



Sermon – July 11, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 3:14 - 15

Colossians 1:28

As you grab your seat, let's open our Bibles together. We're going to spend our time in Colossians, verses, chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. And if you're a guest with us this morning, whether in the room or online, welcome home. We come to God's word every week because we know that apart from Jesus, it is not well with our soul. But that through the blood of Christ, through the work of the Spirit, that God is making us new. He's making us more like Christ so that it might, in fact, be true that it is well with our souls. Back when I was in seminary in 2011, I was living up in Louisville, KY. And not far away from us was the Kentucky Speedway. And for the first time in a number of years, NASCAR returned to the state of Kentucky. And there was obviously national headlines about the race that took place on the track itself. But there were other cars that appeared in the news that week as a result of what took place. See, fans that were on their way out there to watch the race got in such a significant gridlock of traffic that it was backed up for miles on the freeway. As it turned out, over 20,000 people who had tickets to the race couldn't even make it inside. It was at a standstill. Nothing but a parking lot. And that garnered that national attention which caught my eye when now here we are in 2021, 10 years later, and that same area, those same parking lots at the Kentucky Speedway are in the news yet again for vehicles that can't move. Well, this time it's not fans that are trying to make it to a race like it was 10 years ago. Those vehicles that can't move now at the Kentucky Speedway are brand new, just off the line, Ford pickup trucks. And they can't move because they're not fully complete. They're missing one key part. It's not the engine, it's not the wheels, it's not even one of those Texas essentials like air conditioned seats that you need in this time of year in the summer. The one thing that they're missing is this semi-conductor chip that empowers the entire rest of the vehicle to run. So you can have all the parts. You can have all the appearance. You can have everything else you need. But if that one essential item is missing, then it can't function the way it's intended.

And that's what we're going to find this morning when we come to this text. The last time we were in Colossians, Paul talked about these things we need to put on in our life: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. These elements need to be true. But he tells us today, even if we have all of them, if they all show up, if there's one thing missing in our life together

as a church, then we can't function in the way that God intends. So what is that missing thing that Paul calls our attention to? Look at it with me in verse 14. Here's what he says.

¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, in this time, as we turn our hearts and mind to You, Lord, would You strip away from us a love for this world, a love for the flesh and its desires? And instead, replace it with the kind of love that Paul speaks about here. And we're trusting that You'll do that and more as we pray it in Jesus name. Amen.

So what's the one key thing that the church must have? The non-negotiable, the essential, that even if you have everything else, if you don't have this, you don't have it. What we see there in verse 14 is it's love. And now remember, Paul is writing to this young church in Colossae full of broken people trying to sort out what it looks like to follow Jesus. And the last time we were in this text, what we found is that Paul calls us to put on these Christian virtues as we face the test of forgiveness. Now he calls us to put on love as we face the test of unity. And so what we're going to find here is Paul is reminding us there's no such thing as a perfect church. There's no such thing as perfect people. But if we want to embrace God's design for the church, Paul is calling us to pursue two realities.

You'll notice the first one beginning in verse 14. We are called to pursue perfect harmony. Perfect harmony. So we know that apart from Jesus, on our own, we are not loving. We do not seek the best in others. We seek what's best instead for ourselves. And Paul is giving us a warning that there could be a danger that we just seek a more moral vision of that selfishness. That's why as we know in 1 Corinthians 13, he warns us that even if we have all of these incredible realities in our life, without love we are nothing. It's as if this verse, 14, is a condensation of 1 Corinthians 13 in that reality. And to Paul's list from last time, he adds this important addition. That above all these things, we must put on love. You see that phrase, above all? Or maybe better even than that, over all. In other words, it's more significant, the most important, the most critical, crucial, the most essential reality is love. It's not enough to have these virtues of compassion, kindness, gentleness, meekness, patience. All these other elements apart from love we have nothing. And just as he told us that we must put those on, he is continuing that imagery here. And if you remember, we've been talking about it for the last couple weeks, the idea is that in the Gospel, what Jesus does at salvation is He takes off our filthy garments, the ones that have been soiled by our sin, and instead He clothes us in the righteousness of Christ. And he calls us to put on these realities in our life. To wear them like garments. And it's as if he's talking about love as that final piece that comes on top of it all and brings it all together. Now this is not the first time that love has showed up in the book of Colossians. In fact, all the way back in the beginning in chapter one and in verse 4. And again in chapter 1 in verse 8. Paul commends the Colossian church for their love. And then if you look back in Colossians 2:2, you see the reason why it is that they are so loving towards one another when he tells us that their hearts have been knit together in love. And now in light of these realities, he is speaking again about the need to put on love. Which should raise the question for us, what kind of love is this? Well in the original language, maybe you're familiar

