

You can be turning in your Bibles to Colossians 3. Today we'll be looking at verses 14 and 15. Y'all, I love this book! I love this book. In a world where it seems that everything you hear has someone's spin on it, someone trying to further their own agenda, the one place I know for sure where there is no spin, where it will be honest and sometimes brutally honest with me is here in this book. It never takes a Pollyanna approach to life telling me the road to heaven will be a path of ease and comfort; you're all set! It never does that for me. It does not assume that life, nor a life in the church together, will be without difficulty, and we know something about that. Life in the church is not primarily “Kumbaya” moments. We know that. And nor will it ever be. There are real struggles and real pain in the life of the church. Struggles and pain in the life of individuals and corporately are real. They are very real, as they were real in Jesus' day, for the simple reason that the church is made up of sinners just like me and whenever you get a bunch of sinners together, there is bound to be trouble sometimes. We are redeemed. Our natures are different than they used to be, but our humanness sticks pretty closely. So, we struggle sometimes. Paul never assumes that a Christian has all of his ducks in a row. He just never does that. In fact, he assumes that we don't have it all together and we need a lot of instruction and so we have so many books in the New Testament from the Apostle Paul.

So, we come to Colossians 3 that we've been working with and through off and on through the last month or two. Here after describing the beauty of being united with Jesus, and the reality of our new nature, he says in light of this, clean up your act! Now, those are my words, but that's what he says. In verse 5, he says, ‘Stop sleeping around. Clean up your filthy mind and stop coveting what someone else owns.’ In verse 8 he tells the church, ‘You need to put away selfish anger. Stop throwing a fit when you don't get your way. Don't seek your revenge by lying, and for heaven's sake, clean up your trash mouth and stop using the Lord's name in vain.’ He gets pretty real. Then in verses 10 and 11 he says, ‘Stop looking down on those who are not like you. We're one body! We belong to one another!’ And your skin tone doesn't matter, your background doesn't matter, your socioeconomic level doesn't matter; all those things really don't matter in the church. ‘You're family! Now, act like family’ he says. And he's forthright with the struggles and the realities of what it means to be human and to be a part of a body full of humans. This is how to get along, he says in verse 12. He says, ‘Be compassionate. Be kind. Be humble. Be gentle and patient with one another! And when someone sins against you, forgive them knowing full well that you may be the one who needs forgiveness next time.’ That's what he says.

Now, here in verses 14 and 15, our text for tonight, he sums up what is most important, the principle values. These three should be seen as the principle values, the principle behavior in the New Testament church. These are the keys to living together as followers of Jesus. These above all else. He writes, “<sup>14</sup> And above all these put on 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 one body. And be thankful.” These three: put on love, let peace rule, and be thankful, which is the outline of our message today.

So, first of all, put on love. He says there in verse 14, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Now I see two pictures here that he is communicating, or teaching us through: two pictures. He says, first of all, love is a bonding agent. He tells us that love binds everything together and it binds us together! We know that two things can't be bound together unless there is a third agent that does the binding, right? There has

to be a glue of some sort. At Ethos, the bonding agent that glues our life together is love. We have to love one another. We need to care about one another. Notice he doesn't say, 'The skill of the preacher binds us together.' He doesn't say 'The practice of the ordinances binds us together' or 'The pristine theological positions of our faith are what bind us together' or 'The ministries that we do,' or 'The mission projects that we are about.' Those are not the binding agents. Paul says, when you love me and I love you, that's what holds us together. That is what holds us together as a body. Even the virtues, he says, that he listed earlier, compassion and kindness, humility, meekness, patience and forgiveness, without love are fruitless! They do not bear the fruit of the Christian. Sam Storms, a friend, he writes it this way, he says, "Without love, knowledge is but a selfish and arrogant acquisition. Without love, purity is self-righteousness. Without love, zeal is an aimless endeavor. Without love, hope is a fool's deception. Love, as it were," writes Sam, "Holds them together in a single, coherent package." It takes love! When these virtues come from a heart of love, they are the most beautiful thing in the world. The effects of our sinful behaviors are negated with love.

