

## Colossians 3:14,15

*Colossians 3:12* So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. <sup>15</sup> **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.**

What does it mean to “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts?” The word for “rule” in 3:15 is literally “act as umpire.” An umpire makes the deciding call. As a new Christian, I was told that this verse contains a valuable general principle of determining God’s guidance in our lives: Do not make any important decision until you have God’s peace about it. Wait until you feel peace from God before you move forward.

There is truth in this principle. For example, we have consciences which often register a warning to our souls when we are about to violate God’s will. We should be alert and responsive to such warnings. We should not go down a path that condemns us in our consciences, for “whatever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). Good advice for all of us!

But what about those times when you know that a certain decision is God’s will – but it fills you with fear rather than peace? Should you wait until you feel peace, or should you take a scary step of faith because God’s love and wisdom are trustworthy? This is God’s plain counsel in many places in Scripture, such as:

*Proverbs 3:5* Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He



*will make your paths straight. <sup>7</sup> Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.*

When we look closely at Colossians 3:15, we find that it is not a general principle for discerning God’s guidance; rather it is a specific principle of God’s guidance in our interactions with one another.

First of all, the immediate context is about unity between Christians, or as Paul calls it, “the perfect bond of unity” (3:14). We should let God’s peace rule in our hearts because we “were called in one body” (3:15). God has united us with other believers through our union with Christ; He has made us members of the body of Christ. So as we relate to one another, we should let this peace or unity act as our umpire. In other words, we should prayerfully ask ourselves: “What response in this situation will *enhance our unity and express the truth that we are members of the same body?*”

Secondly, this interpretation is confirmed by Paul’s parallel passage in Ephesians 4:

*Ephesians 4:1 Therefore I . . . implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, <sup>3</sup> being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

Notice how similar these two passages are. Both contain reminders of our unity with other Christians (Colossians 3:14,15; Ephesians 4:4-6). Both remind us of the character qualities that help us to live out this unity (Colossians 3:12,13; Ephesians 4:2). So Paul’s command in Colossians 3:15 to “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” is very similar to his exhortation in Ephesians 4:3 to “be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”



Enough of interpretation – now we must turn to application. And how many times each day is this verse relevant to us! For we are daily bumping into other believers, daily tempted to react in ways that contradict our unity and instead express disunity. We may feel that such reactions are natural – even inevitable. But we are not mere organisms, with no choice but to react – like a dog snaps when you step on its tail. We are human beings, made in God’s image, and now (by God’s grace) His beloved children – with the power of God’s Spirit to choose our response according to what is true rather than according to how we feel at the moment. Consider the following common examples:

- A brother or sister hurts you through an unkind action, or a cold or even nasty word. How will you respond? Will you harbor their offense, rehearsing it over and over again in your mind? Will you return coldness with coldness, snub with snub? Will you decide: “I didn’t sign up for this!” and distance yourself from them? Or will you prayerfully exercise your choice to forgive them, as God in Christ has forgiven you? Will you let their offence go, or perhaps bring it up for their good – whichever the Lord directs you to do? Which response lets the peace of Christ rule in your heart?
- As you get to know a brother or sister in Christ, you inevitably become aware of certain idiosyncrasies that irritate you. They talk about themselves too much, they boast about their ministries, they tend to be relationally pushy rather than humbly engaging. Over time, these besetting sins really weigh upon you. When talking about them to other brothers and sisters, will you unnecessarily point out their deficiencies? Will you subtly write them off in your heart and distance yourself from them? Or will you choose to bear with them in genuine love? Will you recall that God bears daily with your idiosyncrasies, that He draws near to you despite your besetting sins, that it is His kindness that leads us to repentance? Will you choose to recall their strengths and even point these out to encourage them? Which response lets the peace of Christ rule in your heart?



- Someone mentions another believing church or ministry. You are aware of problems and deficiencies in this group. Will you take this opportunity to needlessly air your criticisms, or will you do your best to affirm them as allies rather than enemies? Which response lets the peace of Christ rule in your heart?

How we choose to respond is significant because we represent Jesus to the watching world. Our choice to respond with genuine love is an important part of demonstrating the reality of Jesus by those who claim to follow Him (John 13:34,35).

*Lord Jesus, thank You for your amazing compassion and patience and forbearance. Thank You also for providing me with brothers and sisters in Christ, friends who help me to grow in You and represent You to a lost and broken world. Remind me today, as I interact with each one of them, to let the peace of Christ rule in my heart.*

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