

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for Nov. 23: God's peace can rule, judge and regulate life_111703

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God's peace can rule, judge and regulate life

♦ *Colossians 3:1-17*

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Colossians 3 gives the impression the church is forcing its way rather than following God's way. Paul may be losing patience.

The Colossian community searched for meaning to life. The church and community fought to understand earthly ways and spiritual ways or, in simple terms, Paul's longstanding discussion between the flesh and the Spirit (see Romans 7). Paul felt the frustration of the church trying to force its own way. He experienced impatience that the church was not becoming all God desired. Consequently, Paul invited the church to return to do one simple thing—seek Christ in the things above. Paul sounds like Jesus

(Matthew 6:33).

Singleness of heart

Paul asked the church to possess a singleness of heart by fearing God (Colossians 3:22). Paul begged the church to keep on seeking the “upward things,” that is, the virtues and knowledge of Christ and heaven where Christ reigned (3:1).

D.A. Carson says the Christian life requires “radical change,” and Abbott says the Christian life is a pursuit for spiritual things that involves Christ-honoring “moral conduct.” For Paul, right belief in Christ equaled right doctrine that produced right virtue and moral conduct. Paul's belief determined his conduct.



Think! Paul commands Christians to think constantly of Christ and allow such thinking to influence life, thought and action (v. 2). A.T. Robertson says, “The Christian has to keep his feet on earth, but his head in the heavens.” Christ makes the Christian alive, purifies from sin and equals eternal and abundant life (vv. 3-4). The word for “life” (v. 4) is not “bios,” or biology, like a heart pumping blood or a back aching in the morning or even a headache in mid-afternoon. The word “life” is “zoe,” an abundant, vibrant, eternal life on earth as we move toward heaven.

Earth and heaven: Put off versus put on

Paul recognizes, however, the challenges of living and the reality of pressures that pull the heart toward “downward things.” He lists the negatives- impure sexual activity, uncleanness, greed, idolatry, anger, malice, nasty language and dishonesty, to name a few (v. 9).

Paul preaches with passion the message of “putting off” ungodly, earthly things that represent the old way of life (vv. 8-9). Paul yearns passionately for the church to “put on” the new man, while allowing Christ to refresh the soul with God's upward and new heavenly things (v. 10). “Put off” and “put on” refer to doing so just as if you would remove a dirty T-shirt or put on a clean dress. The image of Christ's work when we seek him is vivid and clear.

What happens when Christ's new is put on the soul like a shirt? Your knowledge of God increases (v. 10). Also, God unites people of different backgrounds and expectations and brings them together under the banner of the cross (v. 11). Likewise, the virtue of Christ clothes the Christian, and virtuous conduct is displayed in daily life.

What virtue does the Christian demonstrate? Paul lists the virtue in Colossians 3:12-14—mercies, kindness, humility, patience (longsuffering, “slow to pay back a wrong”), forgiveness, edifying speech and the sacrificial love of Christ that knots relationships in acts of service (v. 14). The bond of Roman society was law and obligation. The bond of the church is God's grace and sacrificial love. When the bond of Christ's love encircles the Christian, mature service results. According to William Barclay, “Love is the binding power.”

Peace at Thanksgiving

How does the Christian seek Christ and his upward things while living in the world with its pull toward downward things? The Christian allows God's peace to rule, judge, regulate and umpire life (v. 15). God's peace becomes the framework for evaluating your own life and conduct. The peace possesses a quality of Christ-like grace that in turn, produces gratitude (“thankfulness,” v. 15). Paul never strays far from the cross of grace (doctrine) that supplies peace for living (ethics, hence, right conduct,

specifically, the giving of thanks). How does peace rule in the heart in conjunction with the Holy Spirit?

When you allow God's peace to rule, then his word builds a permanent dwelling in the soul (v. 16). God's word “tabernacles” in the heart to bring peace through God's wisdom and teaching, joy through God's warnings and odes of praise, and an extravagant grace through union with him. Again, God's word as doctrine and encouragement gives impetus in daily conduct to please Christ by living for one reason: to seek him which means to honor his name (vv. 1 and 17).

Grace supplies gratitude and a spirit of Christ-like service (vv. 17-25). Paul follows with everyday relationships and the importance of four things for their health—the love of Christ (v. 14), mutual service in the Spirit of the cross, respect for people (v. 25) and a willingness to do all things “heartily” (literally, “energetically,” meaning a spiritual energy supplied by God's grace). Seek the risen Christ and his virtue!

Questions for discussion

- ◆ How can personal demonstration of Christian values make Thanksgiving a more meaningful holiday?

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