Do y'all remember, some of you probably remember, Merry-Go-Rounds on the playground? I don't think they have those anymore because they're too much of a liability, but I grew up on Merry-Go-Rounds, and lived to tell about it, right? But we would get a few people on there and we'd line up around that thing and we'd get it spinning, and you had to hold on for all you were worth to keep from flying off the outside, right? I think that's centrifugal force, you engineers help me. It tends to go out, right? That's what our sin does for us. We tend to repel others when we have sinful attitudes. The faster or the more you sin, the more likely you are to fall away. Our tendency to sin to others does that for us and it is our grip on loving one another that holds us on, even when we act like sinners. It's because we love one another, and we care about one another. We hold on tight. There's glue there because of love. That's the first picture I see here.

But the second picture is that love is the chief accessory. Now, it comes as no surprise to any of you that I know next to nothing about fashion and the latest trends. It means nothing to me, and you who have known me for a while know that. Give me a flannel shirt and jeans and I'm good to go! Wherever I'm good to go. Right? It doesn't help that I'm colorblind and have no idea. Shelley has to tell me, "Okay, you look alright to see the world" or I wouldn't know! But I know a little bit because I have four daughters and a wife. So, I know it's important. There are some things I've picked up on over the years, and I know that accessories to an outfit are important. I know that there are some purses that you wear, or you hold, or you carry, whatever you do with it, you take it with you! And there's some colors that you take out at certain times of the year and there are other colors that you take out at other times of the year. Don't ask me which ones, but I know that they are changed, right? And there are some shoes, there are some shoes that you wear at some times of the year and other types of shoes and colors of shoes that you don't wear at other times of the year and to different events. They change it up as well. I know that a length of dress varies according to the type of event that you go to. Don't ask me why, but they do. But we know that accessories are important to tie it all together.

Now, when Paul talks about binding together, I don't think he has women's fashion in mind, but rather, men's. He was a middle eastern man and they wore the big billowy robes, right? Well it didn't matter how beautiful that robe was, you couldn't really work in it. It got in the way, unless you strapped a belt on to tuck it in. Then you could travel, then you could work. The picture that he paints is that love is the belt that holds everything together so that we can function together as a body of Christ. He has told us to put on compassion and kindness,

humility, meekness and patience to bear with one another and forgive one another, but without love this whole ensemble falls apart. It doesn't work together well.

Paul just echoes the testimony of all of the Scriptures. Do you remember what he writes in 1 Corinthians 13? He says, “<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” These words are so powerful because from an outsider looking in at these qualities, I would say, ‘Woah man! He has it all together. I’m not close to that!’ But Paul says you can speak eloquently, and you can preach with power and authority and it not gain you anything. You can have all kinds of knowledge. You can be the greatest Bible scholar the world has ever seen, unequalled in understanding, but without love it gains you nothing at all! You can have faith that is so strong that people want to write books about you! But without love, it’s all for naught. You can even choose to die a martyr’s death, but if you don’t do it all with love, it profits you nothing. Now how sad is that? So, what does it mean to love one another? What does it look like? I think you know. You have genuine affection for one another, affinity for one another, you prefer one another. You seek to do good for each other! You want to do good for someone else. You sacrifice if needed for the welfare of someone else. You give of yourself, time, attention, money for someone else. That’s love. Paul says, “Put on love.”

Then he says, “Let peace rule” verse 15. “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.” Peace is used in several different ways in the New Testament. We see peace *with* God in Romans 5. He says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace with God is an objective peace, a peace that means we are no longer at war against God. His anger has been abated against us. We’ve been forgiven, alright? So, we have peace with Him. We find in Philippians 4 that there’s the peace *of* God. It says, “Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made unto God and the peace *of* God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” This is subjective peace. Peace with God is objective; you stand righteous and just in the sight of God. It’s a positional peace. But this is a subjective peace, that internal calm that comes from trusting God in His ways. Trusting Him with your life. That He is working in you and through you to accomplish His good purpose, that internal tranquility of soul that you’ve not been abandoned even though it feels like it. There’s that internal subjective. That’s the peace *of* God.

