

A Life of Peace, Gratitude and Thankfulness Ruling Our Hearts

I am no cardiovascular expert, but I can tell you – to grossly understate – that our hearts are pretty vital to our existence. In their pumping blood around, sometimes working well, and not. There are things we do or don't do that affect our hearts. But our physical existence relies on our hearts working well.

In the scripture today Paul turns our attention to our spiritual hearts. Which is what? Our inner self. It is what you think, what you will, and what you desire. The Bible talks about the purposes of your heart, the thoughts of your heart, and the desires of your heart. The heart is where your actions and behaviour begin. Jesus said, "out of *the heart* come evil thoughts--murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt. 15:19)

Jeremiah talks about our hearts as being "...deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" When David prayed "Create in me a pure heart, O God." He wasn't talking about his physical heart but his mind, character, inner self, will, his intentions, the very centre of his being.

Having a strong healthy physical heart is one thing, having a pure heart another! So when we talk today about Christ ruling our hearts, *it is everything about us.*

Only you know before God the state of your own heart and whether you have grateful heart or Christ's peace rules your heart. We know all-to-well don't we we're faced with a daily battle and a barrage of things and circumstances that steal from the heart Christ wants us to have.

Years ago I needed to reclaim Peace, gratitude and Christ ruling in my heart. I didn't know it at the time, but it was to be my last game of rugby. I was so full of anger and frustration at the lack of direction in my life, I regrettably got into an altercation with the referee, which very nearly ended up going to a review panel. I avoided that by walking away. Was so ashamed, here I was a Christian, behaving like that, family there. Took me many years to get through that...

That's my story. This happened to me as a direct result *of me* not allowing Christ to rule my heart. You'll have your story. Perhaps you're in it now. Ask yourself right now, am I experiencing the full peace of Christ? Do I have the freedom, every day, to express gratitude to God? Has your peace in Christ and gratitude for Christ dried up? I want to encourage you today, do not let your peace and gratitude be stolen away, look to Christ, lift your eyes to him where your help comes from.

When Christ, is Lord of our lives, when he rules our hearts, peace, gratitude, serving, worship, prayer, fellowship and devotion to his word, are a natural part of our lives. It's not hard, not a burden.

What is this peace and gratitude, ruling of my heart, how do I find it, how can I grow in it? Paul thankfully addresses this in Colossians 3:15-17. Read together...

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 message of Christ *dwell* among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with *gratitude in your hearts*.

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.

God inspiring Paul with these words, we could say Amen and walk away! However, I've picked several headings from the scripture I'd like us to look at today, let's start with:

LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE IN YOUR HEARTS

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

The greatest need we have is peace. Peace with God. Peace of God. Yet people turn to other things to find peace. In my research I heard an account of a man once one of the richest men in the world: The Sultan of Arabia. A multi-billionaire, the result of vast income from oil wells. This Sultan was educated in Britain, owned the World's largest palace. Had a fleet of airplanes, a warehouse of cars, a collection of the world's top hotels. He lived in opulent luxury and private homes.

But his major problem apart from his vast wealth, he never could really enjoy them, he was the constant target for burglars, kidnappers, terrorists constantly guarded 24 hrs a day 7 days a week. Moved from one hotel to the next in fear of an internal coo. For all his wealth he could not purchase the one thing that every human seeks, peace.¹

That might be an extreme example but it makes the point, that wealth (if it's not *wealth* it will be something else²) does not equate, with peace. The feeling of security and contentment that we might get from *such things* as wealth, ought not be confused with the peace of Christ. Peace cannot be found apart from Christ; from knowing our sin is forgiven and from knowing that in him is life eternal. Only that, can we be secure and content in!

What is this peace of Christ?

It is a peace of mind. Christ's peace is a knowing, that God has my life and circumstances in hand. Christ's peace is a security that comes from God. "Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.... Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure (Ps. 16:5,9)

The peace of Christ is *God's gift of wholeness and completeness*. He offers us this, it's for us, but it's also something we in turn offer to others; it's part of our Christian witness.

¹ Adapted from: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=2610161672> (2.15 – 4.08) And, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=12219919

² Health, being in a positive head space...

Christ's peace is reflected in our resolve; it's obvious. Because peace is a fruit of the Spirit, and fruit is visible.

