

Would you turn with me tonight to Colossians...Colossians chapter 3?

The Colossian church was a good church, but like any good church, was under tremendous pressure to conform to the world around it in certain ways...specifically ethical ways, or lack thereof.

So the Apostle Paul, after writing of Jesus in some of the most exalted language we have about Him in Scripture, delivers this word...a letter...about some ways that following this exalted Jesus ought to look like in daily, ethical decisions, and especially in terms of Christian relationship.

Very generally speaking, that's the context of this letter, and for tonight, I'd like to focus in on just one short part of it, beginning in chapter 3, verse 12, where Paul writes:

***Therefore (in light of this Christ...this Savior and what He's done for you) 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.***

There is a phrase here in this passage, ***"let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."***

***"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."***

Peace.

Peace is something that is proving very elusive to many people in our world today.

How do we know that?

How can we **not** know that?

Look at what all is up, according to any recent observation or survey:

Hopelessness is up.

Counseling is up.

Suicide is up.

Anxiety is up.

Depression is up.

Drug and alcohol use are up.

Fear is up.  
Division is up.  
Anger is up.  
Attacks are up.  
Murder is up.

People are desperate for peace.

Whether we hear it or not, the world around us is screaming, "Peace, please!"

So...how do you get it?

Different means have been offered.

Someone said, "My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start. So far today, I have finished two bags of chips and a chocolate cake, and I feel better already."

Here's another way to get peace:

You probably heard about the crowded airplane where...just before takeoff, the peace of the cabin was shattered by a five-year-old boy who picked that moment to throw a wild temper tantrum. No matter what his frustrated, embarrassed mother did to try to calm him down, the boy continued to scream furiously and kick the seats around him.

Suddenly, from the rear of the plane, an elderly man in the uniform of an Air Force General slowly walked forward up the aisle. Stopping the flustered mother with an upraised hand, the white-haired, soft-spoken general leaned down and, motioning toward his chest, whispered something into the boy's ear.

Instantly, the boy calmed down, gently took his mother's hand, and quietly fastened his seat belt.

All the other passengers burst into applause.

As the General slowly made his way back to his seat, one of the flight attendants touched his sleeve.

"Excuse me, sir," she asked quietly, "but could I ask you what magic words you used on that little boy?"

The old man smiled calmly and gently explained, "I showed him my pilot's wings, my service stars, and my battle ribbons, and explained that all those entitle me to throw one passenger out the plane door, on any flight I choose."

And then, of course, you could find peace by eating at that new restaurant...the owners named it, "Peace and Quiet," because the items on the children's menu begin at \$400.00.

Much of the world has felt anything but peace recently, and especially these last couple years.

But of course, the need for peace is nothing so recent.

The greatest need of the world...the thing people have invested billions of dollars and lifetimes of moments into, in days past and right up to today, is finding...peace.

Not the temporary kind that comes from just dulling our senses.

No...real, lasting peace.

That sort of peace is one of life's ultimates after all, and so, it should come as no surprise that it's only found in God.

Which makes it one of the great things followers of Christ can offer to the world...that is, of course, if we have it ourselves...which is not a foregone conclusion, because if it were...if Christ-followers were automatically peace-filled people, then the apostle Paul would have had no reason to write what he does to the Colossian church there in verse 15, ***“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”***

That's what my translation says. A different translation reads, ***“Let the peace of Christ be the decider of all things in your hearts.”***

Even more literally, the words there might be translated, ***“Let the peace of Christ be the umpire in your heart.”***

The Greek word is βραβευο [bra BEW oh.]

This is the only place in the New Testament it's used, and it comes from the athletic world – literally meaning “to be the arbiter, or the umpire of a game.”

So...the peace of Christ is to rule, to have the last call, to be the deciding factor in our hearts.

And remember, to Paul, the heart was not just the seat of feelings and emotions and sentiments, as we tend to think of it today.

The heart, to Paul, was the absolute center of the person. To him, the heart is the control panel for our will, for our consciousness, and for our choices.

So Paul is not saying, “Hey, here's hoping you'll feel peace.”

It's not about what might be if all the stars line up correctly.

No, Paul is saying, “Choose to let the peace of Christ determine the manner, the way, the tenor of your life.”

It's about the Christian choosing this...determining with our will to give rein in our lives to the peace of Jesus Christ.

***“Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.”***

It's not about happenstance or circumstance.

It's about a conscience choice.

So...what, exactly, is involved in this choice to let Christ's peace rule in our hearts?

That's what I'd like to explore on some of these Sunday nights...how we choose peace...how we come to let Christ's peace rule us, and how we maintain that peace in a very peace-less world.

Now, the truth is, you can answer that question, "How do we let that peace rule in us?" in one word: obedience.

The more we live as Jesus says to live, the more peace...the deeper peace...the more enduring peace we can have.

Philippians 4 tells us, ***"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about things. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand, and that peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."***<sup>1</sup>

Peace is just one of the tremendous by-products of obedience.

But are there specific things...specific points of obedience to Jesus that lead explicitly to maybe more substantial peace in our lives? Are there specific on ramps, or highways, to peace?

