

Umpire in the Heart

One Another Duties

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Well, brethren, as we return to the matter of being at peace with one another, I direct your attention to Psalm 120, the first of 15 Psalms used by pilgrims traveling up to the temple in Jerusalem for one of the annual feasts. These Psalms, at least for the most part, seemed to have been composed after the exile and the first, Psalm 120, seems to begin in a distant land where the pilgrim lived among a hostile people, that is, the Psalmist seems to have been an outsider relative to those among whom he lived.

Verse 1 of Psalm 120, "In my trouble I cried to the LORD, And He answered me. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, From a deceitful tongue. 3What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, O deceitful tongue?" Parenthetically I add, how shall judgment come to these who had so used their tongues against the Psalmist? Verse 4, "Sharp arrows of the warrior, With the burning coals of the broom tree," that is, the arrows and the coals representative of the punishment or the judgment to come. "Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech," Meshech being in the Caucasus in the far north mentioned in Ezekiel 38 and 39. "Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech, For I dwell among the tents of Kedar!" That is amongst the Arab peoples of the southeast, Meshech and Kedar represented the world of the unbelieving, alien peoples among whom the Psalmist lived, hostile peoples who surrounded him. Verse 6, "Too long has my soul had its dwelling With those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, They are for war." The sense being, "I desire peace, I love peace." To import the language of 1 Timothy 2:2, "I desire to lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. But what I find all around me are those who prefer war."

The Psalmist is a man at peace, the Psalmist is a man for peace, a man who seeks peace and presumably prays for peace, but in the language of another, "His gentlest words, his gentlest word is like a spark on tinder. If he but speaks they fly to their weapons and are ready without provocation to answer with blows. They are for war." W. S. Plumer writes, "Good men love peace, pray for it, seek it, pursue it, will give anything but a good conscience for it. But there's another class of men, there is a class of men and their number is not small who love strife and live in fire." Now in the context of Psalm 120, those who are for war constituted the world out there. That's bad enough but we expect that. How dreadful when such are within.

Now in connection with the Psalmist's statement, "I am for peace, but when I speak, They are for war," my thoughts went again to the narrative of 1 Samuel 25. I say again because in a different connection they went there some months ago, the narrative of Nabal, David and Abigail, and the narrative seems to be illustrative of several truths. In the first place, we observe in that narrative and I ask you to turn to it again for part 2 of the introduction, we observe a man who at least initially is for peace, that is David. The context of the narrative, David's men were in need of provisions and he sought those provisions from the well-supplied Nabal whose men David had treated well. And in verses 1 to 13 of 1 Samuel 25, we read of David's men going to Nabal, asking for provision, and I quote at verse 3, "now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh." Your English rendering may read "churlish." However read, the simple meaning is he was difficult to deal with. He was intractable and disagreeable. The man was "harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite. David sent," verse 5, "ten young men; and David said to the young men, 'Go up to Carmel, visit Nabal and greet him in my name,' and now in verse 6 we have this peaceable greeting, "and thus you shall say, 'Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.'" Brethren, may that greeting be our heart's desire towards one another. May we genuinely wish that for one another.

But again in the context here of the narrative, this is a peaceable greeting from a man who initially was for peace instructing his men to go to a churlish man and offer such a greeting. He further instructs him, verses 7 and 8, remind him how well we treated his men when they were with us. Verse 9, "When David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David's name," that is, the extended that peaceable cordial greeting. They made a reasonable appeal to the churlish man. "Then they waited. But Nabal answered David's servants," and the answer follows. It was harsh. It was provocative and upon the answer we find a second observation and that is David now under provocation suddenly and quickly becomes a man of war. Initially a man of peace but his temper is up and now he's for war. Brethren, that can happen to us. We become provoked, we become offended, and just as quickly as David becomes a man for war against Nabal, we become the same against one another.

Verse 13, "David said to his men, 'Each of you gird on his sword.'" What a change from the peaceable greeting of verse 6. Now a sword. "Each of you gird on his sword.' So each man girded on his sword. And David also girded on his sword, and about four hundred men went up behind David while two hundred stayed with the baggage." Peace under provocation displaced by war, displaced by a desire to strike back.

David again illustrates something else we've considered. We considered last week some of those disturbers of the peace. This was one of them. Proverbs 15:18, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife." Well, here's David painting a sad picture of that disturber of the peace. Proverbs 29:22, "An angry man stirs up strife." Proverbs 30:33, "the churning of anger produces strife." And again we see in real life David sadly illustrating that kind of disturbance of the peace.

