

Leviticus 26:3-13 (Opening)

³ “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, ⁴ then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. ⁵ Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. ⁶ I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. ⁷ You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. ⁸ Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. ⁹ I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. ¹⁰ You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. ¹¹ I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. ¹² And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. ¹³ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

Close your eyes for a second, and think of that perfect location; the place for you where life is perfect.

It's different for everyone. Some people call it their "Happy Place"; that place where there's no problems or troubles. Life feels perfectly calm.

For me, one of those places is alone, in the woods, far from everything else. It's a warm summer day; there's a soft breeze blowing. You can hear the breeze moving the leaves quietly; the birds are singing in the distance, there's the occasional sound of a squirrel chattering at something. There's a small stream of water tumbling over some rocks nearby, adding its soft voice to the quiet of the day. It sounds to me like a quiet nature symphony, where every sound compliments every other sound, and each builds quietly on the other.

That's one of my happy places. Yours may be completely different, but probably has the same effect on you as mine does on me. Wouldn't it be nice to live there every day? I think that's kind of what Heaven may be like; not specifically like my happy place or yours, but somehow making you feel like you do when you're in your happy place, only hundreds of times better.

There are a few things that tend to ruin our happy place. One is some kind of discord; that sound that doesn't seem to fit, like a chainsaw in my happy place; or someone running by, singing along with the music on their iPod with their ear-buds in. Have you ever noticed that no matter how good you can sing, you may sound great to yourself with your headphones on, but everyone else thinks you sound horrible?

The description of my happy place isn't just about the place, but the sounds and the feelings when I'm there. The sounds are musical in some way, building on each other until the perfect song is performed.

Last week, we talked about Colossians 3:5-11, where Paul wrote about the bad actions that can keep us from being what God wants us to be; the things we used to do before we became Christians, and some of the

things we may still do, even though we have become Christians. Paul points out those things that we shouldn't do that cause problems in our relationships with others, both Christians and non-Christians. Just to keep these two parts of Colossians 3 tied together, I want to read our closing scripture from last week.

Luke 11:24-26

²⁴ "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' ²⁵ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."

The point I was trying to make with this scripture is that no matter how hard we try, once we get rid of our bad habits, those things we shouldn't be doing, if we don't replace them with the things we should be doing, we're going to slip right back into those old bad habits and keep doing the things that cause problems for us, and for those around us.

So, let's look at what Paul says we should do once we've taken off that old dirty suit. What are some of the aspects of the new self that we're supposed to put on?

Colossians 3:12-17

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in

all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Paul starts his discussion of the positive aspects of what a Christian should look like with another group of five things. If you remember last week, Paul used two groups of five bad things; the first group was things the Colossians did before becoming Christians; the second group was bad things they were still doing, even though they were Christians. So Paul lists five behaviors that would be more the opposite of the five behaviors that the Christians in Colossae were doing; an antidote of sorts.

These five behaviors are really quite self-explanatory, but there are a few interesting aspects of them that I'd like to share with you.

The Greek word that's translated as compassionate here is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 1:3 talking about God's mercy.

1 Corinthians 1:3,4

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Another thing I think needs to be pointed out is the word that's translated as "meekness" in the English Standard Version that I quoted from. The New American Standard Bible translates the word as gentleness. The Greek word is prautes /prah-oo-tace/. Prautes is one of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians chapter 5. But even more interesting to me is the definition given by the HELPS Word Studies from HELPSBible.com. Praótēs is properly temperate, displaying the correct blend of force and reserve, or "strength in gentleness". It avoids

unnecessary harshness, yet without compromising or being too slow to use necessary force. It's not the wimpy, soft "meekness" that we're told about by society today; that meekness that makes you a doormat. Nope. It's all the good things from an iron fist in a velvet glove.

The last word in the five in the English Standard Version is patience. Again, not a great definition. Most of the time when this word is used describing God, it's translated as "Longsuffering" or a slowness in avenging wrongs.

All five of these behaviors, when tied together, cause what Paul talks about in verse 13. If we're compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient or longsuffering, we'll put up with each other's faults; we'll understand that God's not finished with any of us yet, so we've not been perfected.

