the same are grafted into the family of God, and those who refuse are pruned and removed.

So maybe Paul was alone in this idea? No - even Peter agrees - he uses the same language when talking to the Church that was used of Israel in Exodus:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9, NIV)

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:6, NIV)

This fact provides the first motivation or rationale for our change in character. Because we are part of God's covenant family we have obligations under that covenant. We have agreed to follow God's direction and act in certain ways.

Many people don't realize that so much of the law, and Jesus' teachings, are about the way that we treat each other rather than about faith or worship. Think about these facts for a moment:

- In the Ten Commandments, at least 6 out of the 10 (more depending on how you count things) are about relationships between people
- In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount there are 19 teaching blocks following the Beatitudes - at least 8 of them are about dealing with other people
- All of the New Testament writers reinforce the moral teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures - even though we are no longer under the law we are still expected to live by the same standards!

So let's move on to the kind of behavior that Paul wants us to "put on" or wear.

### **The Seven Virtues**

There are seven virtues listed in this passage - or more accurately 5 virtues and 2 virtuous actions. You'll see them in verses 12 and 13.

...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Col. 3:12b-13, NIV)

The five virtues don't need much explanation. These are not status virtues, but active virtues. You are not a compassionate person (stative) unless you actually act with compassion toward other people (active). You are not a patient person (stative) unless you actually are patient when dealing with difficult people (active).

In the preceding section Paul gives two lists of vices here that we are to "put to death" or "rid ourselves" of, and here he replaces all that with five things - just one list. None of these lists are meant to be considered exhaustive, but the point is clear - it takes less to live as Children of the light than it does to live as Children of the darkness.

Also note that these five virtues are also used to describe the character of God, and of Jesus. By pursuing these virtues we are becoming like Jesus.

Paul then goes on to add a two-part instruction. We are called to bear with each other and forgive one another. These are actually part of the same instruction and can not be separated. The word for "bear with" is the word *anechomai* - which means to forbear, or even putting up with someone. It has the sense of "keep on putting up with one another".

He's talking about how the Christians should relate to the other members of their Christian community. These people were a mixed bag - Jews, Greeks, Romans, slaves, free, men, woman - and in that culture you would NEVER have such a mixed group of people gathered together. And they all came with different backgrounds and expectations. And, because they are human, they are likely to cause friction! Any time you get more than, well - 1 person, you're going to get friction. And in that culture, with those dynamics, as SpaceX says, "Excitement is guaranteed!"

So how does Paul expect us to deal with this “exciting” group of people? If Paul was a modern Canadian, he may be tempted to say “Tolerate one another.” We’re well known for being a tolerant society - but this isn’t what Paul is meaning here. The word tolerate can simply mean indifferent acceptance - if you don’t annoy me, I won’t annoy you - I will tolerate you. Paul doesn’t settle for mere tolerance - he expects us to annoy each other. How do we know? Because he pairs the instruction to forgive with it.

If there weren’t offences there would be no need to forgive. If we didn’t step on each other’s toes, we wouldn’t need to say “sorry.” Paul is a realist. He knows that these changes that he is calling for don’t usually happen overnight - they take time. The process of “putting to death” our old ways and “clothing ourselves” in our new ways can be a lifetime endeavor. I’ve been a Christian for 40 years, and I’m still learning how to do this stuff! I can talk a good talk, but sometimes my walking looks a little wobbly! It’s guaranteed that I’m going bump into you sometimes. I may even offend you. I may even sin against you.

And here is where the Christian community is different from all other parts of our society. We are called to welcome each other - even while we are still offending, and forgive each other. This is radical!

Our call is to go beyond tolerating one another, even beyond putting up with one another, but to embracing one another - forgiving each other, supporting each other, and building each other up.

We live in a world that wants to divide us. It wants us to align ourselves into different groups - groups based on the color of our skin, our sexual preferences, whether we are a colonizer or a victim. The community in Collosae had similar divisions. Paul’s message was very clear - none of that matters. All that matters is that we gather around Jesus Christ - put aside all other things that divide us, and be as one. Bearing with each other, supporting each other and forgiving each other - because it will get messy!

