

God's Goals For Holy Living

Col.3:12-17 12 Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body, you are called to live in peace. And always be *thankful*. 16 Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom He gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with *thankful* hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving *thanks* through him to God the Father.

Consider the contrast between the clothes of the earthly nature and the clothes of God's chosen people. Just look at the virtues mentioned and think how popular are they in the world today. The virtues are: tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. They include making allowance for each other's faults, and forgiving anyone who offends you. And finally, love that is agape, self-sacrificing love as we see in God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. That kind of love.

It's quite a contrast to what you see in the news about how fellow Democrats are treating Senator Manchin when he, in good faith, wouldn't go along with what they wanted. Not one virtue is present. Not one.

But ask yourself this question: how hard would it seem to take off the worldly clothing and put on Christ's clothing? In other words, how hard would it be for you to show tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness and love? You might ask, "How is it even possible?" Remember the words of Jesus about how all things are possible with God (Matthew 19:26) and the words of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil.4:13)

But it takes prayer and the will to seek God's direction for your life. Meditating on God's Word is essential. Take the Benedictine order of monks. They have four Ways to approach God's Word: first, prayer; second, reading; third, meditating, and fourth, contemplating. Contemplating means considering with an open and quiet mind, free of distraction. I find traveling in my car one of those quiet times if I'm by myself and leave the media turned off.

Finally ask yourself, what practical difference does this new clothing make in my relationships? With husband or wife? With parents or children? Even with neighbors and employers? That's where the rubber hits the road. That's real life.

What confirms that all of these relationships are built around Christ? The text says: letting the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts, living in that peace, and being *thankful*. Letting the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your life. If you look at the text, thankfulness is mentioned four times.

Finally, ask yourself, is the person of our text who has put on the new clothing calm and cool and in control but also lavish in their love for others? When you look at Jesus, you have the answer. "God is love and He who abides in love abides in God and God in him." (1 John 4:7) Praying to be more loving is to be more like Jesus.

When you bend a limb on a tree, it doesn't stay where you've bent it. It whips back to its original position. That's how hard it is to change habits, isn't it? Think for a minute on what is involved in replacing old habits with new ones. It starts with the will to do so. You may make New Year's resolutions but you can make contracts with yourselves that follow the five-step movement of what I call MOABS. When you're going to make a change in your life, start with baby steps. What you change needs to be M-measurable; O-observable A-attainable; B-behavior (something you do) and S-specific. MOABS. For example, if I say, "I'm going to enhance our fellowship," how is that measurable, observable, attainable, behavioral, or specific? But if I say, "I will shake at least one person's hand each Sunday at church," that is measurable, observable, attainable, behavioral, and specific. In short, it's do-able.

Paul speaks in our text about being loving towards others. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" as the second of the two Great Commandments. Taking baby

steps in love means first respecting the other person. We are all image bearers of our Lord. Genesis 2 says that God created us in His image. Secondly in growing toward love is appreciation. It means finding what you can appreciate about others. Thirdly, affection, or finding what you like about the other person. Finally, love which is all of those plus commitment. It's primarily a choice, not a feeling.

Think for a minute, that's how God loves us: He respects and appreciates us; He likes us even in our rebelliousness; and He is committed to us as we can easily see in the cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb of Easter morning. In short, He loves us.

We can grow in God's direction for us in holy living, if we choose a goal and ask for His help. So, ask yourself, which of God's goals for holy living do you need to apply to your life as we enter the New Year? His goals are those virtues that Paul mentions in our text combined with getting to know Him better that you might love Him more. We can even pray that we might know Him better and love Him more.

Lenski, one of the classic Lutheran commentary writers, said of this text, "The real love of which we Christians speak means for us a cementing bond that belongs to the completeness which we Christians know as our goal. The bond is not a girdle. The virtues also bind together (as we dress ourselves in the new clothing piece by piece.) Love stands above them for it is true perfection's own most wonderful bond. Peace, as Paul uses it, means a state when God is our friend and all is well with us. It is the objective condition that comes from God as our Father through Christ as the Giver Who has made this peace for us.

The verb 'rule' is acting like an umpire. Listen to Christ's own peace-speaking in your heart. That call from God which made you one body of true Christians, gave you the peace of Christ which is ever to assure you in your own hearts.

Paul is speaking of congregational worship when he speaks of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. This singing is also in our hearts and not just on our lips. The Word of Christ needs to permeate our entire lives, everything we may do in word or work, to do all things in the Name of the Lord Jesus."

What does this mean for the fellowship of the church? In Purpose Driven life, Rick Warren, says, "Life is meant to be shared in four ways: where people experience authenticity. In other words, Instead of pretending, role playing,

politicking, superficial politeness and shallow conversation, there can be honesty and humility. People may choose to wear masks (and not face masks for virus protection), keep their guard up, and act as if everything in their life is rosy – perhaps out of fear. Secrets that are kept block growth. That is true in churches as well as in families.

Secondly, in real fellowship, people experience mutuality, that is, the art of giving and receiving. It's depending on each other. Paul says in his body analogy that every part of the body depends on other parts of the body.

Thirdly, in real fellowship, people experience sympathy. Sympathy is important for the need to be understood and to have one's feelings validated. Every time you do that, you build fellowship. That is something we all need.

Finally, in real fellowship, people experience mercy. Fellowship is a place of grace where mistakes are not rubbed in, but rubbed out. Many may be reluctant to show mercy because they don't know the difference between trust and forgiveness. Forgiveness is letting go of the past. Trust has to do with future behavior.

Putting on the Lord Jesus is helped by daily Bible reading which keeps you in the range of God's voice. To assimilate the truth of the Bible, we must fill our minds with it so that the Holy Spirit can transform us with the truth.

This text is a powerful word from God to each of us as we enter this New Year. Let us pray daily for God's help in putting on God's new clothing for us and seek God's Goals For Holy Living. Amen