At the end of verse 13, Paul turns something that Jesus taught around, but it doesn't change it, amazingly. Jesus said in Matthew 6:14 and 15:

Matthew 6:14, 15

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Jesus ties our forgiving others to receiving forgiveness from God. But Paul turns it around in Colossians 3:13. He says we should forgive others **because** God forgave us, and the same way He forgives us: totally, and expecting nothing in return.

Back in verse 9 that we looked at last week, after listing off the five bad behaviors the Colossians were still doing, Paul brings up lying. To balance out the list of good behaviors, and to bring an antidote to lying, in verse 14, Paul talks about love, which ties everything together in perfect harmony.

This “love” that Paul talks about in verse 14 is the Greek word Agape. What’s really interesting here is that in the Greek, it actually says “the love”, pointing specifically to one particular love, the love that God has for us. So Paul is telling us that we need to love like God does, unconditionally, without expectation, completely. Paul says we need to become more like God so we can help our brothers and sisters grow in Him, rather than lash out and get angry at them when they fail in their Christian walk.

In verse 15, Paul writes about the “peace of Christ”. What is the “peace of Christ”, and how can we let it rule in our hearts? Well, to understand the word peace here, we need to go back further than the Gospels. We need to look way back into the Old Testament, and look at the Hebrew word “shalom”.

According to Strong's Concordance, the Hebrew word Shalom means completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord. What’s really awesome is that Shalom describes my happy place! It also describes what the Promised Land would have been for Israel, if they had always followed God’s law, and what Heaven will be like. That place of rest where there’s no pain, sorrow, or anything bad. Shalom is all the good things that God can provide. No wonder the Jews use it as a greeting and a departing blessing!

This “peace of Christ” is what helps us to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, longsuffering, and to love people unconditionally. We can’t do that without God making us so we can. Our natural state is to be selfish, which is just the opposite of all those things.

Now, take a look at verse 16. Here’s another way of translating that verse that may make it a little clearer:

Let the teaching of Christ be alive in you in an abundant way. Use all wisdom to teach and warn one another with psalms, songs of praise, and spiritual songs, singing to God with thankfulness in your hearts.

That's why we have songs during our worship! To teach and encourage each other. Sometimes, the sermon can't stand on its own.

Also, the root of the Greek word translated as "thankfulness" here is "Charis" which is normally translated as Grace, goodwill, or loving-kindness. So thankfulness is the result of receiving God's Grace.

Paul closes this part of his letter by telling the Colossians they should always express thanks to God by doing everything they do in the name of Jesus. He's reinforcing the fact that we should be focusing more on loving and helping each other. You can't be angry or wrathful with someone in the name of Jesus. Those two things just don't go together.

Paul says because God loved us, and forgave us even before we have become forgivable, we need to learn to be more forgiving of our brothers and sisters. That doesn't mean we need to accept when they sin; in fact, just the opposite. If you truly love your brother or sister, you'll gently correct them when they sin; gently, but firmly. Sometimes that's a hard balance to create. That's why God's Grace is important here. We need to understand that while we can forgive the pain someone may have caused us, only God can forgive the sin that caused the pain. To become right with God we need to make sure that we learn and turn away or repent from our sins. The more we learn how not to behave, and start behaving more the way God wants us to, the more we're going to be able to share God's light with the world. That basket that Jesus said we're putting our lamp under will be lifted, and we will begin to shine His light, and hopefully attract others to be our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Philippians 4:4-7 (Closing)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Questions

1. What makes your “Happy Place” perfect? What ruins it?
2. When someone tells you a person is “meek”, what does that make you think? What are some other adjectives you associate with “meek”? How does the definition of the Greek word **πραΰτης** (prautes) as properly temperate, displaying the correct blend of force and reserve, or “strength in gentleness” change your image of Jesus being meek, and the meek inheriting the earth?
3. A dear friend of mine, while working on a new translation of the New Testament, used a phrase rather than a word to translate the Greek word **ἀγάπη** (agape). The phrase is “Giving yourself to others, for their good, expecting nothing in return.” Even though it’s cumbersome, do you think it’s a good translation of the concept of agape? Why or why not?
4. How does the definition of the Hebrew word Shalom influence your understanding of the peace of Christ?