

Our Corporate Calling

Colossians 3:15-17

The passage we are going to discuss today is actually something I'd consider a calling verse for my occupation. These verses drive everything that I do here at this church. It is the what, why, and how of every detail that I plan for our time together. So I'm actually very excited to study this passage with you this morning. My hope during our time together is to see that the Gospel would have its rightful place of authority in our relationships and dealings with one another. We have a corporate calling if you will, and Paul's aim in this passage is to show us what this corporate calling is and what that corporate calling will require of us.

We aren't in a sermon series on Colossians. So I think it would be appropriate for me to give a very brief summary as to what has been happening in the surrounding verses to the passage Dave read earlier. I want to give us a little bit of context.

The Colossian church overall was a thriving church, growing, and healthy. But as with many other churches Paul dealt with, rather than living in the new way of the Gospel, the Colossians were being pulled into rules about eating and drinking, religious festivals, new moon celebrations and sabbath adherence. While none of these things are inherently evil, Paul says that these things are simply "a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Col 2:17)." Paul combats this way of thinking by beautifully exalting Jesus Christ as the foundation of which we build our lives. In chapter 2 he says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form (2:9-10). Paul paints this amazing picture for the Colossians of the beauty, splendor, and glory of Jesus Christ. And he goes on to say that in this glorious Christ, you have been brought to fullness. You lack nothing because of Jesus residing in you through the Holy Spirit. And I love what he says in chapter 3:4, "Christ, who is your life." You need nothing else. As believers, we are so tightly knit with Jesus Christ that he is now our very life. Not an accessory. Not an addition to our lives. But he is our lives. We have been transformed. Paul is trying to help the Colossian church understand that they don't need anything else other than the gospel message that they had already received with joy.

This new reality in which they live now dictates their relationship with God, one another, and everything that they say and do. God had not simply called the Colossians to be his people, but also to live a certain kind of life. A life that is marked by the gospel. What we are going to see today, is that their calling as well as our calling is bound up in the gospel, and cannot be separated from it. It is this calling that we are studying today. Because of God's call on us to be the body of Christ, **we have an obligation to one another to live in peace and to preach the gospel to one another.** That's where we are at today. Let's begin in verse 15:

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

What does Paul mean for the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts? The peace Paul is referring to here is not some private and inward peace of the soul or some peaceful disposition of spirit. God absolutely does provide those things to us. But Paul here is referring to a peace that is corporate. Paul is not writing to an individual, but a church. A body of believers. The verses leading up to this all have corporate implications. Paul specifically mentions that this peace exists because **we are members of one body.** What I believe Paul is saying here is that there is not only a vertical dimension to our peace (that is, with God), but also a horizontal dimension (in our relationship with others). Because we are now reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, we also, as members of one body, are reconciled to one another! The Gospel is not just between you and God. It is between you and the person to your left, and to your right.

But how does this peace "rule in our hearts"? The Greek word for "rule" used by Paul originally referred to the function of an umpire who presided over and presented prizes at the games in that day. Literally translated, it means that the Peace of Christ is "to act as umpire". Think of a modern day umpire for baseball. What does he or she do? In the most general sense, he judges, decides, or rules over the affairs of the game. The umpire facilitates the game so that it operates within a proper set of boundaries in hopes that the sport can be enjoyed by all. This is analogous to the role of Christ's peace in our own lives. In all inner conflicts as well as in all disputes and differences among Christians, Christ's peace must give the final decision. We are to do nothing that would violate that peace.

But how is this peace different from the world? Worldly wisdom has a very different view of peace. What does the world tell us to do? What the world tells us to do is to simply lay aside our differences so that we can all get along. You be you and let me be me. If we just put aside our differences, hold hands and sing kumbaje, everything will be alright. But that can't be the peace of Christ, can it? This way of thinking has the appearance of wisdom, but lacks any real power to unite people in true love. Peace within the body of Christ must mean more. What does this peace really look like?

As members of the body of Christ, Paul wants to make peace the arbiter, the intermediary that should be given preference over competing concerns and interests. Without sacrificing principle, believers should relate to one another in a way that facilitates and demonstrates the peace that Christ has secured for them (Rom 14:19). The peace the world offers is cheap. There is no substance to it, no foundation, no resiliency. Rather, the peace of Christ is costly. It came at the cost of Jesus' life, the Son of God. Therefore, the peace we will try to preserve with one another is also costly. In order for the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts, we need to be willing to give something up.

