

## **“Living in Jesus.” (Colossians 3:12-17)**

**Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 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. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 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. 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.**

One more year has gone. Already. The next one is almost here. What will it bring? How would we know? Probably as usually ... mixed blessings, a little bit of this and little bit of that... joy and sadness, losses and gains, smiles and tears.

It's quite futile to speculate about that, for that is out of our control. Let's leave it up to our gracious and merciful Lord to whom all authority is given both in heavens and on earth. He knows what we need, and He will provide it.

But we could finish year and begin the new one renewing our minds regarding how we are to live as Christians. And Paul the apostle has prepared for us these wonderful guidelines in his letter initially addressed to Colossians.

Paul begins his exhortations to us by reminding where our focus should be. **“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”**

You have been raised with Christ... Paul refers to our Baptism. It was in your baptism when you were immersed into death with Jesus, where you died to sin and old selfish self, and were raised again with Christ. Now you belong to God. You are His own. Your life, your future is hidden in Christ.

Therefore don't set you mind on things that are of earth. As we are here only for a while. Instead, set you minds and hopes on the thing that are above, on the things to come, on the things that are already yours, for now hidden in Christ.

As Jesus also said: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [whatever you need for this life] will be added to you.” Because the things to come are so, so much greater. When Christ appears you will also appear with Him in glory. In glory...

And as Paul assures us: “The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” This is where we are to set our minds, this is what we are to reflect on, on this great promise and hope that is given to us, on our glorious life in the New Heavens and New Earth.

However, focusing on the things above doesn't mean to neglect our Christian responsibilities in this age. Most certainly not! Thus Paul goes on to explain how we are to lead our lives in a distinctly Christian way.

What would be this distinctly Christian way? We are talking about our new life, where we are united with Christ. Living in Christ. Paul speaks about this intimate connection that we all have with the Triune God.

The Father makes home with you. The Father and the Son send their Spirit to dwell in you. Our new life is so different from the old one. For us it is about daily dying to our old selves, to our selfishness, to our self-importance, to our self-assertion and being raised up for new life in Christ.

Or we could put it as John the Baptist did, that Christ in us needs to increase and we need to decrease. And how would that happen? Paul provides us a list of several virtues that are to be manifested in our lives as Christ in us increases.

**“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”** As Christ grows in us, we will exhibit more and more of these virtues.

But there is something we need to see even before we reflect on these virtues. “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved!” Did you hear? Paul is not telling that if you live according those virtues, then one day you will be a good Christian.

No, he begins by affirming who you already are. God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. For God the Father chose us in Jesus “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

Or as Jesus said: “You did not choose me, but I chose you...” Now you are “holy and beloved...” How come? For as you are in Christ, and Christ is in you, God the Father looks at you with the same affection that He looks at His Son: “You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased!” That's about you.

But how do we then express this new identity? Paul tells. By having compassionate hearts, meaning, when we genuinely care, in our hearts and in our actions, for the distressed and suffering whom God has placed in our lives.

By being kind, meaning, striving to do good to all who can benefit from us. Using every opportunity to serve people in our lives according to the abilities and resources granted to us by the Lord.

Then by being humble and meek. This would be rather a shocking suggestion to Colossians. In pagan cultures, and our culture too is becoming increasingly pagan, there are different values, – that of dominion, of self-assertion, of self-promotion, of raising up and above the others in your social power and status.

How different is the way of Jesus and that of His followers: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who ... emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant... He [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming

obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Self-denial and self-sacrifice instead of self-assertion and self-promotion. That is our way.

Then, by being patient, meaning, holding out under provocations, injustices, inflictions (and they always come) and not giving way to resentment and retaliation. “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God... To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink””. Leave vengeance to the Lord, for He will repay.

Paul goes on: **“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.”** What could be more Christ like that this!

But you would know how hard it sometimes can be. When our old self feels offended, when someone has wronged us. When we are right, and they are not. How easy is it to forgive? This saying brings us to Matthew 18, where Jesus tells the parable about the gracious master and the unforgiving servant.

The gracious master forgave that huge debt, which the servant would never be able to repay, but the servant put in jail one of his debtors for a minor offence. The same is true with us, – every sin, every evil thought, every hurtful word, every wrong deed, every time when we failed to do what we were supposed to, all of that has been forgiven to us. You are forgiven!

How can we not haste to forgive our brothers and sisters for minor things that they may have done or failed to do? Instead of holding grudges, we should be competing in forgiveness, rejoicing that we have been granted this privilege to be able to imitate our Lord Jesus.

**“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”** And on the top of these virtues, put on love. Not some kind of ‘love’, but true love that Jesus teaches us.

It is not about emotions and feelings. It is not about those few people who we truly like. It is about love that doesn’t look for our gain. It is about love that the Triune God has poured over us. He didn’t pick good people, we know that, He loved us while we were still His enemies and He lied down His life serving us.

As Christ grows in us, also His love will grow, and as we have been loved, so we too will be blessed to love those who don’t deserve it but need it so much.

**“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”** And here Paul reveals why we need to excel in all these virtues. Because when we live that way, fearing, loving and trusting our God more than anything and loving our neighbors as ourselves, the peace of Christ rules our hearts.

Peace that has no equals on earth. Peace with God and peace with people. Peace that Jesus established by the blood of His cross. Peace that surpasses our understanding and that is given to us as God’s gift. Because this is what it means to be one body of Christ. A body can’t function well, if members are

fighting among themselves. When everyone wants to get thing their own way, when there is no mutual care and gentleness. The same is true about the Church, the body of Christ.

When we strive to treat one another as we are treated by Jesus, when we strive to care for one another as Jesus cares for us, when we are patient with one another and forgive one another as Jesus has forgive us, there is true peace.

And so many things to be thankful for. Because once we allow Jesus to rule our lives, we see how much there is to be thankful for. Every day, every moment... For we all live by God's undeserved grace. He owes us nothing.

**“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.”**

Here is the answer to the inevitable question, – but how can we do that? How can we decrease so that Jesus increases in us? The answer is – let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. This language of dwelling...

It gives us this picture of house. We are God's house, God's temple. Now let us fill every room, every corner, every shelf in this house with God's word, let it dwell richly with us. For when we have filled every inch with the Word of Christ, there simply is no room left for darkness, for selfishness, for foolishness.

Let us build up one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Here Paul takes us and leads to the setting of learning and the Divine Service. That's where we all together listen to our God speaking to us.

This is where we can grow in all God's wisdom. This is where we sing psalms and spiritual songs and hymns that build us up. This is where we support one another by our presence as we try to follow our Lord in harmony as one body.

And we are to listen to the Word and worship our Lord with thankfulness. Remember, we are so privileged, we are chosen and beloved children of God, and that is in His Word and His Service and Sacraments where He comes to us.

Those are the greatest gifts of our God. The Word and the Sacraments. For this is how we are united with the Triune God and this is how the eternal life is given to us. How could we not be thankful in our hearts?!

**“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.”** May the Holy Spirit grant us this mindset for the years to come.

That whatever we do, in word or deed, we would daily strive to decrease our old self, and let Christ increase in us. So that everything that we do we would do giving thanks to God the Father and trying to bring honor to His name.

May Jesus lives in you and you in Him! Blessed New Year, Brothers and Sisters! Amen.