Colossians 3:8–17

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

> *But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

The New Man — Renewed in Knowledge After the Image of Him That Created Him

The new man is not the same as the new nature, just as the old man is not the same as the old nature. The old man is Adam — the first man in his responsibility, whose trial was concluded at the cross. The new man is Christ — the second man, the man of God's purpose. We have put off the old man and put

on the new man. That is: we are no longer looked at as in Adam, but as in Christ. And the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him — renewed in kind and character, brought into full knowledge, into the image of the Creator.

This is something entirely new in time — fresh and unprecedented. Old Testament saints were saints, truly God's own, but they were under trial in the first man, not yet in the good of this. The truth of the old man and new man could not be taught while the trial of the first man was still running. Only after the rejection and death of Christ — the final demonstration that the first man was not recoverable — could these things be unfolded. God now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). That could not have been the universal command before. A whole new order has been brought in.

The Elect of God, Holy and Beloved — Ground for the Graces

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved. These three — elect, holy, beloved — are not achievements but constitutions. God has constituted the believer this way. Election is His sovereign choice. Holy means set apart to God — brand plucked from the burning, filthy garments removed, change of raiment put on (Zechariah 3). Beloved: taken into favour in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6). The measure of the Father's love for the believer is the Father's love for His beloved Son. These are the three things that provide the ground and character for what follows.

Just as Jacob made Joseph a coat of many colours because he loved him, so God has given His elect, His holy and beloved ones, a coat of many colours to put on. Each of the seven graces that follows is another colour in that coat — not a drab, cold uniform, but the rich variety of what Christ is displayed in those who belong to Him. The world may see the Christian as cold and regimented. God gives a coat of many colours. And every colour is Christ.

Seven Graces — Four and Three

The seven things to put on divide, as is characteristic in Scripture, into four and three. The first four — bowels of mercies, kindness, lowliness of mind, meekness — are qualities of character, what a person is in himself before others. The three that follow — longsuffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another — are relational in a more active way: they have to do with how one bears with and responds to others in the friction of daily life together. The standard for forgiveness is given explicitly: *even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.* That is not a reduced standard. It is the highest standard conceivable.

Above all these things — love, which is the bond of perfectness. Love holds all the graces together and makes them complete, as a garment bound by a girdle. And the peace of God is to rule — Darby: *preside as umpire* — in the hearts, to which we are called in one body. The peace of God arbitrates the decisions of the heart. And the calling is in one body — not in many independent local units, but in one body, expressing its oneness wherever it gathers.

The Word of Christ Dwelling Richly — All in the Name of the Lord Jesus

The word of Christ is to dwell richly — not visited occasionally, not skimmed, but inhabiting the soul with abundance. In all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in the hearts to the Lord. The comparison with Ephesians 5:18-19 is instructive: there, being filled with the Spirit produces exactly the same outflow of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Here, the word of Christ dwelling richly produces it. These are two aspects of the same reality — the Spirit's work is through the word, and the word's fullness is by the Spirit.

The chapter closes this section with the most encompassing principle: *whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by him.* Everything — every word spoken, every action taken — is to be done in His name. His name is the claim, the authority, the character under which the whole of life is to be conducted. And all of it is wrapped in thanksgiving to God the Father by Him. The Christian's entire life, in every department, is to be a living in the good of the name of the Lord Jesus.

— Study ends —