

BETHEL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
FAIR LAWN, NJ
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“The Peace Of Christ”
Colossians 3:15

In one of our upstairs bathrooms in Ocean Grove there is an old, cast iron claw-foot tub. Over the many years it has served its homeowners well, but today it is a bit worn and badly rusted around the drain. Rather than replace it, we decided to have it repaired (we like old things, and besides, it weighs over two hundred pounds.)

We soon discovered that not everyone is qualified to service this old tub. There's a special process that's involved, which includes cleaning and sanding, and then restoring the enamel surface. The new enamel has to be bonded onto the old, which means that the “prep work” will make or break the job.

If the right bonding agent is not used, the new enamel won't adhere to the old. It will slowly begin to peel, and the old tub will go back to its old, worn look. So in searching for a refinishing expert, we were also looking for a written warranty. Not everyone was willing to give one. Restoring old tubs is not as easy as it might seem. But once we found an expert who would stand behind his work (in writing), we knew that old tub would be cared for in the right way. We also knew we would be thankful for a job well done.

By way of analogy, there is a cohesive agent that is essential to bonding us together in the local church. It prevents us from peeling off when differences and disputes arise. It preserves and promotes our harmony as members of one body. Paul names that all-important ingredient in a passage that parallels the one before us this morning: “Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit *in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3).

Clearly the Apostle Paul was a realist. He knew that there are very real threats to the unity and tranquility of church life. Disputes are inevitable. Conflicts will arise. Schism does occur. Theological disagreements are ever present, and hurt feelings do lead to inter-personal friction. That is why the Apostle includes this crucial word of admonition on how to resolve these problems: “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were indeed called in one body. And be thankful” (v. 15). If Christ's peace rules in our hearts, His praise should be on our lips!

1. Peace In Our Hearts (v. 15a)

As we noted last week, the context of this passage (vv. 12-17) is focusing upon how we are to interact with one another in the local church. In particular, the seamless “garment of godliness,” with which we are to clothe ourselves, is the most obvious example of this (vv. 12-14). This same emphasis continues in verse 15. It's within the “one body” that the “peace of Christ” is to exercise its' authority; it is to “rule” in our hearts corporately.

In Paul's day, the word that is translated "rule" was used to describe the role of an umpire in athletic contests. Like umpires today, the call that he would make at any point in the game was the only call that mattered. When disputes arose between contestants, his word was the final word.

To any serious minded member of the church today, Paul's point is painfully obvious. When we are faced with potentially divisive decisions and the need to resolve tensions, we *must* consider what will preserve and promote the "peace of Christ" in our midst. In the words of one noted commentator: "In a healthy body harmony prevails between the various parts. Christians who have been reconciled to God, who have peace with Him through Christ, should naturally manifest peace with one another . . . where differences threaten to spring up among them, the peace of Christ must be accepted as arbitrator." (F. F. Bruce, The Epistle To The Colossians) The worldly and disruptive mindset of "my way or the highway" has no place in *any* local church fellowship.

One final thought: unity doesn't come at any price. Some things *are* worth fighting for. We are never to negotiate or compromise the foundational truths of God's Word, lest we offend those who disagree. The purity of the Gospel and the Church must always be maintained. Let's not forget that the same Apostle who is now admonishing us to preserve our unity has already admonished us to reject those who advocate heretical teaching (Co. 2:16-23). Peace never trumps Gospel truth!

2. Praise On Our Lips (v. 15b)

Thanksgiving is also an important ingredient in unified church fellowships. There is always so much to be thankful for, which is one of the reasons there is such an emphasis on thanksgiving in this brief letter (Col. 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 17; 4:2). It is also important to note that in the New Testament the word that is translated "thanks" is the same word that is also translated "grace." As someone has once said, "Grace and gratitude are the closest of kin." The more we recognize that peace and harmony are but the out-workings of God's grace "in our hearts," the more thankful we should be.

Like peace, gratitude is to characterize our corporate relations with one another. These are two hallmarks of a healthy church that are always interrelated. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have the one without the other. If we are committed to preserving peace "in our hearts," praise should flow from our lips. And if we are thankful to God for one another, it will be difficult for interpersonal strife to disrupt our communal peace.

We live in an age that is very different from the one in which my generation was raised. Today, there is very little cohesion between fellow members of local assemblies. As a pastor friend recently told me, our church has a front door (through which people enter) and a back door (through which they leave). But if we all take to heart the admonition of this passage, that back door should not be so readily used when differences arise. We'll be willing to allow the peace of Christ to be the final arbitrator, and we'll be all the more thankful for one another, and His work of grace within our hearts!