But here in this text it talks about the peace of *Christ*. This is the only time in the New Testament that we find that phrase: “peace of Christ.” Paul uses it to describe a relational peace that occurs between believers that comes from Jesus, Himself. It’s a communal peace. Paul says, “Let peace rule.” The thought here is that peace is the umpire, the referee, the one who makes the rules and enforces the rules. The metaphor here is of a contest. Let the peace of Christ be your umpire. Let it be your referee. Let this peace of Christ in your heart make the decisions about what you do and how you treat others, what you say and your attitude in the community of believers. So, we ask ourselves about our behavior: is the peace of Christ being the authority in me, in my relationships with other believers? Now, from time to time, the closer a relationship we have in a body, the more the likelihood that there are going to be rifts in that relationship. I mean, there are sinful behaviors, sinful attitudes; there are sinful thoughts. Sometimes, it’s simply a difference of opinion, it’s not sinful at all. But he did not call us to strife, and he did not

call us to enmity. He calls us to peace. When we're not in touch with Jesus, the one true source of peace, we won't have it. So, we are to make decisions within our body based on the authority of the one who grants peace. Giving thought to what would preserve and promote the peace that Jesus died to bring. Now we don't sacrifice fundamental truths of the faith but frankly, I will say that 99% of the disagreements in church life through the years that I've been a part of, have nothing to do with the fundamentals of the faith. It's about our humanness. So, where you can, consider another's opinion more important than your own. Ask yourself, "Am I creating strife or am I creating peace by my words, attitudes, behavior?" I really don't have to have my own way. Hard to comprehend, right? But I don't have to have my own way. I can submit myself to the will of others. Whatever the case, seek to regulate your attitudes and mind under the authority of Christ's peace.

Put on love. Let peace rule. And finally, be thankful, there in the last part of verse 15. Being thankful simply means to be grateful for what you've been given. Nancy Lee DeMoss in her book, "Gratefulness," that we're reading together as a family and with Todd, contrasts gratefulness and ungratefulness, so I just want to read her words here. She says, "A grateful person is a humble person, while ingratitude reveals a proud heart. A grateful heart is God-centered and other-conscious, while an ungrateful person is self-centered and self-conscious. A grateful heart is a full heart, while an unthankful heart is an empty one. People with grateful hearts are easily contented, while ungrateful people are subject to bitterness and discontent. A grateful heart will be revealed and expressed by thankful words while an unthankful heart will manifest itself in murmuring and complaining. Thankful people are refreshing, life-giving springs while unthankful people pull others down with them into stagnant pools of selfish demanding unhappy ways." Unfortunately, a part of human nature is a natural bent to react to people and life circumstances focusing on the negative, what we do not possess, not with what all has been given us. I think we all recognize that, do we not?

In the body of Christ, ungratefulness is really, really contagious. It spreads like wildfire and I've seen it often among God's people. When one person gets crosswise and they start telling their friends about a negative experience with another person or circumstance, it seems to spread like wildfire. Ungratefulness is not a very good testimony to the world, is it? In fact, I believe John writes that they will know that we are Christians by our love for one another. What testimony are we giving when we are ungrateful for the things that God has given us? Instead of focusing on what we have, and the great gift of new life that is ours, we focus on those things that we do not have. Do you remember all the blessings that you do not deserve? Those things that we are given in spite of who we are! If you do, your heart becomes grateful! My friends, you have an impact on those around you. Your attitude and your perspective on the world is contagious. Are people refreshed and encouraged by your thankful spirit, or are they weighed down by negative, ungrateful words? It's a question we all need to ask ourselves continually. May we carefully and purposefully guard against spreading the ugly virus of ungratefulness, at least as diligently as we seek to stop the spread of COVID-19. Unless I'm the only one, I think that most of us, if we're honest, sometimes fall prey to ungratefulness, or at least shall we say, there may be room for growth in gratefulness? Is that fair? Do you have room to grow in gratefulness?

Let me just give you one thing that will help you on the path and journey toward gratefulness, and it's one word: remember. That's it! Remember. Remember what has been given to you that you did not deserve. Remember. Remember God, that He is sovereign over every detail of your life circumstance, that He is always there, always has your best in mind, and He

desires your good, and He loves you more than what you can comprehend. Remember that He is always with you, His spirit is always present in you. Remember that you don't deserve this favor. Remember that His grace is abundant and free, that He lavishes it on you even in the dark days! You have been blessed beyond all measure and one day you will be in glory with Him and there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more suffering, no more unrighteousness. Remember! Think about these things! Remember. And it all happened because He sent His Son to die in your place. Is that not glorious? Is that not something to remember? And how, when we think about that, how can we be ungrateful? Count your blessings, name them one by one, count your many blessings, see what God has done. Above all else, these three, these three Ethos, these are the principle values that we need to hold tight and focus our attention on. Love, Peace and Thankfulness. These, more than everything else, will chart our course for the days ahead together. Let's pray.