

**Introduction:**

- A. Jesus said, “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” [Jn 13:34-35]. That sounds great, of course, but it perplexes me. Lots of groups love one another and nobody concludes that they must be Jesus’ disciples.

**What is so distinctive about Christians loving one another that people can see that they must be followers of Christ?** Look again: “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” Jesus isn’t just saying “*I loved you so you should love each other.*” He is pointing to the **way** he loved them. Jesus loved as no one else. A group hug won’t do it. Singing “Blest Be the Tie that Binds” won’t make much of an impression. A fellowship dinner isn’t the same thing. **To love one another so distinctively that the world sees Christ we must learn to love as he did.**

- B. Turn to **Col 3:1-4... *Illus.***: I’ve just finished listening to a remarkable novel, *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead. One picture that sticks in my mind is of a slave named Mabel who walked away from the deadly Randall plantation in the dark of night. She waded into the swamps and when she came to the first island she looked up till she spotted the North Star and then she knew which direction to go. She could not go back for she would suffer the cruelest of deaths. She had only one way forward. We set our eyes on a brighter light and with far more hope, for our hearts and minds are oriented to the highest heaven where Christ is enthroned. We do not look from afar. Having died with Christ, and been raised from the dead with Christ, we’re now hidden in him. He is our life. We are seated with him.

The Bible says here that we died. Let's read on: **vv.5-11...**

**I. IF WE ARE GOING TO LOVE LIKE JESUS WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF THOSE OLD GRAVE CLOTHES AND PUT ON HIS GRACE CLOTHES**

- A. We once wore a sinful nature that reeked of death. We were often toxic, like people infected with a deadly contagion: *sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying.* Think of all the damage we've done to people. How **grace-less** we've been. **Get out of those old grave clothes once and for all!** *Illus.:* There's another image in that book, of a slave woman named Cora. She's finally crossed to safety and a kind, loving man named Royal buys her a new blue, cotton dress. The old dress is filthy and torn, and bears terrible blood stains. When she's changed, he crumples it up and throws it in the gutter as they walk away. Do that!
- B. **Put on the grace clothes of Christ. Vv.9-10....** These are some remarkable clothes—this “new self,” new nature—that we put on. They are immortality itself. This new self is “*being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*” These are like smart clothes. Our new nature keeps being upgraded the more we learn of Christ, and the effect is that we become more and more like our Creator God. We become godly.
- C. **This transformation**—this new Christlike self we wear—renders as unimportant all the usual distinctions among us. Because for us, Christ is all. And Christ is *in* all. Our identity is all about Christ and our life as a church draws from Christ within us.

**If we are going to love like Jesus we have to get out of those old grave clothes and put on his grace clothes**

## II. SO DRESS IN THE GARMENTS OF GRACE (3:12-14)

- A. Look at the first phrase of **v.12**, *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved...”* Chosen. Holy. Dearly loved by God. We’re no longer orphans or rag pickers. We’re no longer red-faced failures or soul-sick sufferers. Remember the father’s welcome of the prodigal son? *“Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.”* Here in Col. 3 is another picture of the best robe he gives us.
- B. **Vv.12-14**, *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”* The clothes we wear can change our perceptions of ourselves. A nurse learns to think of herself as a nurse even when she’s not in the white uniform. Same way with a cop. Christians are to always clothed in these selfless graces.

All those qualities cost us something and they are all the clothing Jesus put on. His very nature was a servant. *Kindness, gentleness, forgiveness as Christ forgave us*—they all speak of relationships where we have to sacrifice. They are all *grace gifts* to others, whether deserved or not.

- C. *Well, can’t I just go off and be alone and be godly?* Not very well, we can’t. **Christlikeness is primarily relational.** Christians who isolate themselves from church, from relationships with other Christians, are like people stuck in an elevator. They’re going nowhere. Likewise, those who are disciples of Jesus but who are not engaged in

a church—let alone those who don't even attend church—are not going to grow in grace as God intended. It is the very stress and unity of church life where we learn to be the agents of God's grace.

- D. That section tells us that we were born again to be dressed in grace—that we are able to bring to all our relationships the same loving, sacrificial qualities that Jesus brought to us. *Illus.*: You know how little kids can put on a Spiderman costume and they *feel and act* like Spiderman. We put on Jesus.

So why doesn't that work better? Why am I still so cantankerous, so defensive, so short-tempered? The text has told us how to dress, now it teaches us the secrets of Christian unity. **V.15...**

### **III. GIVE THE PEACE OF CHRIST THE LAST WORD (3:15)**

We wouldn't be here, of course, if it wasn't for the peace of Christ. Christ reconciled us to God while we were yet sinners—while we were his enemies. He made peace and he gives us peace like nothing the world can offer. It is a peace that all Christians share in common.

