

## Christian Living, from Colossians #5

After a couple lessons on prayer, we will return to the study of Colossians 3, about practical Christian living. Chapters 1 and 2 are doctrinal, but we need to be able to put correct doctrinal knowledge into effect in our lives, to glorify God and to be fruitful in Christ. So far we have studied Col. 3:1-13.

Col. 3:14-15 – “And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. “

### Charity (Love)

The Greek word used here is **agape**, which most people have commonly heard to describe a certain kind of Christian love. Greek has many words for love, but the NT uses mostly two – agape and phileo (in many grammatical forms). Phileo can have a broad set of meanings including affection and brotherly love, family love, or even a love of money. This lesson will not be doing a comparison between Greek words, even though that would be interesting.

I do not know why, but the KJV sometimes translates agape as love, but also as charity. Every time it uses charity, the Greek word is agape. Thayer’s Lexicon defines agape as “affection, good-will, love, or benevolence”. The word charity is no longer very good, because now it primarily means giving money to the poor, or to the church, or some organization.

We use the word love in many ways:

- Almost meaningless (“Love ya, bye”)
- Expressions of approval or enthusiasm – “didn’t you love that playoff game?”, “I love my smart phone”, “I love chocolate”, “I love the new model RAM trucks”, etc.
- Sexual – as in the offensive term “making love”. In previous decades (early 1900’s?), it simply meant sweet talking, tender conversations. Now it refers to sexual activity, even when there is no love involved at all.
- Familial or neighborly – the love between family members or good friends

The Bible uses agape for a purer kind of love than these examples. It is used to refer to the love of God toward Christ, of God or Christ toward men, or of our love for God, but here in Colossians and many other of Paul’s letters, it is speaking of love between believers. It is not the love between spouses or mothers and fathers to children, but a love that is born out of our relationship as believers. It is not a love based on what we can get (like expensive meals or diamonds) or experience (like the thrill of a muscle car’s acceleration), but love based on our brotherhood under God. Notice that it says to “put on” love – it is a kind of love that does not necessarily come naturally, like a love of sugar or of family. We love the brothers (sisters) because of the love that God has put in our hearts.

We love partly because Jesus commands it (Jn. 15:12 – “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”) and because we are to follow his example. But we also love because we know God, and if Christ is dwelling in our hearts, then his love goes out to those around us. 1 Jn. 4:7-8 – “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” 1 John says a great deal about love, but that study would take a great deal of time.

**Col. 3:14 says “charity, which is the bond of perfectness”** – or perfection, in a moral and spiritual sense. We know that we will never be perfect in the absolute sense in which God is perfect, and yet Jesus does say, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Love is a bond which unites us in a perfect way, a Godly way. It is not corrupted like the love of the world (“I will love you if you love me”, or “I will love you as long as I can get something out of the relationship”, “I will love you as long as you make me look good”, etc. It perfects our relationships in the church and in our families and to our neighbors, even to our enemies, because it is God’s love. Rom. 5:5 – “... because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

### Peace (“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts”)

This peace is not national peace, or Millennial peace, or peace with boss or co-workers, but the internal peace that we have as a result of coming to Christ in humble submission and repentance and the new birth. It is a peace with God, as we see that we are no longer his enemies, no longer living in fear of his eventual damning judgment. We no longer have to live up to impossible standards of the Law or of men’s institutional religious rules.

If we have real and genuine peace with God in our hearts, then it will extend also to the home, church, and workplace. Only those who know peace can be peacemakers (Mt. 5:9). We cannot always make others be at peace with us, because they don't desire it, but "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Rom. 12:18)

Why does it say to "let the peace of God rule"? Perhaps because in the midst of a chaotic and corrupt world that is so full of distractions, we need to be reminded to look away from those things and look to God in faith. Faith that he really is in control and working all things according to his will in this world (even though we cannot see the "big picture"), and also faith that he will keep us safe and that he will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to endure (1 Cor. 10:13).

Peace is one of the main characteristics or benefits of our redemption. Rom. 14:17 – **"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."**

#### **How do we obtain and maintain this peace?**

- Realize that it can only come to those who are "in Christ" as redeemed believers, who are born again.
- Know that it is his peace, and so refuse to be afraid. Jn. 14:27 – "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Our peace is "in Christ". Eph. 2:14 says "He is our peace"  
Jn. 16:33 – "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."
- Yield to the Holy Spirit and lead lives that are spiritual, not fleshly. Rom. 8:6 – "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."
- Pray thankfully to God and refuse to be careful (anxious). Phl. 4:6-7 – "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."
- Trust in God and maintain your attention on him. Isa. 26:3 – "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."
- Know that it is a fruit of the Spirit – Gal. 5:22-23 – "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

#### **Thankfulness (Col. 3:15 - "... and be ye thankful")**

Unthankfulness is a common characteristic of this world. Rom. 1:21 – "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

Those who are not thankful to God apparently do not know their own guilt, and the terrible and eternal consequence of their sin. When we know that we were formerly on the road to destruction and eternal damnation, but that God in his mercy got our attention, gave us repentance and life, and that we are no longer his enemies, but adopted sons, how can we not be thankful? That is why so many songs, hymns, and the psalms express thanks to this great and loving God.

Too often people see thanksgiving or thankfulness as merely "counting our blessings", with no regard to God. To be thankful requires humility. It is an acknowledgement that our blessings are not just a matter of luck, or hard work, or superior strength or intellect, but they are gifts from a loving and generous Creator and Father.

Thanksgiving is to characterize not just our daily lives, but our public worship. The OT had sacrifices that were called "thank offerings". We are to initiate worship by thanksgiving – Ps. 100:2, 4 – "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with thanksgiving. ... Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name."

What if you don't feel like it? Do it anyway! 1 Thess. 5:18 - "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."