with this term, this word love is agape. Agape love. A love that sacrifices of ourselves for the sake of others. The kind of love that was clearly pictured on that cross of Jesus Christ. Where for the joy set before him, He endured the suffering, the shame. He took on the sins of the world, including yours and mine. He sacrificed Himself for the sake of others, for the sake of God's glory. And this type of love Paul is speaking of here that we are called to show to one another in the church, reflects that reality in the cross as we embody it here in the church.

I'm not sure if any of you others of you are keeping count, but there are only 55 days until the first Aggie football game. Anybody excited? And I can imagine right now over at the football complex, the equipment team is getting everything ready because all those players have different needs. They've got to have the helmets, the shoulder pads, the cleats, and when that player gets ready to go out to practice, and especially to compete in the game, they're going to put on each article and item that's there. And they're ready to play. They'll be a player as soon as they put those items on. But the last thing that they will put on is that uniform, that jersey. Above all, over all, that will cover the rest of it up. And at that point, when they put on that jersey, they are declaring their allegiance to a team in a battle that's about to take place. When Paul speaks here of this need to put on love above all, he's saying, over all of these things, when we put on love, it signals to one another and to the world around us the team to whom we have allegiance. The body of Christ. The people of God. We are declaring our allegiance to a king and not our circumstances. So it raises the question for us. What does it look like to put on love here at Central? And it's an especially important question coming into the Fall semester because we have some amazing opportunities for you to volunteer and put that love into action. I know right now, we're anticipating a surge of new college students coming back in the Fall and we need additional table hosts to foster community and connection amongst our college students. Maybe that's you. Or after a successful Special Needs VBS this summer, we might have the opportunity to minister to more adults and children with special needs. And maybe the Lord is working in your life to have you on Sunday morning volunteer in our special needs wing to serve those in need. Or I look across our preschool, our kid's space, our student ministry areas, and I know that we are always looking for volunteers coming into the Fall to invest. Perhaps the Lord maybe working in you this July, even while we're taking this month with our life groups off to stir in you the kind of desire that Paul is speaking of here to put on love. To serve the body of Christ in a selfless way for the up-building of the church. But notice back in verse 14. What happens when the people of Christ put on the love of Christ as they serve the body of Christ. Do you see what it says as the verse goes on? It says, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Now notice that word binds with me for a minute. That's the same word that back in chapter 2, in verse 19, is translated as ligaments of the body. Those things that hold it together. The idea here is that of a bond or a clasp, perhaps a tie or a glue. Things that enable separate things to be brought together and to remain. It's the same type of picture that Paul used of Jesus, Himself, in Colossians 1:17 when he said, in Christ all things hold together. It's as if Paul is saying love is an agape adhesive. That apart from Christ, we are blind in our sin. But in Christ, we are bonded together in this love and in this service. And we could look around the world, around the culture, even in our community, and see all sorts of bonds that people try to use to stick together. In a place like Bryan/College Station, it could be the bond of a shared interest. Even one as passionate as our love for Texas A&M. In a state like Texas, it could be a shared bond of heritage, this connection to the Lone Star State. But those things on their own, Paul shows us, cannot provide the type of bond that can only be explained through the love of Christ, experienced by the people of Christ, through the Spirit of Christ. That is bonds us together as one so that we can live on mission as one. He speaks there about how it binds us together. And

when that happens, notice the result. Do you see it there at the end of verse 14? It bonds us together in perfect harmony. This is a term that's only used a couple of times in the New Testament. And at its root, the picture of it is when something comes to the fulfillment of its intended purpose, to its natural end, to its maturity, when it comes to completion. In fact, if you look back at Colossians 1:28, Paul uses this same word to explain his purpose in writing to the Colossians. Notice what it says:

²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we might present everyone mature in Christ.

You see that word mature? It's the same word that we're getting now this idea of perfect harmony. That when we walk with God in love, it reaches an intended end; that of harmony, of a unity, of a perfection of the design. Paul's showing the Colossians and us that love is the pathway to pursue their purpose. I wonder by show of hands, were there any of you that were out there with us last weekend to see the firework show at the Rellis Campus? We took our family out there. We were in my truck. We thought we could load up, get some seats back in the tailgate, and watch it from the side of the road. And when we stepped outside, the mosquitoes were swarming and we realized that we were going to get eaten alive if we stayed out there. So instead, the six of us stayed crammed in the cab of my truck. Which meant for me, because the truck was facing away from the fireworks, I spent the entire time in the driver's seat looking at my left side rear view mirror and watching the fireworks take place. And let me tell you, they still look really good when you're in reverse through a mirror. We just loved the festivities, but one of the things we loved the most about last weekend was not just the fireworks, it was the drones at the beginning. If you weren't there, maybe you don't know what I'm talking about. In addition to the fireworks, they had 80 flying drones that they had somehow managed to sync together in unison, to move all together, to make different shapes, to pivot around, they changed colors, and they were all synced one to another. Even though they were individual flying objects, they moved as if they were one. There was a perfect harmony in their actions where it preserved their individuality but it brought them together in a unity reflected in this perfect harmony. When Paul pictures the complete path, he is calling us to, through the love of Christ, that is the image he gives us. One of perfect harmony. Where individuals, those who are separate from one another walk in a unison, walk in a harmony, walk in a faithfulness. And it's not harmony that comes because of a program, but a person: Jesus. It's not a harmony that comes from automation, but affection; this love for one another. And you and I know that this side of heaven, we may never see this fully realized. We may never see the totality of what Paul is picturing of perfect harmony playing out here in churches like Central. But even in the midst of that, we are called to pursue it. So what does it look like to pursue harmony in a place like Central? I see harmony on display in situations like when a life group leader wakes up in the middle of the night overnight into Sunday and comes down sick and sends that text to somebody else in the class, I need you to fill in for me this morning. And they step up and serve. I think about the way that you're pursuing harmony when you walk in this room and there might be some first time guests who happen to sit in your seats. And rather than scoff or hover in hopes that they'll move. You take one for the team and you move elsewhere to serve them. That's what perfect harmony looks like. Or I think of the way that perfect harmony has showed up for the entire past year when we experienced a once in a century global pandemic that caused us to make major changes to how we do things. And yet we walked faithfully side by side in the type of harmony that Paul pictures. And that's only possible if we have that essential ingredient of the agape love that Paul is speaking of here. He calls us to pursue perfect harmony.