- A. When push comes to shove in our relationships we battle inwardly. We have internal debates like these:
- *If I forgive her she just gets away with it again.*
  - *I've been patient—very patient—but he needs to meet me halfway.*
  - *If I tell her the truth it is going to be very messy and I hate messy.*
  - *Let someone else do the compassion thing this time. I'm worn out.*
  - *I don't like being treated this way.*
- B. Grace can meet some stiff opposition within us. When we should be compassionate, kind or forgiving there's some

serious pushback inside us and among us So we are told to call in an arbitrator, a referee, called “*the peace of Christ.*”

*Illus.:* So picture some Christians who aren’t getting along—a couple kids in the youth group, a married couple, some guys on the opposite sides of a leadership decision. Imagine them in a boxing ring, satin trunks and a big boxing gloves, dancing on their toes, tapping their gloves together. Before boxing matches the referee brings the two boxers together for some last minute reminders: “*Let’s have a clean fight. Protect yourself at all times.*” Imagine our referee in his black and white striped shirt climbs into the ring and summons each to the middle. “*I’m your referee tonight,*” he says. “*My name is ‘the Peace of Christ’. Let me remind you of the rules:*

- “*You will **forgive** all offenses against you, because Christ forgave you.*
- “*You will **not judge** the other before you have thoroughly tested your own heart’s motives and actions.*
- “*You will meet any harsh or thoughtless words with **blessing** and **prayer** for the other’s best, because your Father is merciful and expects you to be also.*
- “*You will **esteem** all others above yourself, and consider yourself the servant of all, because no servant is greater than his master. Your basin and towel is there in the corner.*”

And the two just stand there, hands at their sides, till one finally pipes up as he pulls his hands from the gloves, “*I think I know what grace requires of me. I’ll take care of this another way.*”

- C. When we were studying this passage, Tyler pointed out that this is a strong command. “*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts*” isn’t suggesting that it just happens naturally so that we just *let* it happen. Rather, the sense is, *Put the*

*peace of Christ in charge of this tension you feel. If you're going to be an agent of Christ's grace you are required to let his peace referee your tensions.*

- D. "Since as members of one body, you were called to peace." Here's the extraordinary unity of the body of Christ. Peace, nourished through grace, is what makes our love for one another so distinctive it draws people's attention to Jesus.

There's one more thing we must do: **v.15c**:

#### **IV. "AND BE THANKFUL"**

What does being thankful have to do with Christian unity and grace? Listen to the rest of the thought in **vv.16-17**... Let's break that down:

- A. "Let the message [word] of Christ dwell among you richly." There's the unity idea again: *among you*. What prompts us to be a thankful people? When the word of Christ—all that Christ speaks to us in Scripture—dwells in us *all richly*. *Illus.*: I've read a sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins a couple of times. I think I get it. He says (I think) that Christ embodies believers which means that "*Christ plays in ten thousand places.*" I read the poem because the author of a book I'm reading says that this one sonnet changed his whole way of thinking about ministry. That poem dwells in him *richly*. In me, barely.

It's like that with the word of Christ among believers. We bring to one another a rich understanding of Scripture, the work and word of Christ. We dig deep into the Bible. Those in whom Christ's message dwells richly are thankful. The last two Sundays, through all the elements of those worship services, and especially the sermons from people who are learning God's word richly, left us all leaving grateful for the riches of the gospel.

B. When the word of Christ dwells in us richly as a congregation there are two unifying outcomes:

1. *“Teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom.”* When the *message of Christ dwells in us richly* we naturally share that with one another. We share a biblical insight over coffee. Someone sends an encouraging verse in a get-well card. A growth group or Sunday school class works out a passage together, bringing in the things we’ve each learned elsewhere. When someone is slipping we try to find a way to warn them of the dangers. *“With all wisdom”* guides the placement and timing of our teaching and admonishing. **The effect of teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom is that the word of Christ dwells in us even more richly and we are thankful for that.**
2. *“Singing psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit to God with gratitude in your hearts.”* Here’s the second effect of the word of Christ dwelling in us richly. We have a wide repertoire of songs that express the riches of our faith in Christ. We sing about everything precious to us. And our singing of the riches of the word of Christ makes his gifts our highest art.

Notice the phrase, *“with gratitude in your hearts.”* **The key ingredient in good Christian singing is gratitude.** Enthusiasm, style, rich lyrics, great music—all those are secondary to gratitude. **Our shared gratitude is the harmony in our songs.** That’s why we sing each other’s music. It isn’t really important if you or I like every style of song we sing. What’s important is that we love each other enough to give one and all a voice to sing together of our gratitude to God for the rich word of Christ we enjoy together.

C. **V.17**, “*And 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.*” Here’s the third secret to Christian unity—whatever we do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. That takes the ownership out of our hands. It takes away the reason for comparisons and conflict. And again, “*giving thanks to God*” brings a unity only Christians enjoy.

## **Conclusion**

We’ve mentioned several times the statement by Gordon MacDonald, “*The world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church. You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, or heal the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer grace.*”

So far in this series, we’ve looked at how the Bible teaches us the truth of God’s grace. “*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*”

We’ve learned how freeing Christ’s grace is, how it can transform our lives as it did Paul’s. We learned from the four friends who brought their paralyzed companion to Jesus how we embody grace and how forgiveness of sins is Jesus greatest miracle of healing.

Now today, we have seen that to love one another so distinctively that people will know we’re Jesus’ disciples we must clothe ourselves with the virtues of grace. We must let the peace of Christ referee our inward battles, and we must nurture thankfulness through the word of Christ and songs harmonized by gratitude.