

“What are your priorities?”

December 27, 2015

Colossians 3:12-17

I. Introduction

For the last few weeks we have been getting ready for Christmas—the birth of Jesus Christ. As a church, we have considered the prophets, the angels, the Wisemen, and the shepherds and their various involvements with Christ’s birth. During the same time we have all decorated our houses, sent out and received Christmas cards and letters, finished buying presents and wrapping them so that they all could go under the Christmas tree. In many homes there was a Christmas meal with family and friends which also took weeks of planning and organizing.

Now, except for a household here and there, it’s all done. Another Christmas has come and gone. There may be wrapping paper in some weird out-of-the-way places, but all the presents have been opened. Now we need to decide where to put all of them. Some presents were “Just what I wanted” and already have a place to stay. But there are others that—well, let’s not go there. The Christmas meal is done, company is gone, the fine china is washed and put away, and now we’re eating leftovers. One advantage of living in the “frigid north” is that we can sometimes use the garage as an extra refrigerator!

Tomorrow most of us will go back to our normal schedule—at least for the 1st part of the week. Then we will celebrate New Year’s Day—parades, football games and, for some, putting away Christmas decorations. For many people, the time between Christmas and New Year’s is a time to look back over the past year—a time to take inventory. As each of us looks back, there are going to be things and people for which we are thankful—they bring pleasant memories. But there are going to be other things, perhaps even people, that bring back unpleasant memories. This coming week is also a time to look ahead to the coming year and figure out how we can repeat the pleasant memories and reduce the unpleasant ones. Some people even make New Year’s resolutions which they may keep for a week or two.

As Christians, we need to take inventory, too. Have we grown? Do those around us see Jesus in what we say and what we do? Are we more Christ-like today than we were last year? Do we have a better understanding of God and who He is than we did last year at this time?

We also need to look ahead. How can my Christian life be more pleasing to God, to those around me and even to myself? In our Scripture this morning, Paul gave 8 characteristics or traits that

should be seen in every Christian's life. Characteristics we can aim for; Paul would say, "Strive or struggle for." As we begin a new year, let's review these traits of a Christian which are seen in how we deal with those around us.

II. Christian Traits

A. Compassion The 1st trait that Paul listed is compassion. The word Paul used means "*pity, mercy, sympathy, as well as compassion.*" As believers, we need to display a tender feeling of compassion and mercy towards those around us. We must not be indifferent to suffering. BUT we must be concerned about meeting people's **spiritual** needs as well as their *physical* needs. As people who have been chosen by a merciful God, we need to show mercy and compassion to others in the same way. **Turn to Philippians 2:1-4.** Do you put the interests—the welfare—of others ahead of your interests? Jesus did. Some Christians are very good at caring for the physical needs of others, but what about their spiritual needs? Are we showing compassion to others if we don't tell them how they can have eternal life? Which is more important: a comfortable life here on earth or eternal life in heaven?

B. Kindness The 2nd trait of kindness is related to compassion. A *kind person* is **as** concerned about his neighbor's good as he is about his own. He is helpful to others. **Turn to Luke 6:35-36.** God is kind even to ungrateful and evil people—at one time that could describe each one of us. Now as God's children we should do the same. We need to follow the example given in the story of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37.** Everyone is your neighbor and everyone needs your kindness.

C. Humility As we have seen in other sermons, humility is not thinking poorly of yourself; humility is having a proper estimate of yourself; of who you are. In **Romans 12:3** Paul wrote, "**For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.**" As we read in Philippians 2, the person with a humble mind will think of others 1st and not of himself. Humility allows us to serve others without caring whether it is noticed or not. Humility is the absence of pride.

D. Gentleness The next characteristic of a Christian, "**gentleness,**" is closely related to humility. Gentleness, or as it is sometimes translated "*meekness,*" isn't being spineless, but rather being willing to suffer injury instead of inflicting or causing it. Jesus demonstrated gentleness when He allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross. Obviously as the Son of God, He could have resisted successfully,

but He didn't. In [Matthew 26:53](#), Jesus said, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" but instead He was willing to suffer death on the cross for you—this is "gentleness" or "meekness." The gentle person does not fly off the handle, he has everything under control. Gentleness is the mark of a Christian under control of the Holy Spirit—it is a fruit of the Spirit in [Galatians 5:22-23](#). Then there's patience.

E. Patience The patient person never gets unduly mad at others; that is, he doesn't get mad without a just cause. In [1 Timothy 1:16](#) we read that Jesus had unlimited patience. But at the suitable time, He did get angry—like when He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple in [John 2:13-16](#). That's what Paul meant in [Ephesians 4:26](#), "In your anger do not sin." The commentator William Barclay put it this way: "This is the spirit which never loses its patience with its fellow-men. Their foolishness and their unteachability never drive it to cynicism or despair; their insults and their ill-treatment never drive it to bitterness or wrath." Patience is the opposite of resentment or revenge. Turn to [James 1:19-20](#). There are times—although few in number—when it is appropriate to get angry—to defend others or one's self, but it is wrong to get angry quickly at the wrong things for the wrong reasons.