But beyond that, and really here's the main point, we observe a wise proactive peacemaker, a proactive peacemaker in Abigail, one who steps into the breach between Nabal and David and seeks to make peace. Verse 14, "But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, 'Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he,'" that is, Nabal, "'scorned them.'" Well, that's consistent with his being a churlish man, he derided them, he angrily expressed his derision for them, he scorned them. And the young man testifies to the truth of what David had said as to how his men had treated Nabal's. Verse 17, "Now therefore, know and consider what you should do," what you, Abigail, should do, "for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him." He's a churlish man. He scorns others. He is hard and intractable. But again, the peacemaker, Abigail, "Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves of bread and two jugs of wine and five sheep already prepared and five measures of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. She said to her young men, 'Go on before me; behold, I am coming after you.'"

Verse 20, she meets David and not only has she offered these provisions that he sought, but she now wisely appeals. David having expressed his angry retaliatory resolution, his warlike mind, verses 21 and 22. At verse 23, "When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, 'On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal.'" She wisely appeals, proactively appeals as a peacemaker and God blessed her labor. Verse 32, "Then David said to Abigail, 'Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand.'" Verse 35, "Go up to your house in peace."

In summary, we observe a man who initially like the Psalmist of Psalm 120 was for peace but then we observe what we see too much of perhaps in ourselves, how quickly that can change to hostility and a desire to strike back. Under provocation David quickly becomes one who is for war. We observe a harsh implacable man, Nabal, who refused overtures of peace and goodwill but thankfully we observe the hero of this account, the active peacemaker Abigail who demonstratively pursued peace. Brethren, we need to be Abigail-like peacemakers, for peace, alert to the things to which we respond in warlike, David-like ways, and we like Abigail need to take the initiative to pursue and make peace. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are the Abigails. Blessed are the Abrams for they put on display the peacemaking character of the living God.

Brethren, we are now returning to the matter of peace with one another. We began in Mark 9 at verse 50 a few Lord's day's ago, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." And in 1 Thessalonians 5:13, "Live in peace with one another." And at Philippians 4:2, "live in harmony in the Lord." We have considered, if you have the outline before you, a primer on peace, the Prince of Peace, the place of peace and you are

the place, the church of Jesus Christ. Last Lord's day, the matter of hunting down or pursuing peace as Abigail illustrates, and now this morning, admittedly the unusual fifth heading: the presidency of peace.

Now the term "presidency" signifies the action of presiding over. The term "presidency" signifies the action of governing. In our system of government, the President is the Executive Officer. Well, we can say I believe understanding properly the term we're going to consider in Colossians 3:15, rule, that the peace of Christ is to be the Executive Officer in our souls especially when we get into that latter frame of mind that David was in and we want somebody's head. It is the peace of Christ that is to be the Executive Officer and make the decision as to what response is going to prevail. The peace of Christ is to be the executive. The peace of Christ is to be the authority. The peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts as members of Christ's body so as to preserve our very existence and to commend our message.

Our text today is Colossians 3:15 and I read it in the NAS and then we'll read it in a few other English renderings, some known, some rather obscure. Colossians 3:15 in the NAS and ESV is translated this way, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. " The NIV renders it this way, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." J. B. Philips, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts remembering that as members of the one body you are called to live in harmony and never forget to be thankful for what God has done for you." And getting quite literal, a lesser known English rendering has it this way, "Let the peace of Christ act as umpire," and that gets back to the original usage of the verb rendered "rule."

As we come to Colossians 3:15, note brethren, in the context, note we meet initially the conjunction "and." The conjunction "and" is found in verse 15, it is found in verse 14, and the conjunction "and" is signifying a continuation of the train of thought commenced in verse 12 and is telling us interpretively that the light of verses 12 through verse 14 is to shine on our understanding of verse 15. Follow in Colossians 3 at verse 12, "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." We have here in the verses read some primary Christ-like virtues identified, Christ-like virtues that are to be exercised relationally, that is with one another, with each other, these virtues have to do, verse 14, with unified relations in the church and whatever verse 15 means, its meaning must be gained by keeping an eye on what has just gone before, particularly on what we might call the horizontal dimension of these virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness and love. Granted they have vertical manifestations but what is under consideration is their horizontal, their social, their relational with fellow members of the church of Christ, and we should anticipate then by these connectives, particularly "and," that the train of thought is continuing, whatever the

peace of Christ means, it's related in sense to what has gone before, whatever "rule" means, it has the same concern, our relations one to another.