### **How do we get these new clothes?**

So the next question is how. How do we become like this? How do we develop these virtues - they don’t come easy. Especially when the old ways are still ingrained in us.

This is what Paul moves on to in his next section.

**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 message of Christ dwell among you** richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 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. (Col. 3:15-17, NIV)

He gives us three things to do. He says:

- Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts

- Be thankful
- Let the message of Christ dwell among you (teaching, singing)

When he talks about the Peace of Christ, he doesn't mean a warm fuzzy feeling. He means this love for others - this love that accepts, and welcomes, and forgives. This love that acknowledges that Christ forgave us much, and that same forgiveness has been offered to others as well. Who are we to judge, when we have failed so much?

Jesus told us that we should pray for our enemies. Do you know how hard it is to stay angry with someone when you're praying that God would bless them? He calls us to forgive those who sin against us. Do you know how hard it is to hold a grudge after you offer genuine forgiveness? He asks us to be thankful for others. Do you know how hard it is to dislike someone when you give God thanks for their very existence?

This is what he means by the Peace of Christ. This is what it means to let the message of Christ dwell among you.

### **You Can't have peace with God if you do not have peace with others**

So I want to come back to my controversial statement:

You Can't have peace with God if you do not have peace with others

Why do I say this? Hopefully by now you're starting to see why I say this. If you claim to be forgiven by God, but refuse to forgive your spiritual brother, you don't really understand God's offer of forgiveness. If you claim to be following Christ but don't accept others who also want to follow Christ, you aren't really a disciple.

There are three scripture passages that speak to this very clearly. The first is the "new command" that Jesus gives us in John 13. He says:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13: 34-35)

As a Bible student and theologian I am frequently reminded that Jesus didn't say "By your theology everyone will know that you are my disciples". Theology is important - but most people aren't attracted to theological arguments - they are attracted to love. That is what should most notable about our community - the way that we love one another, forgive one another, accept one another and support one another.

The next is the Greatest Command in Matthew 22. A Rabai asked Jesus:

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40)

This was not a new response. But Jesus says that loving God cannot be separated from loving neighbor. How we treat people reflects how we treat God, and vice versa.

And finally, in Paul's famous love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 he says:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13: 1-3, 13)

This is something that challenges me every day. How we love others is more important than the work we do for God and in God's name.

### **Bridge to communion**

In the first century, there were a lot of rules around who you could eat with. Jews would not eat with Romans. Free men would not eat with Slaves. The Jews had rules about washing before you could eat, how food could be prepared, and they wouldn't eat certain foods; and the Romans often sacrificed their meat before their Gods before the meal.

But the early church cut through all that with a simple ceremony - The Lord's Supper. We sometimes refer to it as The Lord's Table - because at this meal, at the Lord's Table - all people are equal. There are no divisions.

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. (Col 3: 11, NIV)

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says:

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. (1 Cor. 11:28-29)

The traditional teaching on this passage is that we should examine hearts for any unconfessed sin - perform a rigorous moral inventory. But this doesn't quite get to the context of this passage. Here Paul is talking about how we relate to one another. This is what we should examine. If we have treated people badly, we should walk away from worship, repent, and ask for forgiveness. Then we should come back and celebrate.

Just before this verse he says:

17-22: In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you

go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter! ... (1 Cor 11:17-22, NIV)

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ... (1 Cor 11:27-29, NIV)

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. (1 Cor 11:33-34, NIV)

This is all about how we treat others - especially when we worship. And it is directly relevant to our passage we studied today.

### **Invitation to communion**

And that leads us nicely to communion. And so before I invite you to participate I encourage you to consider, as Paul instructed, whether there is anyone in our community that you may have offended or pushed aside. Maybe you need to go to that person, right now, and ask forgiveness.

For on the night that he was betrayed....

### **COMMUNION**

- All are welcome
- Ushers will guide you row by row
- Mobile servers are available