F. Bear with each other Bearing with each other means to endure or hold back—the KJV translates it as "long suffering." In [1 Corinthians 4:12](#) Paul gave an example of being "long suffering," "When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it." He did not respond in kind and neither should we. If we have agape love for one another, we can endure and we can make allowances for each other's faults; we can be long-suffering.

G. Forgiving each other Not only are we to endure problems and not retaliate, we must also forgive the one causing trouble. If Christ can forgive us as we sin over and over, we must be able to forgive each other. As [Matthew 6:12](#) says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Since we want to be forgiven by God and by others, shouldn't we be ready to do the same?

H. Love Finally, Paul says to "put on agape (love)." Agape love is the belt that holds all these virtues together. As we can see in [1 Corinthians 13](#), the first 7 Christian traits listed here in [Colossians](#) are all part of true Christian love—agape love. Turn to [Romans 13:8-10](#). When love rules in our lives, it unites all the virtues together; then there is spiritual maturity.

III. Christian Priorities

If these 8 Christian traits are to be present and growing in a Christian's life, then we must get our priorities straight. Paul gives us 3 priorities—the 1st priority is:

A. The Peace of Christ The “*peace of Christ*” (and of God) is to rule or be the umpire in our hearts. This peace is to guide a believer in making decisions. When we obey the will of God, we will have His peace within; but when we step out of His will (intentionally or unintentionally), we lose His peace. But peace of heart alone is not always the peace of God. When Jonah was running away from God, he was able to sleep peacefully in the boat while a storm raged outside. Having a feeling of peace about something isn’t sufficient evidence that one is in the will of God.

If we are at peace with God, we will also be at peace with our fellow believers. If we are out of peace with God, we will bring discord and troubles to the church and even to others around us. Jonah thought he was at peace, but in reality, his sins created a huge storm for those around him.

Paul went on to say that when there is peace in the heart with God, there will be praise on the lips—Paul said, “**Be thankful.**” In **Psalm 32:1-7** David wrote that before he confessed his sins, he “**groaned all day long**” and his “**strength was sapped.**” But when he confessed his sins, he had peace with God and then he could sing. Do you find it hard to praise God? Perhaps you are walking out of God’s will.

B. The Word of Christ Paul said that a 2nd priority for a Christian is “**the Word of Christ.**” If you are to experience the peace of Christ; if you are to demonstrate the traits of a Christian, the truths in this Book must dwell in or live in your life; the Word of Christ must fill your life. Paul wrote that it should feel at home in your heart. This book must be more than a bunch of facts or trivia, it must influence everything you think and say and do. The only way this is possible is through reading, studying, and applying the Word to your life.

As well as causing the characteristics of a Christian to grow, Paul wrote that another result of being filled with God’s Word is that within the church body there will be teachings and warnings based on God’s Word—the Word of Christ. There will be singing of Psalms—*songs from the Old Testament*—and hymns—*songs of praise to God*—and spiritual songs—*songs of testimony telling of what God has done for you*. In spite of whatever is around us, if we are in God’s will and if we are filled with His Word, our singing will be done with gratitude to God. Let me show you an example, **turn to Acts 16:22-25**. Paul and Silas were able to praise God even while they were suffering.

C. The Name of Christ The 3rd priority, “*the Name of Christ,*” is the simplest and most basic rule of thumb for living the Christian life. Everything we say or do should be done and said in the name of

Jesus. By our words and our actions we should glorify His name. When people look at us, they should see Jesus Christ.

One of the best tests of any action is to ask ourselves some questions: “Can I do this thing asking for Jesus’ help?” “Can I speak it and in the same breath name Jesus?” “Would I be willing to ask Jesus to do this action with me?” If the answer is “No,” then it shouldn’t be done at all—it is sin.

IV. Conclusion

As Christians we each bear the name of Jesus. We belong to Him because He died for us. Bearing the name of Christ is a great privilege but it carries with it a tremendous responsibility. Just as our earthly families have expectations of us to bring honor to our family name and not disgrace it; our heavenly Father has expectations of us to bring honor to the name of Christ.

Are the traits of a Christian visible in your life as you go about your daily activities? Are you compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient? Are you long-suffering and do you forgive others? Is everything you do regulated by agape—sacrificial—love? What are the priorities in your life? Where do having peace with Christ and living your life as God’s Word says rank? Is your prime concern what others think of Christ and Christianity or what they think about you?

Since we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we have the resources we need to live a Christian life and to grow. In **Philippians 1:6** we read, “**Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**” But we must allow the Holy Spirit to melt us, to mold us, to fill us, and to use us.

As you begin a new year, purpose in your heart and mind to allow the Holy Spirit to make you more Christ-like; to grow the fruit of the Spirit in your life. In your heart and mind choose to make the Peace of Christ, the Word of Christ and the Name of Christ the priorities in your life.