

Thank You, God, For My Church - Colossians 3:15-17

“DEARLY BELOVED: The privileges and blessings that we have in association together in the Church of Jesus Christ are very sacred and precious. There is in it such hallowed fellowship as cannot otherwise be known. There is such helpfulness with brotherly watch care and counsel as can be found only in the Church. There is the godly care of pastors, with the teachings of the Word; and the helpful inspiration of social worship. And there is cooperation in service, accomplishing that which cannot otherwise be done.”¹

How many of you recognize these words? How many know where they come from? These words come from the membership ceremony for the church of the Nazarene and I have had the privilege to pronounce these words over many of you as you chose this congregation to be your church family.

Throughout the month of October, we are focusing on the call of God to be thankful. Two weeks ago we focused on the fact that God raised us out of a slimy pit of sin and ruin and placed our feet on a solid rock, who is Jesus. We thank God for this incredible rescue.

Then last week we focused on the one who rescued us, who is Jesus, God’s gift too wonderful for words. We marveled at the fact that the God who fills the Universe would not only notice us, but would come to rescue us, even if it cost him death on a cross. We thank God for his indescribable gift.

This week we turn to Colossians 3:15-17 where we find the Apostle Paul calls us to be thankful no less than three times. This is found in the context of Paul’s teaching on the church, “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved.”² The church should be a place of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, forgiveness and above all else, a place of love. This is all found in Colossians chapter three.

As Paul continues to look at the church family, he calls Christians to a response of Thanksgiving.

First, we must be thankful that we are part of a community of peace.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.³

Paul uses the analogy of a body, which must work together in harmony to function well. For instance, when the immune system starts to attack and destroy the coating around the nerve endings in the spinal cord and brain the doctors say you have a condition called Multiple Sclerosis. It is a condition of ill health because the body is fighting itself. Christ’s body, the church, cannot function this way. The Prince of Peace lives within us so we can live at peace with one another.

¹ Manual, Church of the Nazarene, (Kansas City: NPH) p. 254

² [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Col 3:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Col 3:15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Paul says that we will allow the peace of Christ to **rule** in our hearts. That is a fascinating picture. This word for “rule” is only used here in the New Testament, and speaks of allowing something to be the referee or umpire of your life. When you need to know what the call is, how you should respond, you look to Christ and the peace He has brought into your life and you let that have the last word. You will not choose a path that leads to conflict and discord. As people of love, we will find a way to bring peace to the situation.

Satan will use anything to divide the church. When this COVID 19 pandemic started, Satan rubbed his hands in glee because this was a tool he could use for his benefit. People would form all kinds of opinions about how to respond, where it came from, and who we should listen to. Christians would disagree among themselves about how to respond, and churches would be split over how to handle this threat. Paul reminds us, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. How a church responds to the crisis is far less important than how it continues to show love and concern for each other, how Christ’s peace reigns in the members of Christ’s body. We can spend our time talking about COVID or Jesus. Which will bring peace to our hearts?

When our focus is on Jesus, and the peace He brings - peace with God, and peace with the people around us, we can experience peace in our own hearts. No matter what is happening in our lives, gathering with believers should not make us anxious but bring us peace.

The second thing the church is to be thankful for is the privilege of worship. Verse 16 says:

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.⁴

Christians are people of the Word. We plant the scriptures into our hearts so that we might know Jesus better, and how His people ought to live. Men like John Wesley would say they were men of one book, meaning the one book that would shape their lives above all else would be the Bible.

Of course for the Bible to shape your life you have to read it, study it, even memorize it. Our souls are nourished through the study of the scripture. As the Psalmist says,

How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your word.

¹⁰ I seek you with all my heart;

do not let me stray from your commands.

¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart

that I might not sin against you. (Psalm 119:9-11)

The church ought to be a place where you gather to study the Word of the Lord, and where its truths are allowed to shape your thoughts and actions. This is why the preached Word is the center of our worship service, and why we have Bible Studies for you to attend. By the way,

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Col 3:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

could you please let me know which Bible study you are attending this Fall. I want to be sure no one is left out of a group. As Paul says, we can teach and admonish – or give direction, to each other as we study God’s Word together.

