

51-03-05.wpd —Baptism's Call to New Life
 peace, gratitude, church, grace, Thanksgiving, new life, discipleship
 Colossians 3:15-17
 New life in Christ is distinguished by a heart of gratitude.

INTRODUCTION:

–In Col.3, Paul has been using *baptism* to illustrate the experience of Christian faith. He uses elements from the early church ritual, where believers divested themselves symbolically of the *old way of life* by removing their clothing, and were plunged naked into a watery grave to be joined to the death of their Lord, who died naked on the Cross. They rose from that water like a newborn from its mother's womb, then a last symbol came—as they left the water, a white robe was given to them, symbolizing their new life in Christ, a holy way of life based on grace, not on their own power or abilities.

–Actually, the whole baptismal ritual pointed to the fact that believers are dependent on grace. This is why **HOM.idea**. What we received in Christ (deliverance from a sinful life, unity with His death, resurrection into a new holy life) are **all gifts**, given to us from Him alone, not from our own works. And the first way Paul points to this is in the peace and harmony given to us in the creation of a new community of humanity called the church.

I. The Church Is a Gift of Peace to a Divided Humanity, v.15

- A. Peace is not the *absence* of war, but the presence of the Prince of Peace who gives our hearts *a peace that surpasses understanding*. [War can bring a false sense of unity among people, because when it is over, people are still people with all their issues of friction and division.]
- B. The Christian understanding of peace isn't just to stop fighting and submit to a situation ["*I think I've come to peace with this now.*"]. We're to submit to our King: *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.*
- C. True peace is found only in the reign of Christ in the Kingdom of God, and *that governing Kingdom is directly related to people*.
 1. Relational division is what marks the greatest "missing *peace*" in our humanity—the only real answer to it is relational integration.
 2. God's plan to restore the human condition to true health allows for no continuation of division (whether it's between *male & female*, or *servant & master*, or *rich & poor*, or between *skin*

color, political philosophies or national allegiances), and His present plan to demonstrate that is the unity He ordains within the church: *since as members of one body you were called to peace.*

TRANS: When we see divisions in churches, we aren't seeing the Body of Christ, but friction among believers who don't realize what they've been given. We don't own or control the church. It's a gift, purchased by the precious blood of Christ, to bring peace to humanity. God sees the Church as one, not idealistically, but as a reality that is practically demonstrated when we come together with an attitude of gratitude to Him. It is by grace that we are allowed to be members of one another in His Body, and this is why, in mentioning this gift, Paul says, *be thankful*. **New life in Christ is distinguished by a heart of gratitude.**

II. This Gift of Fellowship is Needed for Christian Growth, v.16

- A. "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" is often thought to mean we're to have a diligent devotional life. But the "*you*" here is plural. It's talking about us as a group. (God desires every believer to have a rich devotional life: meditate on Scripture, spend time in prayer and listening for God's voice, contemplate and praise God for the beauty in His creation, and read the devotional writings of great saints, past and present, but **don't impoverish the church by keeping all of those blessings to yourself!**)
- B. We are to allow such a rich amount of space for the word of Christ in our hearts that it overflows in sharing with one another: this is true fellowship, which is shown corporately in at least *two ways*:
 1. **As we** "*teach and admonish one another with all wisdom*" (notice it's not just the preacher's role—preachers are just meant to encourage and guide and nurture this kind of fellowship and sharing).
 2. **And as we** "*sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*" [Singing is a "sound vibration" that aligns us with all the rest of creation, because all created things are known to vibrate, and singing is a built-in part of our human nature.] *Joyful singing* attracts people to churches because it resonates with their built-in vibration that longs to reverberate with grateful praise to their Creator, even if they don't realize it. Giving in to that urge to resound with songs of thanks to God is a step to human fulfillment. (That's why *the attitude of gratitude* is known as a sign of a *happy human being*.)

TRANS: I'm glad that our country made Thanksgiving Day a legal holiday. It's so appropriate to give thanks to the Lord for His gracious blessings to us. I think of the "*poor atheist on Thanksgiving Day—all dressed up and No One to thank.*" But we who have submitted to the Kingdom reign of the Prince of Peace, and have enjoyed the fellowship of the Body of Christ that His grace has made us members of, we have so much to thank God for. **New life in Christ is distinguished by a heart of gratitude.** We show that gratitude by the way we live that new life. This is Paul's last point here....

III. Thanksgiving Is the Context of Our Discipleship, v.17

- A. Being a disciple of Jesus is not just a Christian title, but a dynamic "living out" of our faith in Jesus Christ. Everything we do, "*whether in word or deed,*" we are to "do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."
1. If Jesus is our Lord and we are His disciples, our *words* belong to Him (Can we place "*in the name of the Lord Jesus*" on all the things that come out of our mouths in speaking to others?)
 2. If Jesus is our Lord and we are His disciples, our *deeds* belong to Him (Can we place "*in the name of the Lord Jesus*" on all that we do with our time and in our relationships with others?)
 3. If you get those two discipleship categories "messed up," let me tell you how to reorganize—**it's to start over** by "*giving thanks to God the Father through him*" (This gets us back on track, reminding us that our Christian life is **not** by our power, but *by His grace.*)
- B. We sometimes try to organize our lives by compartmentalizing ["*A place for everything, and everything in its place.*"] We cannot do this as disciples of Jesus. Instead, **He is to rule over all the parts and places we deal with in life.** We are not owners but stewards under His Lordship. All that we have, all that we experience, all that we enjoy, all in life has been given to us by His grace: all are gifts.

CONCLUSION:

{**Re-read** the whole passage again, emphasizing the words related to *gratefulness.*} **New life in Christ is distinguished by a heart of gratitude.**

Colossians 3:15-17 (NIV) 15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And **be thankful.** 16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with **gratitude in your hearts** to God. 17And 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.