

## Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord<sup>[f]</sup> has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ<sup>[g]</sup> dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.<sup>[h]</sup> <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let us pray....

Trump. Colin Kapernick. The Alt-Right. Hillary's Emails. Black Lives Matter. Build that Wall. Gun Control. Sexuality in the Church. Now that your heart is racing, I need to ask you a personal question. Is that ok? How many of you, in the past 2 years, have lost or severed a relationship because of a controversial issue?

I've never witnessed so much anger, controversy, name-calling, or ugliness before. We are so divided over everything.

Paul is writing to the Colossians, a group of Christians who are members of the congregation at Colossae. The Epistle to the Colossians declares Christ's supremacy over the entire created universe and exhorts Christians to lead godly lives. If you're familiar with the Epistles in the New Testament, Paul or whoever the author is, is usually writing to a group of Christians that seem to have strayed from Christianity or are having trouble being Christians during a time of persecution.

What today's scripture tells us to do is contrary to everything I feel like we do, see, and hear in today's world. Paul is telling them that because of what Christ has done for them, they need to react accordingly. He says you need to have certain qualities about yourself, you need to forgive, you need to love, you need to have peace, and you need to give God praise and thanksgiving.

He's talking about individual Christians, yes, but what he's also talking about is the collective community of believers, or what we would think of as the church.

I don't want to look at this scripture on an individual level, as much as I want to look at it from a communal lens. Verse 15 says, "one body" meaning the body of Christ, which can quite literally mean the local church. Yes, it is great for individuals to act like this as Christians, so remember that. As Christians, people made NEW because of our relationship in Christ, we need to possess these 5 virtues. We need to clothe ourselves with these desirable qualities. We aren't perfect but, because we have been radically changed by our relationship with Christ, we strive to possess these attributes—compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

One of the overarching themes of this section is about the lordship of Christ. This means that Christ is Lord over all of the universe, but also Lord of our lives. To do everything in the name of the Lord is to recognize Christ's lordship over all aspects of our life. That means how we act, what we say, what we believe, what we say, and how we treat others. There should be continuity between worship and daily life. This should not be a burden, but a natural expression of thanksgiving. In this letter, thankfulness is the key response to the gospel through participating in communal worship. As

readers teach and admonish one another, the Word of Christ will have a firm place in the community and will be the source of wisdom.

But in a time where the Church as a whole is dying, there is conflict, gossip, abuse, and unnecessary pain, we need to really look inward. Clearly Paul recognizes that similar things were happening in this community-- he recognizes the reality of every community, and offers the solution. Verse 13 says, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Everything we do, individual or collective, is a response to what GOD has done FIRST in the world and in our lives. Bearing with others involves fully accepting them for who they are, with their weaknesses and faults, and allowing them worth and space. Because God constantly forgives us, we should be generous enough to forgive others. Forgiveness is essential for newness in humanity.

Think about any relationship you have—if you're holding something against a person, if someone has wronged you and you hold anger, sadness, and resentment in your heart, you aren't going to be able to move forward in having a relationship with them. Let me be clear that forgiveness is not always a remedy for healing a relationship—we have to let go of toxic or abusive relationships. Forgiveness is not just good for our souls, but, we cannot be a healthy and sustainable "one body" if forgiveness cannot happen. Forgiveness

is not just about healing, but about reconciliation for God's purpose for harmony. In addition to forgiveness and bearing with one another, we are called to work towards peace and to love.

Earlier in the book of Colossians, chapter 1 v 20-22, Paul talks about the true reconciliation that God has done with humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It says, *“and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.”*

God has made peace and brought about reconciliation. What would it look like if we were really reconciled to one another, as Christ reconciled himself to the world? I'm talking deep hurt, race relations, politics, in our Methodist denomination, and yes, the budget... I know that God can reconcile the most broken of relationships—the deepest wounds and the widest divides. I know it because I've seen it with my own eyes!

Through the crucifixion, Christ's peace enters through reconciliation with God. We are called to appropriate and live into the peace of Christ. This should be the rule of our hearts and the church. God has brought believers into this new order of peace. Now we are to let this peace take control both at

the center of our individual lives and in the one body. Then, there is love. Above anything else, Paul says that we are to “put on” love—that this is the most important virtue as a Christian. We hear this throughout the Bible—love one another, the greatest of these is love, love is patient, love God and love one another... just to name a few. Love has been described as the bond of perfection. Love acts as a bond not only for other virtues, but also for the community in which they are to be displayed. Love unifies us as one body and it’s our responsibility to respond.

So, what do you think? Sounds good, right? Not only does it sound good, it’s our response as Christians to how God is working in our lives. This is the call of the church—the church universal but also Lexington United Methodist Church—The call for God to rule over our lives so that we made exude thanksgiving, forgiveness, peace, and love. Any place there are people means we are going to be falling short of what we are supposed to do. But, it doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t strive for the one body and our individual lives to look this way.

The more we get away from these virtues, the more we get wrapped up in our own junk. Though it can be hard to forgive, love, be at peace, it ultimately creates more unified and Christ-like environment for everyone. The church needs to be on the forefront of this movement in our society.

Nowadays, people don't really look to the church for anything relevant. This isn't the history of the church, especially the United Methodist Church, but this is our time. In a world that is so divided over every single issue, we can be an alternative. It starts here with us... in this local church. We need to show the world that God can reconcile any situation or people to each other. We need to be the first to forgive and offer signs of peace to one another—something the world needs a dose of. We need to show that we have a peace that surpasses all understanding in our hearts, and that we aren't sweating the small stuff.

**We need to offer the most radical, open, and hospitable love to everyone in this world, so that all may know the love and grace of God.**

When we do this, it keeps our eye on what is important—the lordship of Christ over all aspects of our lives. When we focus on reconciling our differences with one another and truly try to live in peace with one another... and love one another, then the petty things fall away so that the church can live out its mission in the world, which is to make disciples of Jesus Christ to radically transform the world.