The first question, then, as we take up verse 15, "And let the peace of Christ," what is the peace of Christ? I respond in the context of the socially oriented, socially directed, Christ-like virtues of verses 12 through 14, and remembering the hermeneutical principle of the analogy of Scripture, we remember that, we can then remember there is a primary parallel text to be brought to bear on our understanding of Colossians 3:15. What is that primary parallel text? Ephesians 4:3, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." We ask the question: what is the peace of Christ? If we had no context, no analogy of Scripture, we could give many answers and many of them would be right, but what is meant specifically here? I believe it's rather obvious as to what the answer is. In view of the context and the connectives that link us to the context, in view of the analogy of Scripture, Ephesians 4:3 especially, the peace of Christ has reference to peaceable mutual relations among the fellow members of the body of Christ, it has reference to how you and I get along with one another. It is that peace which should characterize life in this church. It is that harmony, that wholeness, that unity, that fellowship that should mark the mutual relationships of Christ's people.

Yes, it is a peace foundationally arising from the reconciling work of Christ. And yes, it is a peace wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ. But in this context with Christ's church being the forum where peace is manifested, the peace under consideration is the peace that others should discern in terms of how we get along. That's the peace that's under consideration here.

In the language of one interpreter that I came to appreciate many years ago, F. F. Bruce, he translates this opening exhortation, "Let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts." Well, it could be rendered "arbitrate." When hostile forces have to be kept at bay, the peace of God garrisons the believer's heart as in Philippians 4:7, but here, Colossians 3, the mutual relations of fellow members of the body of Christ are in view. Where differences threatened to spring up among them, the peace of Christ must be accepted as the arbitrator. Not our desires. Not our agenda. Not our preferences. But the peace of Christ. It's to rule. It's to call the shots in a controversy. For if members are subject to him, the peace which he imparts must regulate their relations with one another. It is not to strife but to peace that God called them in the unity of the body of Christ. 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. Strife is the inevitable result when men are out of touch with him, who is the one source of true peace, but there is no reason why those who have accepted peace with Christ which Christ established by his death on the cross should have any other than peaceable relations among themselves.

We're talking about a peaceable heart, peaceable ways towards children of the same heavenly Father, towards fellow members of the same family, that one in union with Christ, the head of the body, the church, now a member of that body, that one is to yearn to and pursue living in peace with other members of the same body. That's the peace

we're talking about, a socially directed peace, a peace manifest in the realm of real relationships in the church. That's the peace that is under consideration.

Now Paul says this peace, this peace is to rule. The idea here in the verb of ruling is the idea generally speaking of presiding over, thus the heading "presidency." But there's more light than that. The term was an athletic term. It came out of the world of athletics where there was what we would call a referee or an umpire who decided between competitors. It signified the activity of an athletic official who presided over the games, who enforced the rules and in many cases, particularly in track and field, would decide the victor. For Paul, we would imagine competitions with which he was familiar like wrestling and boxing and again track and field, the verb infers competition between two opposing sides, the verb infers a contest, it infers a struggle in the venue here of the heart, the inner man. A struggle is going on between two opposing sides and the referee steps up, the referee is the peace of Christ, and he makes the call. He declares the victor and the declared victor proclaimed by the peace of Christ is Christ-like virtue or excellence that sustains brotherly relations. The call doesn't go to my anger. It doesn't go to my retaliation. It doesn't go to my grudge-bearing. It doesn't go to my bitterness. They tear down relations. But that's what's going on in the heart. I've been provoked and there is now a Roman 7 struggle within me and the guy in the striped shirt, as it were, steps up, he makes the call.

Amidst the contest in the soul, the peace of Christ declares the winner and the winner is Christ-like virtue which promotes unified brotherly relations and keeps the peace of Christ's church. In the language of another: the need to have a Christian community living together in unison and tolerance is further stressed, that is now in verse 15. What happens when strife and friction enter as disturbing elements? The umpire and he's going back to the etymology of this word "rule," the umpire in any dispute is Christ's peace, both the peace he embodies in which he alone can give, which is the desired prize in all Christian relationships. He is our peace. The call here is to allow no alien spirit to creep into church members' relations with their fellow believers, a spirit which would destroy that peace.

Another writes the verb here translated "rule" would describe the activity of the umpire in the game who decides the contest, thus in the inner conflict which would inevitably accompany many of their attitudes when love and bitterness contend for the mastery, peace is to be the governing factor. Something has happened, a disagreement, an offense, and you've got these two competitors in the soul, love and bitterness. The peace of Christ walks up and the peace of Christ makes the call, declares the winner and it's love and the outworking of love.

