

“Living in Harmony”

Ps. Craig Mobey

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-14 (NIV)

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

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.

Introduction

I once lived next door to a most inconsiderate neighbour. He would burn plastic and general rubbish straight after Lizette had hung washing. He's happy to start industrial work in a residential area at 7am (sometimes earlier) and continue well into the evening. Close to our bedroom. On a Sunday. Actually, it seems to me as if he waits for Sundays to work on trucks and cars. Then there is his language! Picture this, on your 50th birthday you are woken early morning with the F-word and other colourful words being shouted in frustration. Being fed up, I naturally wanted to do something about it... maybe try 'get even.' I didn't, though.

I want to live with my neighbours in harmony. If I had 'gotten even,' hopes of harmonious living would become more difficult. Therefore, managing the situation would have to come from my side, not my neighbour's.

Let's look at harmony in another way. What is the opposite of harmony? Disagreement, dislike, incompatibility and even hatred. So, if you were to take a snapshot of your marriage, relationships with family, friends and colleagues, what do you see? In a sense, disagreements will occur, but do they linger and disrupt? Or are they purposefully dealt with in such a manner, that God is glorified?

Striving to live in harmony can save us a lot of grief in life. Have you ever thought about how many different kinds of people – each with their own temperament, culture and history come to Jesus and then form one body?

Put on Love (v.14)

Verse 14 of today's Scripture says to put on love, because love binds all the other virtues together.

We get dressed for all sorts of occasions. We dress for the beach, weddings, dinner, cleaning house and more. Clothing makes a statement of intent and purpose. What if we put on – clothed ourselves – with love?

Stay with me here, you and I may feel loved, but at the same time, there is more to love than just a feeling. Let's run with this a bit more. Love is my will in action; it is a choice. Therefore, despite the way I feel about someone, I can choose to be kind, choose to be gentle, choose to be patient, choose to forgive and that causes someone to feel loved.

These are the kind of choices that we have to make – daily – if we are going to get along with one another; if not, we will tear each other apart.

Love is a virtue binding decision. Verses 12 and 13 list seven virtues when :

1. Compassion.
2. Kindness.
3. Humility.
4. Gentleness.
5. Patience.
6. Tolerance (forbearance).
7. Forgiveness.

If love binds these 7, then we also have a picture of what love is, with love being the greatest of all (1 Corinthian 13).

If we can get these 7 virtues 'right' then obstacles to harmony are removed because love reigns. Not only does love reign, but we wear love, we are clothed with it . In this way, we make a statement of intent and purpose that says, 'I choose harmony above our differences.'

Let the Peace of Christ Rule (v15)

Here is a guiding thought: what if Christ's peace is the umpire of our hearts? How would this change the decisions that are borne in our hearts?

I suggest placing this guard over our choices, 'will my decision most likely lead to peace or conflict?' If 'peace' (i.e. the peace of Christ) is your answer, then the decision is likely to be a good one. If conflict is your answer, then perhaps you would do well to reconsider.

Many times when we are wronged we are confronted with a hard choice: 'do I need to be right or do I need to be in this relationship?' The answer is not straight forward because although we naturally gravitate toward the relationship (maybe not at first, but later on), staying in that relationship also reminds you of the wrong. Remember that a few moments ago I said this, 'despite the way I feel about someone, I can choose to be kind, choose to be gentle, choose to be patient, choose to forgive...?'

It's not that you will allow yourself to be walked over, it's that you respond from a position of Godly love and peace.

Having said this, there are boundaries that we need to set. As Christians, we will not compromise the Gospel and we will not approve of sin.

When the peace of Christ is the umpire of our heart we do not harm relationships over the colour of a wall, coffee without enough sugar, seating arrangements etc. Instead we recognise that there are times when we give up our right to be right for the sake of relationships. Meaning: Appreciate what you have in your relationships with God's people.

Pursue Godly peace and with thanks, let peace rule in your heart.

Do it all in the Name of the Lord Jesus (v17)

Why? Both verses 16 and 17 instruct us to express gratitude toward God. This is not necessarily because we are friends and it seems like a good thing to do. I repeat ... it is an instruction!

In reflecting over verses 16 and 17 some things stand out for me. There is firstly a foundation undergirding our gratitude and secondly, things that we need to do in love and peace.

Stay with me here...the foundation is Christ who dwells among us and practically, we must strive to allow the Word of God to dwell in us every day and guide us. When we fail to humbly submit to His Word and His truth, we also find living in Godly harmony difficult to achieve.

However, 'truth' is divisive because all 'true truth' is God's truth; this is absolute truth. Other truths are 'constructed truths,' i.e. relative truths which are subject to change. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that parts of society seem to be offended by true truth. Instead of submission to absolute truth, tolerance is elevated over absolute truth. 'New-age' tolerance says, 'you must let me have my way, you must not be offended, like I was offended by absolute truth.' In this world, acting on verse 16 in particular, may be met with resistance.

I personally cannot and will not compromise on the Word, the Gospel or approve of sin. In worldly terms, my 'tolerance' might be found a bit wanting. But I will lovingly and peacefully strive for harmony. I am putting on love.

The truth is, that if Christ is dwelling among us, there are certain things we need to do and certain actions we need to take according to true truth:

- We have to – in wisdom – teach one another.
- We find the wisdom needed for teaching in His Word; the Psalms for example.
- We must harmoniously praise and worship together as we respond to His love, grace and mercy.

But let us not forget that in addition to teaching, we are to admonish one another as well, also done with wisdom. Yes, we are to warn, reprimand, advise and urge one another. And yes, we welcome admonishment with gratitude.

Conclusion

If you want to live in harmony, then put on love. Then allow the peace of Christ to be the umpire of your heart. Stay true to Him and remain in His truth. Then our harmony will bring honour to God in all that we do.

Allow me to rephrase ... Jesus is the focus of our efforts. Jesus is the reason we pursue harmony with each other. It doesn't matter whether or not you and I got our way. Christ is all that matters. Everything else is simply irrelevant.

So gratefully put on love, gratefully pursue peace, and gratefully hold onto the Truth so that in everything you can gratefully put forth Christ.

My neighbour? We started to get on better, praise God.

Family, go and live in harmony.

Amen.