And knowing God’s Word leads to singing! A church that is alive and loving Jesus will love to sing. Someone has suggested you can tell the spiritual health of a church by listening to its singing. Does it come from our hearts or our heads? Is it performance or a gift given to God for His love and the mercy He has shown to us?

Note how the songs will be a means to show your gratitude to God. The church will be a place of thanksgiving expressed in song because of what God has done for us in Christ. As the Gospel song says, “This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Saviour all the day long.”⁵

It is not about how well we sing, how true we are to every note, or how professional the band plays. It is a heart issue: are we truly grateful for what God has done for us in Christ – rescuing us from sin and giving us eternal life through faith in Jesus? Music is powerful and can stir our emotions. Let our music be spiritual songs, songs that point us to Jesus.

Finally, God’s people, the church, are to do all things in the name of Jesus.

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. ⁶

The church is not building an empire for itself, or promoting its brand. The church lifts up the name of Jesus in everything it does, and if we cannot invite Jesus into our actions we should not be doing it. Sadly, throughout history there have been times the church forgot this and it did things that caused harm and pain to others. This would include things like the residential schools. May God forgive His church, and may those affected by this also grant forgiveness for their own sake.

But this morning I rejoice and give thanks for what Christ’s Church is doing today in the name of Jesus. This week I was reading the repost of Mission Possible, our work in downtown east side of Vancouver. Everyone hears of the challenges there, but last year alone Mission Possible reached out to hundreds of men and women and through their efforts 85 people deemed unemployable started employment. Street people offered over 14,000 hours of work back to their own community. 931 people allowed the Christian staff to coach them on how to live better lives. All this is done in the name of Jesus.

This week I read how the gleaners provided barrels of dried soup mix to be sent to Uganda through our Compassionate Ministries Warehouse. That soup mix will provide nourishing meals for hundreds of people who desperately need that food. This too was done in the name of Jesus.

⁵ Fanny J. Crosby, “Blessed Assurance”

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Col 3:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Around the world today people are being fed, protected and encouraged through the church in the name of Jesus. I speak not only of the Church of the Nazarene, which certainly is very active in this time of need, but of all churches that lift up the name of Jesus. We are not in a competition but a partnership to minister to as many people as possible in the name of Jesus.

The church is often portrayed as old fashioned, narrow minded, antiquated and out of touch with today's world, yet quietly in every community around the world today the church is bringing help and hope and encouragement to billions of people in the name of Jesus. I do not have time to tell you all the stories of what God's people are doing today to demonstrate the love of Christ to our broken world, but it is almost beyond comprehension what God is doing through the church today.

And it all starts with Christians being filled with the love of Jesus, reaching out to their neighbours and finding a way to help them in the name of Jesus. It starts with a group of Christian women who want to share Christ's love to street people so they ask help in collecting socks and gloves to give away to our homeless neighbours. It starts with people who see we are not here just to care for ourselves, but to help as many as possible in the name of Jesus so they too can come to know Jesus as Lord of their lives.

This morning, we thank God for the church. We thank God for the fellowship we enjoy as brothers and sisters, the encouragement we receive from each other and from our times of worship. We thank God for the fact that our community is a better place because the church is here. We thank God for a place where every life matters – red and yellow, black and white – all are precious in His sight!⁷

This morning we thank God for the church. We are the church. We are people on a journey to become all that God desires us to be. We are not perfect, we make mistakes. But we are Christ's Church, his body, filled with his peace, joy and love. I cannot imagine life without the church. You are my people, my community, my family.

This morning we get to celebrate together as two more people say, "Yes, this local congregation is my church family too" through church membership.

I invite Otto and Elena Bartowski to come join me here at the front of the church.

⁷ Donna J. Krieger, "Jesus Loves the Little Children", © Warner Chappell Music, Inc,