

“Taking Inventory”

December 29, 2019

Colossians 3:12-17

I. Introduction

We have spent weeks been getting ready for Christmas—the birth of Jesus the Christ. We have considered the prophets, Mary & Joseph, the angels & shepherds, and the Wisemen, and their various involvements with Christ’s birth. During that 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. For many, 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. Although, there’s still wrapping paper in some weird out-of-the-way places, the presents have all 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 were others that—well, let’s not go there. The Christmas meal is done, company is gone, the dishes are washed and put away, and now we’re eating leftovers. One advantage of living in the “frigid north” is that we can usually use the garage as an extra refrigerator!

Tomorrow many will go back to their 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 things, perhaps even people, that bring back unpleasant memories. This 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 you grown as a Christian? Do those around you see Jesus in what you say and what you do? Are you more Christ-like today than you were last year? Do you have a better understanding of God and who He is than you did last year at this time?

We need to look ahead, too. How can your Christian life be more pleasing to God, to those around you and even to yourself? In the Scripture this morning, Paul gave 8 characteristics that should be seen in every Christian's life. Characteristics we can strive for. As we begin a new year, let's review these traits of a Christian—characteristics that are seen as we interact with others.

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.*” A Christian needs to display a tender feeling of compassion and mercy towards those around him. We must not be indifferent to suffering. We must be concerned about meeting people's *spiritual* needs as well as their *physical* needs. As people who have been shown mercy by 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 own interests? Jesus did—that's what Christmas is all about. Some Christians are very good at caring for the physical needs of others, but what about people's spiritual needs? Are we really 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 6:32-36.** 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; everyone needs your kindness.

C. Humility The 3rd trait is humility. As we have seen before, humility is not thinking poorly of yourself; humility is having a proper estimate of yourself; of who you are. In **Romans 12:3** we read, “**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.**” **Philippians 2:5** says, “**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.**” The person with a humble mind will think of others 1st and not of himself. Humility allows a Christian to serve others without caring whether he is noticed or not.

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 it 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 told those arresting Him in the Garden of Gethsemane that He could call 12 legions of angels for His defense, but instead He was willing to suffer a 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 part of the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22-23**. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and then there’s ...

E. Patience The patient person never gets unduly mad at others; that is, he doesn’t get mad without a just cause. **1 Timothy 1:16** says that Jesus had “**unlimited patience.**” But at the suitable times, He did get angry—like when He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple in **Mark 11**. 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 seeking revenge. **Turn to James 1:19-20.** There are

times—although few in number—when it is appropriate to get angry, but it is wrong to get angry quickly at the wrong things for the wrong reasons.

F. Bear with each other The 6th trait or characteristic of a Christian is “*Bearing with each other.*” This 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—sacrificial love for one another, we can endure and we can make allowances for each other’s perceived faults; we can be long-suffering.

G. Forgiving each other Not only are we to endure problems and not retaliate, we must also “*forgive each other.*” If Christ can forgive us as we sin over and over, we must be able to forgive others. As we pray in the Lord’s Prayer in [Matthew 6:12](#), “**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,**” i.e., “*Forgive us for our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us.*” Since we want to be forgiven by God and by others, we must be ready to do the same. Jesus added in [Matthew 6:15](#), “**But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**”

H. Love Finally, Paul says to “**put on agape (ἀγάπη).**” Agape love—sacrificial love—is the glue or binding agent that holds all these virtues together. [Turn to 1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)—the word translated as “love” or “charity” is the Greek word ἀγάπη. The Christian traits found in Colossians are all part of true Christian love—agape love. When agape love rules in a Christian’s life, it unites all the virtues together. There is spiritual maturity.

III. Christian Priorities

If these 8 Christian traits are to be present and growing in a Christian’s life, then priorities must be right—[Colossians 3:2](#) says, “**Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.**” Paul gave 3 priorities for the Christian—the 1st priority is:

A. The Peace of Christ The “*peace of Christ*” (and 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 to others around us. Jonah thought he was at peace, but in reality, his sins created a huge storm.

Paul went on to say that when there is peace in the heart with God, there will be praise on the lips—he wrote, “**Be thankful.**” **Turn to Psalm 32:1-7.** When David confessed his sins, he had peace with God and then he could sing. Do you find it hard to praise God? Is peace missing in your life? Perhaps you are walking out of God’s will.

B. The Word of Christ Paul wrote 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 your heart and mind; the Word of Christ must fill your life. “**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly**”—God’s truth, God’s Spirit must be at home in your heart not just an occasional visitor. The Bible must be more than a bunch of facts or trivia. As an acronym, some have said that the Bible is God’s **B**asic **I**nstruction **B**ook for **L**ife on **E**arth. God’s Word 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 happening 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. Paul and Silas are an example, **turn to Acts 16:22-25**. Because they were filled with the peace of Christ and the Word of Christ, Paul and Silas were able to praise God even while they were suffering physically.

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. That is, by our words and our actions we should glorify His name. If we let something into our lives that cannot be associated with Jesus, then we are sinning. One of the best tests of any action is to ask some questions: “Can I do this thing asking for Jesus’ help?” “Can I speak 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 and we have made Him our Lord and Savior (**Romans 10:9**). Bearing the name of Christ—being a Christian—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 in your list of priorities? Is your prime concern what others think of Christ and Christianity?

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** Paul wrote, I am “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 priorities in your life.