Membership in the one body of Christ involves a call to maintain peace among the members. Each member therefore must himself be governed by this inner desire for peace and this peace is Christ's gift. Paul directs that in conflicts within, conflicts arising from hurt feelings, perhaps it's been a correction given or a warning given and you didn't like it, you didn't think it was warranted, perhaps a sharp word spoken, again some kind of disagreement, some kind of offense incurred, some relational interaction that has

displeased and disturbed you, again the point is there are two opposing dynamics. There's remaining sin, I'll put it in my lingo, on one side of the line of scrimmage and on the other side of the line of scrimmage is Christ-like virtue, and they're at one another. The peace of Christ is to win the day, to rule, to declare the winner.

Casting our minds back upon the context, verse 12, a fellow Christian has suffered loss, a fellow Christian is afflicted and grieving and needy, and you know it. You live with that fellow Christian. He or she is amongst you, one of the "one anothers," and there's compassion and kindness on the one side but compassion and kindness are opposed by indifference, by your own busyness, by your selfishness, by your presumption upon others, "Somebody else will step up. Somebody else will take care of it." You've got this contest going on, compassion and kindness on the one side and all manner of remaining sin on the other. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. The call is to go to that response that cultivates unified brotherly peaceable relations between Christ's people. That's the picture.

A fellow Christian may have taken an errant foolish course, you could see it coming, and now you're giving them counsel. There's humility on the one side, but humility is opposed by pride and an air of superiority and a demeaning manner on the other. What's it gonna be? Who's gonna prevail, humility or haughty condescension to that brother that you're dealing with? Let the peace of Christ rule. Make the call.

Your plans, your desires, your expectations were ignored by that brother or sister. You've been overlooked, credit has been given to others, you feel slighted, and there's a competition again in the heart. There's gentleness on the one side but gentleness has some serious opponents, what I want and my expectations, my self-assertion, meet my demands on the other side. Let the peace of Christ make the call.

You've been provoked by another. Someone has acted as Nabal did to David so as to arouse your anger. Patience is on the one side, longsuffering composure under provocation. That's the Christ-like virtue. Well, you know what that's opposed by. David illustrated it. A bad temper and retaliation. Let the peace of Christ rule.

Someone annoys you. Someone drives you crazy with their ways and their habits and their weaknesses and, again, there's a struggle within. There's forbearance but forbearance is opposed by your own desire just to wash your hands of them and be done with them. Let the peace of Christ in Christ's church make the call.

You've been offended by another. Forgiveness is in competition with resentment. Forgiveness is in competition with grudge-bearing. Forgiveness is in competition with a hard unforgiving heart. Who's gonna win? Let the peace of Christ arbitrate that, be the Executive Officer.

The welfare of another brother or sister calls for your self-expending attention or time, energy, skill or presence, and love is met head on by a few convenient empty words. Something has not pleased you. Something has irritated you. Something has disappointed

you. Someone has disagreed with you. There are emotions, there are words and ways which will disturb the peace, which will fracture and cripple "one another" relations and on the other side there are attitudes, words and ways which are peacemaking, peace-sustaining, peace-strengthening, which unify and harmonize relations. Let the peace of Christ officiate, preside over, make the call. In the words of my professor, "Peace is to be the principle which governs our actions and words to exercise supreme control within us. In all inner conflicts as well as with all disputes and differences among Christians, Christ's peace must give the final decision. Nothing is to be done which would violate that peace."

The peace of Christ is the ruling principle, the Executive in the church of our words, ways and attitudes, and as an incentive Paul is going to remind us that this is one of the purposes bound up in the effectual call. We have been called to this, not to infighting but to peaceable brotherly relations.

Brethren, I encourage you to know your opponents, know your own heart, know your own predictable responses that come forth in circumstances of offense and displeasure and disagreement and pray in the corresponding Christ-like peacemaking virtue that should prevail in those circumstances and situations. Let the peace of Christ officiate, arbitrate, be the Executive, be the umpire, rule in your hearts.

We'll come back to this tonight. Let's pray.

Father, this directive is plain, it's understandable, it is keenly relevant. May the Holy Spirit working with the word effectually impress it deeply into the faculties of our soul and in our morning communion with Thee, may we do some anticipation of what the day may hold that we not be caught off guard but might anticipate events and situations where disturbers of the peace would arise and want to fight within our own souls, and may we arm ourselves with the renewal of Christ-like virtue that wins the day. May our church be a church that in the realm of brotherly relations is ruled by the peace of Christ and I pray to the end that we would be preserved as a church to the end that our ministry might be commended by such peaceable relations among ourselves and to the end that Your peacemaking character would be put on display by our relations one with another. Amen.