But notice how this text goes on because we see a second reality that Paul is calling us to as a church, Central. That we are called to pursue perfect peace. So notice how he says it now in verse 15. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful. So Paul doesn't just call us to a perfect harmony, but now to a perfect peace. And I don't need to take any time to convince you, we live in a world of turmoil where we see a lack of peace all around us. Maybe it shows up when military conflicts escalate. Or maybe we see it in the rise of urban violence or sexual abuse or domestic disturbances. Maybe it shows up in your family life through broken relationships or in your day to day experiences through lost jobs or broken friendships. That lack of peace can show up all around us. But what Paul is reminding us of this morning is that it can also show up within us. That we can struggle with that peace when anxiety takes hold of us. When the entitlement mentality grabs us. When an envy for the things of others overwhelms us. There can be that sense of lasting peace that apart from Jesus we know we can never satisfy. But what Paul is reminding us of here is as he writes this letter, he is writing it to a church that you can imagine was potentially filled with a lack of peace. I mean, just think about these Colossians for a minute. It's a young church full of new converts who many of them probably came from backgrounds that still haunt them as they hear this letter. They're living in a culture that is hostile to their faith and they are encountering false teachers within the church who are sowing seeds of confusion. If there might be any place where there is a lack of peace, it might very well be right here in this church. But notice what happens. Paul shows us that incredible things happen when the love of God shapes the mission of the church. That's why he tells us in verse 15, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. In other words, harmony in our mission fosters harmony in our relationships. He says that a clear sense of our purpose fosters a clear sense of our peace.

Now what type of peace is this? You see the way he talks about it there as the peace of Christ. The image here is not some absence of drama or difficulty in our life. It's not some sort of inner tranquility where if we just go down to the depths of who we are we can find it. He's not just talking about that way that we often spiritualize our decision making. When we make a choice, when we talk about we have a peace about it. What type of peace is he talking about here? He's speaking about a peace that doesn't come from a perspective, but from a person. It's a type of peace that Paul talks about in Ephesians 2:14, in this way when he says about Jesus, He Himself is our peace. Or if you look back with me in Colossians 1:20 just earlier in the letter, he tells us how this peace comes about. When he says about Jesus that through Him, to reconcile to Himself all things whether on earth or in heaven. How? Making peace by the blood of His cross. That's the beauty of the Gospel. That left to ourselves, our lives are tumultuous. We're wracked by anxiety, about the future. We're wracked with the desire for approval as we fear others around us and their perspective of us. We're wracked by guilt for the past, the sin and the shame that we carry because we have fallen short of God's design. But what he is reminding us of here in Colossians 1:20 is that through the death of Christ, God has made a way for us to experience perfect peace. The agony that Jesus faced on the cross is the payment for your sin so that you might experience the kind of peace that Paul is talking about right here. And it's a peace that doesn't just change who we are by the power of the Spirit. It changes how we relate to others. In other words, unless we have the peace from God, we cannot faithfully pursue peace in others. And notice the way he speaks about how this peace should play out in our lives. Do you see what he says in verse 15? He says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. That term rule, this is the only time it's used in the New Testament. And it's talking about having control of a situation. Or maybe more clearly, to render a verdict whenever there is a contested situation.

In the original language, it's using imagery that would conjure up a judge or an umpire. Somebody who makes a ruling in an athletic event when there is uncertainty about what's to take place. And we just got 2 weeks to go until the Summer Olympics are here. Anybody else looking forward to watching those in the days ahead? I know my family is. The Olympics is our once every four year opportunity to pretend like we're passionate about sports that otherwise we don't care about. All in the name of our pride in the United States. And we may not ever follow this event, but after watching about 30 minutes of it, we think we're experts. We think we can judge it better than those who are there to score them in the actual arena. We're sitting at home talking about did they over rotate or under rotate their dismount from the balance beam? Or talking about what's happening in a different competition. And while those games take place in Tokyo, in each of those matches, there will be judges. There will be some sort of umpire who in a sense has control over what takes place because they have the authority to render a verdict, a decision, to be the one that directs the results of the performance of the athletes. When Paul speaks here of the way that the peace of Christ should rule in our hearts, that's the image he's creating. This idea that the peace of Christ, the satisfaction of God that we have, that is now the lens through which we see the world. It is what is bringing a verdict in our lives. It is resolving whatever might contest our spirits and contest our relationships with one another. The picture here is one of peace that surpasses all understanding that guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Because do you see when you look back at verse 15 where this peace rules? In our hearts. In the innermost core of who we are. It sits on the throne. There are all sorts of things that seek to rule our hearts, especially in a broken world, especially in people that don't yet know Jesus. Their hearts may be ruled at times by a pursuit of significance or success, maybe status or any number of things like satisfaction.

