

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Amen.

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 whatever grievances you may have against one another. 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 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. 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. **This is God's Word for our meditation.**

Dear Members of God's Chosen People,

Have you ever thought about how much of our lives are governed and directed by rules? Parents, as they raise their children, usually have a set of rules. When you go to school there is a handbook with a set of rules. When you get your driver's license there is a set of rules for the road. We have laws – sets of rules – to maintain order in our society. Even God's Word has the Ten Commandments – another set of rules to guide our lives.

The one thing most rules have in common is that they tell us what we cannot do. Don't commit idolatry; don't misuse God's name; don't kill; don't steal; don't lie; don't covet; don't speed; don't cheat; etc. Hearing all these things we shouldn't do gets kind of old. It's so much more refreshing to hear about what we can do – what freedoms – what privileges we might have.

The portion of scripture before us this morning does just that. It tells us that as a result of being God's Chosen People we have the privilege to, **“Live Our Life for Christ.”** The way we live our life for Christ is to, **“Clothe our Life with Christ-like Qualities,”** and to, **“Deal with Others in a Christ-motivated Way.”**

I. Paul gives us a list of five things that are characteristics of God's people. As I describe them, see how many of these characteristics you have as part of your life and how many of them you might have to work on a little bit.

Paul starts with compassion. A compassionate person sees the hurt of others and is moved to do something about it. A great example of compassion is the story of the Good Samaritan found in Luke chapter 10. The Samaritan saw the man lying by the side of the road who had been robbed and beaten and had compassion on him. He cleaned him up and bandaged him and paid for his medical care. We might show compassion by seeing someone with a particular need and filling that need. Compassion also includes listening even when we don't have the patience or time, to listen anyway because that is what the other person needs.

Then comes kindness. This is a little bit broader than compassion in that it is having a loving disposition. Befriending those in need and not being harsh. The early Christians were known for

their kindness to one another and to their fellow human beings. Kindness is to help someone rather than ignore them. Kindness is to smile and to talk to people in a loving and concerned way.

Paul continues with humility. Humility is the characteristic many of us struggle with because our pride wants to elevate ourselves to the top of the pile. Humility and self-sacrifice were characteristics that Jesus often displayed. When we think of humility we might think of the example of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying. The tax collector couldn't even lift his head when praying because he knew his sinful condition while the tax collector prayed with pride, noting his accomplishments. Do we carry the humility of the tax collector or the pride of the Pharisee? Another way to think of humility is, are we always talking about ourselves and what we are doing or listening and seeking to find out more about the person we are talking to?

Gentleness is the fourth characteristic. It doesn't mean to be spineless and weak – matter of fact we want to stand strong in our faith but gentleness is about dealing with people. A gentle person is not easily provoked and overlooks insults in the spirit of forgiveness. Consider how Jesus dealt with people in a gentle way – correcting them and leading them rather than dealing with them harshly. To be gentle you might have to have “thick skin” in order to overlook the bitterness some people project.

Along with gentleness comes patience. It's hard to be patient and yet patience enables us to endure frustration and perseverance. Be patient with the store clerk or bank teller who might be on their first day and just learning how to do things. Be patient with your child who doesn't understand what you are asking him to do or who might need to hear your request three times before it sinks in. There are examples of God's patience throughout the Bible as he puts up with the continuous disobedience of his people including our disobedience at times.

Paul tells us to clothe ourselves with these characteristics. They are not something that comes naturally to us as human beings. Our human nature wants to display all the opposite characteristics, but as holy and loved children of God we are able to clothe ourselves with these special characteristics that Paul mentions because, **“Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”** It is the love of Christ that has changed our hearts and enables us to display these characteristics – to make them a part of our lives.

As I listed these characteristics, I'm sure that there were a number of them you still have to work on. We have to remember we aren't perfect and that is why Paul reminds us, **“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”** Never forget that we are sinners living among sinners but we need to look past each others faults and forgive each other. Each week we pray in the Lord's Prayer, **“Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”** If God can forgive all the wrongs we have done against him, we most certainly can forgive the few sins our fellow man has committed against us. That isn't always for us to do but Paul encourages us to reflect the love of Christ as we strive to be forgiving. And God himself will help us to make this our way of life.

When we put on these characteristics our relationship with God improves and our relationships with each other will also improve as we then deal with others in a Christ-motivated way.

II. Paul tells us as we deal with others to, **“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”** A better translation of that might be to let the peace of Christ be the umpire or referee in your heart. In other words, choose the things that will promote peace with your fellow Christians. We all know people that are hard to be around – they’re always grumpy or always disagreeable – make sure you’re not that kind of person.

One way in which to make sure we are letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts is by, **“Letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”** To have the Word of Christ dwell in us takes more than just coming to worship services once a week or once every couple of weeks. Notice Paul said that the word should dwell in you not among you. That means God’s Word should be an important part of our lives – inhabiting us in every way. Being a main part of every decision we make, every move we make, every word we speak. And if the Word of Christ dwells in us richly we can’t help but overflow with praise.

One way in which we bring our praise to God is in song. Paul lists Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs which cover most of the forms of songs we use to worship and praise God. Those are songs we want to bring with thanksgiving in our hearts. Always thankful for the gift of life God has given us through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

“For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:17) This past week we celebrated the birth of our Savior. Over the next few months we will concentrate on how Jesus paid for our sins and brings us salvation as a free gift through faith. After Christmas, we look forward to celebrating Easter because Easter assures us our salvation is complete.

As we give thanks to God for this wonderful gift of a Savior we want to follow the direction Paul gives us in the last verse of this portion of scripture, **“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.”** This is the fundamental principle to guide every Christian life. It notes the vital relationship we have with our Savior because we are God’s Chosen people.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save us and he gives us the freedom to live our lives for him by clothing ourselves with Christ-like qualities and by dealing with others in a Christ-motivated way. May we always do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with a heart of thanksgiving, giving all glory to God the Father through him. Amen.