I think there are...and really, those are what I'd like us to consider...and it seems to me that the first among them, especially for our day, is...forgiveness.

Now, of course, there has always been a need for the practice of forgiveness.

But this last year and a half has caused that need to rise...and I don't think to say "exponentially" is necessarily an exaggeration.

There have been things said, things implied, things posted, things presumed that have wounded people tremendously...about so many things...topics.

But especially...between politics and Covid, there has been so much polarization...people are so far apart from each other that they can't even hear the other talking.

And it's happened everywhere...in families – between couples, between siblings, between parent and child.

It's happened in offices, in clubs, in factories, in political institutions, and...in churches.

If ten people are in a room, so are at least six different opinions.

Wherever two or three are gathered, Jesus may well be there, but there's also a very good chance that disagreement is there too.

But...Scripture says that, among disciples of Jesus, forgiveness must arrive in that place as well.

Christians simply must be forgiving people. There's neither argument nor negotiation about it.

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 4:6-7

I could appeal to several passages of Scripture that just plainly declare it, but the truth of it gets at the very definition of “disciple.”<sup>2</sup>

What is a disciple? A disciple is an apprentice – one who learns from the master and becomes like the master in doing what the master does. So if we are to be disciples of Jesus, well, you can hardly choose a more pervasive characteristic of Jesus than forgiving.

That’s really where we almost have to start if we’re to be disciples, made in the image of our Master: we have to be forgivers...we forgive because Jesus forgives.

But add to that that Jesus not only *forgives* in general terms, but He forgives *us*, you see?

We’re not only the disciple...the apprentice, we’re also the *object* of our Master’s forgiveness.

So that makes it doubly important that we forgive.

Now, that’s not to say we’ll necessarily agree with those we forgive. That’s not to say we’ll always wind up being best buddies with them.

But we have to see people as people, and not as political statements or points of view with which we disagree.

We may well still disagree, but like Paul says there in verse 13, we bear with those with whom we disagree even as we forgive them for any hurt they’ve caused us.

That’s not to say that hurt isn’t real or doesn’t exist.

It’s not that what that person did or said was good or right.

They may have been no more right in offending us than we were right in offending God, you see? Yet He forgave...by choice. And if we are to follow Him, we must, by choice, do the same.

Paul says it plainly there at the end of 13, ***“Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”***

So we do for others only what God has already done for us.

But, forgiving others is not just for others’ sake.

Forgiving is also for us in that it’s one of those highways to our own lasting, inner peace...in at least two ways.

When we forgive, we release a person from bondage...from a cage that we’ve put them in in our hearts, and when that happens...when we set that person free, we no longer have that caged person within us.

Until we forgive, that person and the issue they embody, and the cage we’ve put them in, goes with us...always.

It’s baggage we carry around...and it’s heavy. It weighs us down. It disturbs us. Certain words, certain situations call it to mind, sometimes at the oddest moments, and that steals our peace.

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 6:14; Colossians 6:13; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37...

And...the more un forgiveness we harbor within us...the more unforgiven people and circumstances we carry around with us, the worse it is. The heavier we feel.

It's like those cages have sharp corners always sticking us...and they crash together and make all sorts of noise in our lives.

Only when we free the person can we get rid of the cage and the weight and the noise and the memories...and bring peace to that place.

So in that way, forgiveness is for **us**...for our benefit...for our freedom, and that itself brings peace to us.

But of course, if God is saying we must forgive, but we are unwilling to do so, well, that too brings conflict to our soul, because in our unforgiveness, we're living in active disobedience to Him, you see?

And God will never let us live completely in peace as long as that's the case. There will always be this nagging sense of shame or ought. That will follow us all our lives.

That's conviction, because God is trying to move us closer to Christ, but we're unwilling.

It's a holy sort of unease, because it's from God, and it serves His purposes, until we relent. Until we...there's the word...obey.

Oh, but when we do...when we agree to forgive...then all that unease goes away, and we gain, or regain peace with God. Our hearts are calm.

Where there was all this tension before, now there is peace...because we're at peace with God.

That's why forgiveness is one of the highways to peace.

It may not solve or resolve disagreement; people, just in our individualities, are going to disagree about things.

But disagreement does not have to be unforgiving or hold grudges.

Forgiveness clears the decks.

It clears our accounts with others, and with God, and with ourselves.

That's the way God designed us to live...and to interact.

And because He forgives, He's given us the capacity to forgive. He'll help us. He'll give us the grace to do it.

He's looking, even tonight, for people who will trust Him for that...grace to forgive, as a highway to peace.

Is there someone God is bringing to mind in your life...someone you need to forgive? Someone God's asking you to forgive?

He's not doing that just to make you uncomfortable or feel guilty. He's trying to set you free...to give you peace.

You say, "I can't do it," and you may well be right. In your own strength, you may not be able to.

But in God's strength, you can.

Will you trust Him to help you forgive?

He who forgave you...surely He has the resources to help you forgive someone else.

This is one of those highways to peace.

If you need to take it tonight, why don't you?