But what Paul is showing us here in this moment is that what should rule our hearts is a serenity that can only be explained by the peace that we have in Christ. But don't miss this. Look back at your Bible. When he says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, the word heart is not singular, but plural. Do you see that "s" on the end there? That's very important to what Paul is communicating to us this morning. What's the significance of it? When Paul speaks about it ruling in our hearts, he's not talking about you and me as individuals, he's talking about us collectively as a church, as a community, as the people of God. Why? Because one of the best indicators of whether we are living at peace with God is whether or not we're living at peace with one another. Does His peace rule in our hearts, in our relationships towards one another? And it's not an accident that Paul speaks here of peace right after, back in verse 13, he's given us a call to forgiveness. And why is that? It's because what you'll notice is that in the same way that our forgiveness from God empowers us to forgive others, he is now reminding us that the peace that we receive from God empowers us to extend peace towards others. And this idea of forgiveness and peace are two sides of the same coin. That forgiveness is what we do when we make things right with those that have wronged us. Peace is what we pursue when we make things right with those we've wronged. And he's saying, if we want to live in perfect harmony, if we want to demonstrate the agape love of Christ, then part of what that looks like is to pursue the perfect peace that we have now with God in our relationships with one another. So the question that raises for each of us as members of this body is whether or not you and I are peaceable people. There's an author name Ken Sande who talks about three different types of people when it comes to peace: peacemakers, peace-fakers, and peace-breakers. So what's a peace-breaker? A peace-breaker is someone who is aggressive, often volatile. And when they're in a point of tension, they go on the attack. They seek to break peace in order to get what they want. Those are peace-breakers. Then there are peace-fakers. The ones who are more reserved,

often quieter. That they might have fiery rage in their hearts, but you would never see it on their face. Everything's fine. Maybe that was some of you as you walked in this morning after the discussion you had in the car on the way here. The truth is, every one of us is pulled in one of those two directions; to be a peace-faker or a peace-breaker. Which one are you? But what Sande talks about is that by the power of the Spirit, God equips us, not to be reacting to the conflicts we face as peace-fakers or peace-breakers, but as peacemakers. The ones who pursue what Colossians 3:15 is speaking of here in this moment. To right wrongs and to restore relationships. And at the core of that desire, of the longing to be peacemakers, is the internal wrestling with the question, if Christ has shown peace to us, how could we not show peace to others? I've seen some peacemakers on display even this week. Earlier this week a few of us made a road trip up to Abilene to be there to support Misty Heifrin during the memorial services for her father, Ray, that just passed away. And I was captured by one of the stories that someone told about Ray in that service. They talked about how he was a successful businessman who climbed to tremendous levels of accomplishment. But what he realized as he went through it is that in the wake of his achievements were broken relationships. That his aggressive business practices had broken relationships with others. And God convicted him of that reality and for a period of time, he went around town seeking to be a peacemaker who restored the relationships he broke in the pursuit of his success. I heard a story about one of our men in our church who not long ago went on a men's retreat. And at that time, God got a hold of his heart about the way that he was not fostering peace in his home. And when he got back from that retreat, he spoke to his wife, he brought his kids in, and confessed that reality to them. That he'd been a peace-breaker in their home and he committed anew to fostering that desire to be a peacemaker. Or I think just this past Thursday at our monthly men's study, there was one of our guys that got up there who talked about how in a season of his life, he was struggling with an overwhelming anger. He'd have to go out to see clients to provide services for them as part of his job. And the whole trip out there he'd be frustrated at them because of the inconvenience or the complaints that they had. But the moment he stepped out of his truck and into their property, he could just turn it right back on and fake it like everything was fine. And it appeared like things were great on the outside, but it was killing him on the inside. And it wasn't until he stepped into our Regeneration program pilot group, that we're getting prepared to launch in full next month, that God used Regeneration and that ministry to help him understand the underlying roots of that. And to see what it was that was causing that anger and fostering that peace-faking in his life so that he might find freedom from it. And that's what Paul is speaking of here this morning. When he is calling us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. When that happens, not just to us individually, but to us together as a church, look at the result at the end of verse 15. He says, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful.