That's a very summarised view of Christ's peace. Over all of that – when we refer back to the scripture we see 3 key elements about peace – *it's the peace of the person of Jesus Christ*, it is something that is to *rule in our hearts*, and, it's something *we're called to*. Let me explain each of these:

It is the peace of the person of Christ.

If you'll note what Paul says in v. 15 it is that he assumes you know this peace: You know Christ. Point: if you *know* Christ, you know peace.³

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**. (*chieftain of completeness*)" - Isaiah 9:6

For he himself is our peace (*same GK*)...(Eph. 2:14)

If you are a Christian, then you have this peace of Christ. We are recipients, benefactors of the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. Think about this: If it is the peace of Christ, what sort of peace is it? It is the greatest most pure peace you could ever imagine. This peace can be found nowhere and in no-one else apart from, Christ.

It is a peace that is to rule in our hearts.

Paul loved to use athletic analogies. "Fighting the fight, running the race, crowns, pressing on and straining" – images related to Ancient Games. Ruling here is an athletic analogy.

Think of the umpire (*GK means*) in a tennis match. They sit up on their little chair and preside over the match. The umpire oversees and governs the match, ensuring the players stay within the rules. That's what the peace of Christ does. Where there are inconsistencies in our walk with Christ or differences with others⁴, Christ's peace 'umpires' our hearts in resolving these. The *peace of Christ* ruling in our hearts is the umpire over doubt, anxiety and any inclination we have to sin, and other behaviours contrary to his will and word.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7)

Notice here, that not being anxious about anything, along with thanksgiving, and presenting to God (*what we do*) all precede the peace of God (*what he does*) and the guarding of hearts and minds. That's the peace of Christ ruling! When you deviate from Christ's way or truth for your life, it affects the peace⁵ within you. Let the peace of Christ be the umpire of *your heart*.

³ No Christ, no peace.

⁴ When we go 'out of bounds'

⁵ Security, wholeness and completeness

Think of this example: If a husband says something harsh to his wife, then saying nothing gets in his car in a huff and drives off, if he is a Christian the peace of Christ will be the ruler over his heart, and he will be prompted, convicted by that peace and then seek to put that right. To do nothing, in such situations, is to *forfeit* that peace.

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace (*sm GK*) and to mutual edification” (Rom. 14:19) “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. *I do not give to you as the world gives.* (John 14:27) “I have told you these things, so that *in me* you may have peace. (John 16:33)

It is the peace of the person of Christ, that is to rule in our hearts.

Its peace he asks us to have today, because we are called to peace

We do tend to associate peace with peace and quiet, with the absence of conflict and chaos, people getting along, with stillness, as something passive, but as we’ve established already it’s much more than that. It is God's gift of wholeness and completeness, that, we must let rule in our hearts.

Because it is Christ’s peace, without Christ, peace is incomplete. No matter how hard we try this peace cannot be wealthied, contrived, mantrad, or wishful thinking’d, up.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13) It is not man-made; it is Christ's peace. As such our reference for peace certainly doesn't come from the world in which we live, only from Christ.

D L Moody: “A great many people are trying to make peace, but that has already been done. God has not left it for us to do; all we have to do – is to enter into it.”

Peace. Christ's peace. Spirit-filled peace. Unanxious peace. Guarding our hearts peace. Peace that we individually benefit from, but verse 15 clearly indicates a bigger purpose. Peace is for the benefit of the church and the glory of God (see Col. 3:17).

Paul said as members of the whole body, we’re divinely called, to peace. So how we relate to and with each other results in how we experience the peace of Christ when we are *connected* to the body of Christ.

So when we by action or attitude, disrupt or mess with that, it is damaging to the bodies peace. And that’s serious. Because it’s what we’re called to. *Called to!*

Since as member’s, peace is what we’re called to, that extends to the way we handle conflict and reconciling matters. Ask yourself this: when you’ve got two (or more) believers where conflict has not and seems unable to be resolved, where is the peace of Christ ruling (umpiring) in that situation? If Christ-followers are out of fellowship with Christ-followers, something is not right there.⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death (our way), but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace (God's way). (Rom. 8:6)

⁶ When I know I’ve caused an issue, it’s created hurt, an offense, driven a wedge in fellowship, I must do something about that, for peace.

When we *knowingly* hold on to unresolved matters or reject opportunities to resolve matters with other Christians, we must realise 3 things: a. we're not letting the peace of Christ rule. b. that is not of the Spirit c. we're the body of Christ.