Studying this passage this week has actually been very convicting for me. As I've considered in my own life what it looks like for the peace of Christ to rule in my heart, I've been confronted by the Holy Spirit of my own obsession with control. I am actually the most controlling person I know. I've seen how my desire to hold on to control or to hold on to some expectation or outcome of something has led to the peace of Christ being disrupted in my relationships. My wife can attest to this more than anyone else, but I've also seen this sin rear its ugly head in staff meetings here at Faith. There have been many moments in staff meetings where I have not let the peace of Christ rule in my heart. I've become angry and upset, and have said things that I shouldn't. Instead of living in submission to Jesus' rule, I've instead let my flesh determine right and wrong, and have sought to claw my way into getting what I want. This is absolutely against what Paul is advocating here in this passage. I actually want to confess this sin to my fellow pastors and elders who are here this morning and ask for forgiveness. If I have ever sought my own way at the cost of relationship with you, I ask that you would forgive me. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I am vigorously seeking

repentance that I might offer my convictions with open hands and a surrendered heart. I am absolutely committing myself to live in submission to the peace of Christ.

To be at peace with one another, it is absolutely necessary that we as individuals are living in submission to the Lordship of Christ. Are your preferences submitted to Christ? Is your agenda submitted to Christ? Are your prerogatives submitted to Christ? Do you see how this wisdom from God is so powerful? Because the peace of Christ is sacrificial, the peace with which we have with one another as members of his body actually has integrity. It has a backbone. It is not weak. The peace which should facilitate our relationships with one another derives its power from a God who gave up everything for us! Again, I'm not saying we sacrifice principle here. The peace of Christ in our hearts does not mean we simply turn a blind eye to wrong. It doesn't mean we become flimsy and don't hold to convictions. But it does mean that we have to be willing to lay down everything that we think is so "right", and submit those things to the Lordship of Jesus, who is head over the body. We no longer decide the outcome of things, we let him decide. He is the judge, he is the umpire. We submit.

Lastly, Paul tells the Colossians to be thankful. This absolute call to be thankful is to acknowledge our dependence on God's grace through Jesus Christ. It is a thankfulness that once more is a call to submit to Jesus as Lord. It also introduces the theme of worship both corporately (as we will get to in verse 16) as well as in everyday living (verse 17).

Paul then goes on to say, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly...". So not only should the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, but the message of Christ ought to dwell within us richly. The message of Christ could mean a couple things. Paul could be referring to the actual words and acts of Jesus. At this time the Gospels as we know them did not yet exist in written form, so it is more likely that Paul is referring to the more broad saving message of Jesus Christ, the gospel. But honestly, I really don't think there needs to be a distinction here. I think it is both. The message of Christ, both his words on earth as well as the truth of the gospel in its entirety is to be the message that indwells his people.

I find it brilliant that one method in which Paul prescribes for the message of Christ to dwell among us richly is through singing. Singing to one another through psalm, hymns, and

spiritual songs. Basically, there is no music that is out of bounds here. Our hope is that everything we do here today would serve to allow the message of Christ to dwell in us. That is the goal of this sermon. But there is undoubtedly something very powerful and unique about singing. It has been said that songs are portable theology. Very few of you are going to leave here today humming the words I've said in the sermon on your car ride home. However, it is quite possible that the words we sang earlier may be hummed by you as you eat dinner this evening, or as you put your children to sleep. Or perhaps this week, the words we sang earlier, "I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who you say I am," may ring in your mind. Worship through singing is uniquely powerful for us because it is not just something we do. Rather, singing does something to us.

Philosopher and Theologian James K.A. Smith says this, "Worship works from the top down, you might say. In worship we don't just come to show God our devotion and give him our praise; we are called to worship because in this encounter God (re)makes and molds us top-down. Worship is the arena in which God recalibrates our hearts, reforms our desires, and rehabilitates our loves." What is he saying here? The point is that worship isn't just something we do; it is where God does something to us. Worship, in all things, but especially through song is the heart of discipleship because it is the gymnasium in which God retrains our hearts. God reshapes our affections through singing. When we sing, we are retraining our hearts to love God above all else, to love one another, and to love our neighbors. Singing does to our hearts what lifting weights in the gym does to our muscles. It requires effort. Over time, with practice, repetition, our hearts and minds are formed through the songs we sing. Formed to love God in deeper ways.