Now we're going to talk more about thankfulness next week as part of our passage when we go on in Colossians. But for now, focus on what he is saying about the unity that this pursuit of peace fosters. We are called to this reality as one body. And as we pursue this, we are reflecting what God has done for us in Christ. The pursuit of perfect peace with one another is the result of our perfect peace we experience with God. And as we seek to be peacemakers with those that are here in the church, what happens as a result of it is that it brings us together. It knits our hearts together as one so that we might honor God right here at Central. Back in 1968, there was a man named Spence Silver who was demoralized. He'd been given a big assignment at his company, 3M, to build a new powerful and strong adhesive that they could begin to use in the products. And he had spent a period of time working on this. And what he produced totally missed the mark. It didn't have the strength that they needed. It seemed useless. It seemed like

a solution in search of a problem to solve. But this adhesive had one unique characteristic about it. You see, this adhesive, even though it wasn't particularly powerful, it could be used to stick something to something else and then be removed in a way that caused no damage to what it was stuck to, and to where the adhesive stayed sticky enough to be used again. Well, right about that same time, there was another worker in his same company who sang in the choir at his church. And every Sunday when they were getting ready to sing from the hymnal, he would go in and take pieces of paper and mark the page numbers for where they were going to sing. And then he'd get up there in the choir, he'd open up his hymnal, and that loose slip of paper that was in there, as soon as he'd open it, what would happen? It'd fall right out on the ground and he'd lose that spot again for the future. And he thought to himself, wouldn't it be great if there was some sort of bookmark that could be invented that would stick to a page, but when you removed it, it wouldn't cause any damage to the page. And that's the point at which he remembered that Silver had made this adhesive invention. And when that happened, he had this "Aha" moment that produced what we know today as the post-it note. So billions of those have been sold in the 40+ years, 50+ years since that has been produced. And one of the unique aspects of those post-it notes that you have all over your house is that they are the ideal reflection of what we need in modern life in many situations. Why? It's because they are strong enough to stick to something. They are safe enough to remove from something, and they are reusable enough so that they don't lose their value even when they're used and they're used for a long period of time. One of the things that brought my attention to this is that this inventor, Spence Silver, passed away earlier this year. And in the obituary I came across about him, he described the adhesive used in post-it notes in this way. He said, "It's not soluble, it doesn't break down, the paper may eventually deteriorate, but the stickiness will always remain." Think about what we're looking at here in Colossians 3. This bond that Paul tells us to have in the church, this point of stickiness, to come together as one, to pursue these things, this image that he gives there and how good a reflection this reality is that this bond must be firm but flexible. Strong yet sustainable. What Paul is reminding us of here is that no matter the circumstance, no matter the change, no matter the challenges we face, the love of Christ, the peace of Christ can hold us fast. It's like that adhesive. Things around it may change, but it will always remain. And that's how we're called to press on together as one body, Central family.

Let's pray.

Father, we desire to be one. You've given us the gift of your Son so that we may be one in a unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. And I pray, Lord, that we would not just be willing for that reality to be true in our church, but as You tell us in Ephesians 4, that we would be eager to do whatever it takes. Lord, I pray if there are broken relationships in this church or other ways where peace has been disrupted amongst our people, Father, would You use Your word, Your Spirit, to draw us back together as one? So that we might experience the perfect harmony that Paul is calling us to here. And Father, I ask You in this moment that if there are people in this room or watching by video that have never experienced the peace of Christ, that You promise here Lord, that You would open their hearts. That that peace of Christ might rule in their lives from this day forward. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.