For our hearts to be ruled by the peace of Christ and abide in the calling means all parties doing what they must to resolve the situation. What is the basis of our ability to forgive and have this peace Paul speaks of? Look back at 3:13, "Bear⁷ with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. *Forgive as the Lord forgave you*".⁸

"Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you." (2 Cor. 13:11) Peace comes when we *enter into*⁹ and submit to God's plans.

It is the peace of the person of Christ, it is to rule in our hearts, it is what we are called to. What is impeding you from entering into the peace of Christ and allowing it to rule your heart? You will not find this peace anywhere outside of Christ, do you know Him?

I listened to the story of a martyr the other day, the wood was placed around their feet, the executioner was perspiring, he was grumpy, but the Christian was as calm as calm. And this is what he said to the executioner, "with your hand feel my heart" barely felt, because the peace was so real. "Put your hand on your own heart" beating like a drum. "Do not pity me, I will now go and be with me Lord, this is my wedding day, I shall be joined to my Head, pity yourself who knows no peace, and will die and go to an entirely different place"¹⁰

(v. 15b) Let the peace of Christ *rule in your hearts...And be thankful*.

LET THANKFULNESS RULE YOUR HEARTS

You might ask how can I have peace rule in my heart, how can this be my daily constitution? Here's the answer! *And be thankful*. Thankful, not from the head, but from the gut! Thankful because we appreciate and love Christ that much.

With unthankfulness comes a lack of peace. Whereas thankfulness focuses us on Christ, directs our minds toward Christ, keeps us conscious of God and all that helps our purity of heart. Thankfulness, like worship is in our spiritual DNA. Here's a great verse to explain what I mean:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and *overflowing* with thankfulness. (Col. 2:7)

I recall an occasion last year, I was at BP putting fuel in my car and the pump thingy got stuck and petrol very quickly filled the tank up and then started down the side of the car and onto the forecourt, not good....

⁷ Not just put up with but complete the process

⁸ Nothing could more clear

⁹ Refer to Moody

¹⁰ Adapted from: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=2610161672>

How can you and I be overflowing with thankfulness? Only what is full up can overflow! Be full of thankfulness, that *fuels* our peace. And when we're full of thankfulness, what room's left for grumbling about stuff. And isn't that easier to do sometimes?! I am convinced that many Christians live a gloomy existence because they have not developed a daily habit of gratitude and thankfulness.

Be thankful for what? We should never need to ask that question. Be thankful is connected to who Christ is and what he's done for you. That alone is ample reason to be thankful!

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU

16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

"Let the message..." same as "Let the peace of Christ..."

Now it's worth noting here that though Paul is writing in the first century and church was different, the message is relevant. What this verse expresses is what worship looks like in its most unadulterated form. Paul is not talking about a super-duper, hyped up, superficial version of church. But a normal expression of what corporate worship looks like when Christians who love Christ, where peace rules in their hearts, and are full of thankfulness, gather together.

Christ's message dwelling in *individual's* hearts produces God exalting *corporate* worship. How can it be any other way? This was David's, way. "O Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth" (Ps. 8:1) "I will praise you Lord with all my heart, I will tell of all your wonders" (Ps. 9:1)

Worship – which is teaching and admonishing¹¹ one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts – all this is a product of the message dwelling in us. That message is what? Good news. It is about Christ and what he's achieved for us. When *that message* rules in the hearts of Christians, it produces peace and thanksgiving and God exalting worship.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, let thankfulness rule your heart, let the message of Christ dwell in you, and...

LET GRATITUDE GOVERN ALL YOU DO IN CHRIST

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.

Paul's summary of all the preceding verses, "whatever you do" is worship! Christ exalting worship. Not a discontinuous intermittent thing, our lives are continuously worship and involves everything we do.

¹¹ We admonish one-another with that message, which means what? "urging others to choose God's best".

Whether we're praying, or working, singing or serving, or golfing or in our small groups, or talking with our neighbours, whatever we are doing it is in the name of Jesus we do these things, as we do, we give thanks to God the father through him.

And this we're able to do when the peace of Christ is ruling in our hearts. When his message – the good news – dwells in us richly, our corporate worship is God-exalting. Because of what Christ has done for you and me, that alone is ample reason to be thankful! And all we do, we do in Jesus' name, with gratitude in our hearts, to God.

This is the kind of church that glorifies God.