Worship through song is also powerful because unlike this sermon, it is one of the acts we actually do together in this service. When we sing, we are not only expressing our love for God, but we are also ministering to one another. You see, just as the peace of Christ is not purely vertical, but also horizontal, so to our worship is not just vertical, but has horizontal implications. There are horizontal dimensions to our singing. Paul specifically says, "singing to one another." When we sing, we are declaring to God *and to one another* the things that are most true.

A word often heard regarding church worship is liturgy. Liturgy, or in the Greek “leitourgia”, literally means, “work of the people”. So, what we do here is not the work of Logan. It is not the work of Steve. It is not the work of Brian. Rather, this is the work of the people. All of us together. Did you realize that when you came to worship today you came to do work!?! Your participation is imperative. That’s why we not only ask you to sing out loud, but to confess sins out loud, to confess creeds and to pray prayers out loud together. This thing we do in this room is not a spectator activity. We do not come in order that we may get our fill for the day. Certainly we hope you leave here encouraged. But there is something much deeper going on in our gathering. You came not only to be ministered to, but also to minister to those in front of you, beside you, to your left and to your right. Our singing is a way in which we preach sermons to one another. Singing songs does something that I cannot do in this sermon. We get to do theology together, as a family.

I understand some of you may say, “well, I’m just not the singing type.” Listen, when it comes to the historic tradition of the Christian church from the very beginning, and even more than that, the testimony of the Scripture itself, singing has been the defining mark of who we are as Christians. We are a singing people. To say you are not the singing type is like a fish saying they are not the swimming type. Okay, you don’t need to have a music degree. You don’t need to know all the words or melodies. Heck, you don’t even need to sound good! But if you are a Christian, you are the singing type. You don’t have to drink coffee to be a Christian, but on some level you do need to participate in what we do here. So sing! Why?

Sing because the person in front of you may have experienced a death in their family that is causing unexplainable grief. Sing because the person on your left may be struggling with a stronghold that is wreaking havoc on their relationships. Sing because the couple on your right may be struggling in their marriage. Sing because your brothers and sisters need you. I need you. We need each other. Through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we preach the life giving message of Christ to one another. But to what end?

Paul says in verse 17, so that “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.” It is here that Paul sums up his appeal to the Colossian church regarding their corporate calling. Paul is saying

that there is not one facet of our lives that isn't touched by the gospel. Not one iota of our existence is exempt from being in submission to the peace and message of Christ.

As we end our time here today, I want to recall something I said at the beginning: God has not just called us to be His people, but to live a certain kind of life. That life is marked by the gospel, and cannot be separated from it. Therefore, **we have an obligation to one another to live in peace and to preach the gospel to one another.** We do this through submission to Christ and singing. We get to experience life and freedom when we choose to submit ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When His peace becomes our ruling authority, we finally get to experience the sweetness God intends for our relationships with one another. We experience the power of the Gospel when we choose to live in this submission. When his peace rules, we flourish.

Similarly, we are accountable to one another to see that the message of Christ dwells in us richly, and one way in which we do this is by singing to one another. Our obedience to God Monday through Saturday begins in our discipleship here. Our Sunday morning gathering is our team huddle. If you have been in a Greek house this is our family meeting. This hour that we spend together is a rehearsal for our lives the rest of the week. We get to work the gospel into our spiritual muscles, training our hearts and minds to be obedient to Jesus Christ. My goal in this sermon is not to make you feel guilty about not singing. Sometimes it's appropriate to simply listen and let the words wash over you. There is absolutely a place for that. But I do want to inspire you to see your part in the tradition of the church for thousands of years as well as, and most importantly, the commands of Scripture. You have a role to play in our unity and our understanding of the Gospel. We lose something when you are not here. We need you. I need you. This thing we do here on Sunday mornings is not a formality. It is essential to your discipleship. My discipleship. Our calling.

My appeal for us today is that we would see the immense gravity of our corporate calling, and to own our individual roles in making that calling a reality. By living in submission to Jesus and preaching the gospel to one another, we actually have a shot at seeing the gospel take root in our lives, in our families, neighborhoods, and city. Our corporate calling is to let

the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and to let the message of Christ dwell in us richly. We do this by submission and singing.

So, are you submitting to the Lordship of Christ? Are you willing to sing so that the message of Christ would dwell not only in your heart, but also in the hearts of your brothers and sisters in Christ?

We are going to respond to this message by allowing for just that. We are going to sing a song of praise that reminds us of who we are in Jesus. The worship team is going to come up and lead us in doing theology together. By singing to God and to one another, we are going to do ministry as a family. May the message of Christ dwell in among us richly. Let's pray.