

Horsley Evangelical Church (www.horsleyec.org.uk)

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Colossians 3:12-17 A Beautiful Garden

Last week we thought about *the drastic side of holiness*. If we are to follow Jesus Christ then there are certain things in our lives which we daily need to 'put to death' or 'throw out'. In gardening terms, there are things in the garden of our lives which need to be regularly 'weeded out'. These things are listed in verse 5 – sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed. These things have to be weeded out of the Christian's life. Then we had the list in verse 8 – anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language and lies. Again these are things that belong to the compost heap.

But this week in the verses which follow, Paul is talking about what to plant in the garden. Having weeded our garden, we now come to the planting of it. Removing weeds is good and necessary. But if that's all you do, you only have bare earth. Free from weeds, yes - but nevertheless just bare soil.

Christian holiness however is like a beautiful garden. To be sure, holiness does have a negative side. But it also has a positive side. Overwhelmingly in fact, it is something very positive and attractive. Whenever you meet someone who is really holy there is always something very attractive about them. Their holiness does not just consist of things they *don't do*. Instead their lives are filled with behaviour which is beautiful, joyful and outgoing. And you always go away thinking, 'I would like to be like them.'

Martin Luther once described sin as *turning in on oneself*. Sin is always thinking about self. But holiness is out going. You are not preoccupied with 'me'. Rather you are thinking about and are genuinely interested in others. You love people. You want the best for them and are prepared to give yourself for that to happen. And this of course is what Jesus Christ was like. It also describes what he has done for us. For in loving us, our Saviour gave himself for us.

So this week, we look at some of the things which make a beautiful garden – some of things which make a Christian's life 'holy'. In verses 12-14 there is what we might call **the love of Christ**. [Read verses 12-14](#). The holy life, the beautiful garden will show something of the love of Christ. All of the virtues in these verses were seen in the life of the Lord Jesus. And they will be seen in our life as we follow him and remain 'in him'. And they all come from love. That is why Paul speaks about love *binding them all together*. Each virtue is held in place by love because each comes from love.

How can we describe the love of Christ? After all, there are so many types of love in the world. The love of Christ and the love of God is sometimes called *agape* love – it's the love of self-giving and self-sacrificing. Christ showed his love for us as he gave himself for us on the cross, for our salvation. But as Christ lives in us by his Spirit, people will see something of the love of Christ in us. We will learn to give ourselves to others. We will be a willing to put ourselves out for others to help them, and ultimately that they may know God.

Look at the way Paul describes the Christian first in verse 12. We are *God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved*. It's interesting that this is how the nation of Israel are described in the Old Testament. But Paul deliberately picks up these same expressions and now uses them to describe the Christian. It reminds us of God's great plan. All that God did in the Old Testament in choosing a people of his own and revealing himself to those people was always done in preparation for what the Lord would do in the New Testament era through this Son Jesus Christ.

So if you are a Christian, it's not primarily because you have chosen God but because he has chosen you. And he has set your life apart to belong exclusively to him – that's the root meaning of the word 'holy'. And you are dearly loved. God has set his eternal and unfailing love upon you. And there is nothing he will withhold from you. If he has already given you his Son, will he not, along with him, graciously give you all things.

And as one of his children you will bear the family likeness - the love of God and Christ will be seen in your life. In what ways will it be seen? Paul make a list. [Read verse 12 again](#). The love of Christ will be seen in your life as you show people *compassion*. That means you will not judge others harshly. Instead you will 'feel' for people in their troubles and your heart will go out to them. You will imagine what it must be like in their shoes.

Then there is *kindness* (12). Christian kindness goes out of its way to help the other person and seeks their wellbeing. Kindness doesn't pass the needy person by as the Priest and Levite did in the parable of the good Samaritan. *Humility* is when you forget about your perceived rights or status. You have a sober estimation of yourself and esteem others better than yourself.

Gentleness is where you will spare the other person what might distress them or hurt them. Being gentle is the opposite of being stern or harsh. It realises that people are fragile, even though they put on a brave front. *Patience* means that the Christian will not flare up at the least provocation. It also means we will not get downhearted at the least disappointment. Patience remembers that God is not finished with any of his children and that He is always on the throne.

But all these virtues come from *Christian love* – a desire to give ourselves in service to others. Love keeps them all in place. Love does not let any fall away. And of course these things describe how God has treated us. The Lord has shown to each of us compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Perhaps the sad thing to keep in mind as we go through these things today is that Paul is addressing the situation in the church at Colosse. He knows from speaking to Epaphras that these things were lacking in the congregation after the new teaching had come in. The believers were not loving each other as they should have done.

And this comes out more clearly in verse 13. [Read verse 13](#). The Christians at Colosse, you see, were not bearing with one another. This in part was because the new teaching was turning their eyes away from Christ. And sadly it would seem that some were not willing to forgive others in the fellowship. But Paul says you must. Bear with each other. Overlook certain actions and be patient with those who may irritate or hurt you. Be slow to take offence. Probably the other person didn't mean to upset you. But even if they did, don't get bitter and angry. Think of the many times the Lord has borne with you down the years.

And says Paul, you must forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. This is so important isn't it. If forgiveness is withheld then things only fester away. It's nice if the other person asks to be forgiven. But even if they don't, the implication here is that you forgive them anyway. Do it quickly and do it from the heart. Don't bear grudges. Forgive the other person as the Lord has forgiven you.

