

January 1, 2006

"Let the Peace of Christ Rule Your Hearts"

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The night before he died our Lord Jesus told his disciples and Christians of every age, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

The peace Jesus gives is different from the peace the world offers. This world looks for peace primarily in people getting along with each other. It seeks peace through peaceful feelings. It measures peace with the kind of warm fuzzies that have made Oprah famous and very rich.

The peace Jesus gives us is different. It is the peace of knowing my sin, my ugly sin that makes me unacceptable to God, has been paid for and that I am his dear child through Jesus. It is the peace of knowing if Jesus comes this year on the clouds of glory to destroy this world and judge all people I am ready to meet him because he has become my peace. It is the peace that assures you in the storms of life that Jesus is the pilot of your life.

This morning we want to speak to you about having this peace in Jesus rule your hearts in 2006. The Greek word for "rule" is found only once in the New Testament. It was used in athletic contestants for an umpire or referee controlling a game or contest. What kind of game would we have between USC and Texas this coming week if there were no referees in the game? You want the peace you have in Christ to rule your life, call the shots, dominate everything you do and say. You don't want this peace sitting on the sidelines or hiding in a closet. You want it with you wherever you go, ruling and controlling and dominating your life.

1) You want this peace to help you get along with other people

So much of your life this coming year will revolve around getting along with other people in your family, at your job, in school, or sometimes even people you don't know who cross the path of your life. When the peace of Christ rules in your heart you will find strength to love people the way Jesus wants you to love them. "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness

and patience.”

You want the peace of Christ ruling your life, because of who you are. You are “God’s chosen people.” You are “holy and dearly loved.” From all eternity God developed and designed a plan that would cancel the debt of sin that made you unacceptable to your God. It was a good plan. An earlier verse in Colossians says, “He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us.” That means I can start this New Year with a clean slate and live every day justified or declared not guilty before God. He chose you from all eternity to have the faith that believes in this gift of forgiveness. He chose you to be holy and blameless in his sight. The more you know who you are in Christ, and the more you know the peace you have through Jesus, the better equipped you will be for the battle of getting along with people according to God’s way, not your way.

Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

You are privileged to walk around purified and holy in God’s sight through the righteousness you have in Christ. You are also privileged to wear the clothes of a new life that God wants to live that is markedly different from the selfish person that still exists inside of you. Put on compassion. Compassion is the deep, inner feelings, feelings inside the stomach that you have for people who are in need. Put on kindness. Look at Jesus, and follow his footsteps in the way he treated people with kindness. Put on humility, the kind of love that puts others first and yourself in a secondary position. Put on gentleness and patience. It takes a strong person to be gentle instead of rough, and patient instead of impatient.

Let me ask you a personal question. What kind of person are you when you get up in the morning? Do you jump out of bed and hit the deck running, singing in the shower, bringing smiles to all around you? Or, are you a slow starter who stumbles around, mumbles, reaches for the coffee, and gradually comes alive? Makes no difference how you begin your day. Because the peace you have in Christ rules your life, whether you are slow starter or fast starter, every day becomes a new day to put on the new clothes of living for Christ with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

I know that there will be some tough challenges facing you this coming year when you will be asked to show forgiveness to people who have hurt you. You may find yourself saying, “I am sorry” on more than one occasion.

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgives you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity.” You never want to bury the hatchet with the handle still sticking out of the ground. You want to forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. The Lord says, “I will remember their sin no more.” The Lord says that he removes our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west. In Christ we have the power to forgive and even the power to put the past behind us and forget or at least minimize some of the deep hurts that have come into our lives. This peace that rules your minds and hearts in Christ, also gives you the strength to love people the way the Lord wants you to love them.

2) You want this peace to help you grow in the Lord

This peace that you have in Jesus is so powerful it also helps you grow in your appreciation of who the Lord is and how much he loves you. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." The peace that you have in Jesus is like a river that flows in your life. Whatever problems and troubles the new year brings to you, the peace always flows the same. It does not dry up and fail you. As Charles Spafford wrote in a hymn after his daughters were lost when a ship went down at sea, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever, lot, Thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."

In his devotional book, "The Answer to Anxiety," Herman Gockel tells the story of an art class that was painting a picture of peace using a theme related to water. Most of the class tried to paint scenes similar to the front cover of your bulletin this morning, a mountain reflected in the pool of still water. However, the artist that got the best grade was the one who showed peace as a thundering waterfall, and over the falls a bird sitting in a nest and singing joyfully. Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air." They sing without a care in the world because they knew their heavenly Father is taking care of them. That is a peace that also rules our hearts and minds this morning because of who we are in Jesus. Galatians says, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In the biggest storms of life, we can rejoice together in who we are in Jesus through our blessing of baptism.

How can 2006 be a year of greater peace and joy? The answer is found if we look back into our text. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." The Greek word for "dwell" has the thought of actually taking up residence, the way a person might move into a home or into an apartment. We want God's Word to take up greater residence in your lives, because when that happens, we will grow in appreciation of the peace and love that we have in Jesus.

The Apostle Paul wrote these words about the peace we have in Jesus. He knew what it was like to face the storms of life and have this peace in Jesus flow through him like a river. A little quiz this morning. Can you tell me where Paul was when he sang hymns of praise to God in the middle of night, in a dark dungeon, with his back laid bare from being whipped and beaten? It was the city of Philippi. Paul and Silas sang to each other with hymns and songs and spiritual songs. They sang about the peace they enjoyed together in Jesus, just as we can sing about this peace even in the worst events of this coming year.

We want the word of Christ to dwell in us richly more often than just the times we gather together on Sunday to hear sermons that open up the Bible and sing songs that reflect the teaching of Scripture and the joy of the gospel message. We want this word of Christ to find its way into our personal daily life. The year 2006 could be the best year of your life, a halcyon year and a banner year, if you find that you have actually seen an increase in time spent alone with the Lord in the word. I am holding in my hand a Bible. Take the time to read a little each day. I am holding in my hand a MP3 player. Download the Bible and listen to it as you drive or during some other quiet time. Even if you spend only three minutes a day alone in the Word, you will be amazed at how you will be richly blessed because God's Word has a promise attached to it. "So is my word that goes out from my mouth; It will not return to me empty, but accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

I am holding in my hand a cup. As you fill this cup with a greater appreciation of God's grace and the peace you have in Jesus, it will begin to overflow. You will find that these words come true in your life, "And whatever you do, whether in word, or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father through him." Life will deal you its share of blows this coming year, and holes will be poked into your cup as you feel drained of the blessings you have in Jesus. Paul knew the struggle we faced last year and will face again this year, "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no the evil I do not want to do, I keep on doing." Did you ever have days when you felt like a surfer being rolled in the big waves, banged up and beaten up by your internal weakness that give in to sin? It won't be easy again this year as we find ourselves facing our weakness and realizing every day, "Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good." Then the peace that only Jesus has to offer comes back into our lives and we are able to say with Paul, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the peace that rules our hearts and lives this coming year. Amen.