Has the Lord forgiven you? If today you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ then God *has* forgiven you. But just as the Lord has forgiven you so you must forgive others. How has the Lord forgiven you? *Freely*, in the sense that he has not demanded that you pay off your sins. Then he has forgiven you *completely*. All your sins against Him have been forgiven and forgotten. And so we must forgive every grievance we may have against another person.

It's part of the way we show forth the love of Christ. If your life exhibits the love of Christ then you will forgive others, especially brothers and sisters in Christ. But we need to move on because in

this beautiful garden Paul talks next about **the peace of Christ** – for his peace will be seen in those who belong to him. [Read verse 15](#).

The Bible tells us that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And through the Holy Spirit we have the peace of Christ in our lives. It's a peace which the world doesn't know or understand. It's a peace which guards our hearts and minds. And Paul tells the Colossians to let this peace rule in their hearts. It means that it must act as a referee or an umpire. It will blow the whistle against certain behaviour. The peace of Christ is to determine how we react to situations. I think we all know what it is to *lose* the peace of Christ in our hearts. It happens when we fall into sin and we lose the sense of the Lord's presence. We grieve the Holy Spirit. And we lose his peace.

And yet Paul applies this very specifically here. [Read verse 15 again](#). The peace of Christ is also something we know corporately. His peace is known between his people in a church. We are members of one body – the body of Christ. And we must not lose the peace that is found within his body, the church.

God is the God of peace. Between the members of the Godhead there are relationships always marked by love and peace. So if you and I are being made into the image of our creator (10) it means that our life together will be marked by peace. We too will live in peace with one another in the church. Just as there are no disputes within the Godhead, so there are to be no disputes and arguments between the member of Christ's church.

And instead of anger there will be what? – thankfulness (15). What will characterize our meetings together as Christians – complaints, moans and groans, panic? No, our life together will be marked by *peace* and *thankfulness*. Every day we will remember what the Lord has done for us. We will remember what he has done for a sinner like me who deserves not the least of his mercies. Peace is a beautiful thing. And so is thankfulness to God. Is it seen in your life and mine?

Then thirdly in this beautiful garden Paul talks about **the word of Christ**. [Read verse 16](#). Now sadly, the background to this well-known verse is a church where the believers were *not* letting the word of Christ dwell in them richly. Instead, other teaching, as we have thought in previous weeks, was threatening to take centre stage. But Paul urges the believers in Colosse that *the word of Christ*, not the word of men, must be central in the church. Paul use the word 'wisdom' (16) quite deliberately. Worldly wisdom was being presented to the church at Colosse, but what they needed was the wisdom of God that is found in his word.

The *word of Christ* refers primarily here to the teaching of Christ's apostles. But more generally it refers to the teaching of what we call 'the Bible'. It refers not just to the actual words and teaching of Jesus that we find in the Gospels, but *all* the words of both the New and Old Testament. It is all *the word of Christ*. It is the word about Christ and the word about the way of salvation through Christ. These are the things the Christian is to think on. This will make the garden beautiful. We are to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. The Scripture is to be at home in us, both individually and in our life together.

And we are to share its teaching together. Yes, we will identify people whom God has gifted to teach the word of Christ in groups or more formal settings. But informally, as we mix together, we are to teach and admonish one another. We are to share with each other what God is doing in our lives. We are to talk about the things of God, encouraging and challenging one another.

And when that does happen in a church, it is not divisive, nor does it come across as 'holier than thou'. Actually it's beautiful and 'natural'. And the word of Christ will influence our worship together and we sing hymns, psalms and spiritual songs to God. This verse reminds us of the importance of the *words* of what we sing. A hymn is a great hymn not because of its melody but primarily because of its words and because it stirs us to remember something about God and his salvation.

But notice again the fruit of gratitude (16). It's all done with gratitude in your hearts to God. Here is an important feature of this beautiful garden. There will always be thankfulness and gratitude found on display.

Then finally in verse 17 Paul mentions **the name of Christ**. [Read verse 17](#). This verse reminds us that we are Christ's servants and therefore whatever we do, we do it as his representatives in the world. We are Christ's ambassadors. If the Christian behaves badly in any way, this will affect the name of Christ. If there is any scandal in the Church, then the name of Christ is dragged through the mud. If there are sinful relationships within a church then again the name of Christ is dishonoured.

And so we must remember that whatever we do, we do it as his servants and ambassadors of Him. That should make us think therefore before we act. How will this action or word affect the name and reputation of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? But as others have commented, this verse also reminds us of the power which is available to us as we serve the Lord Jesus. When Jesus sent out his disciples, they went *in his name*, and as such they were given power from above. And that is still true today. Whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we do it in the name of the Lord Jesus knowing that God is with us, and he will bless and use whatever we have do in the name of his Son.

But at we close, notice the same thing for the third time - as we serve him and make him known *we are to give thanks to God the Father through him*. Our service is to be thankful. We know that to serve Christ is to represent him and that is always a great privilege. It is never something to be ashamed of, but always something to give thanks for.

Can I ask how your garden is shaping up this year? Are you a gardener? But then, if your spiritual life were represented by a garden, how is that garden this morning? Is it clear of weeds? But then are beautiful plants and shrubs taking root? True holiness is a thing of beauty. It is positive not negative.