

PEACE RULING OUR HEARTS

Colossians 3 is one of the greatest chapters in all the Bible. It is one of those mountain peaks for which we should be so fond of the Word of God. Here we find a great battle taking place between heaven and earth, and heaven is winning.

A new spiritual life is given by the risen and ascended Savior in the opening 4 verses – a life raised with Him, set in Him, hidden in Him and to be brilliantly revealed in Him at His return.

The words of old Samuel Rutherford come to mind: ‘Jesus has long ago taken my heart with Him to heaven and I haven’t seen it since!’

Our minds and lives should be fixed on things above. We live where we love, and if our love is Christ, our life is with Him.

Why is it mankind spends so much time thinking about the world he is soon to leave, and so little on the world where he will dwell forever? Our main concern in this life is to secure an interest in the next.

Now such a heavenly orientation does not, however, remove all concerns about this present time, as Paul brings the full weight of this high and holy life to be brought down to bear upon a holy war. Like an avalanche, verses 5-11 come down upon all kinds of fleshly, sinful, selfish, godless actions – the old life that deserves the wrath of God.

You fight because you are a new creation of God’s own hand, by His Son, and joined as one body, one church, through the Spirit.

The war is evidently with ourselves; we have changed but sin has not changed. Notice how we who once were sons of disobedience are not described by God Himself – verse 12: chosen, holy, beloved. This is all on account of what Jesus did for us, becoming man, living a holy life, and out of love died on the cross for our sins.

We are to live accordingly – and the verse I want you to consider with me today, is part of this new life; a life of kindness from the heart, a life of forgiveness when others have hurt us, a life of love which brings others near

and into the church, a life of peace which surpasses understanding, and a life of singing and gratitude because of Jesus and His Word.

Which kind of a life would you want? Which of these would you count the rich man, the blessed man, and the cursed and poor man? If these were two grave stones with these two opposite characters on them, for which life would you want to be remembered? And much more importantly, which person would you want to be when you stand before the Lord in judgment at the last day?

In this warfare then, I want us to consider the striking phrase of Paul in verse 15: *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...*

Peace is one of the many rich jewels found in the Bible which God gives to those who come to Him.

Listen to these verses – they are some of the best that you will ever hear:

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds... Philippians 4:7

And His name will be called ... Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end... Isaiah 9:6, 7

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind *is* stayed on *You*, Because he trusts in *You*.

The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

But Paul's point to the Colossians and to us is particularly rich and pointed to our needs. That word "**rule**" is of greatest significance. It is one thing to know or understand or even be fascinated with the vision of what peace is. But it is quite another to have it truly reign and run your heart!

What is this peace which rules?

What does it mean that the heart is ruled by it?

Why is it we can come so short of such peace in our lives?

These are the three questions we will attempt to answer in our sermon today.

To ask what this peace is to ask whose peace it is, where it comes from, because it is not the peace of man. This peace does not pop out of nowhere.

Here in Colossians 3 it pours down from the mountain of Christ's exaltation. (Read verse one)

Recall what Jesus told his troubled disciples in His valley of death, as He was about to go to the cross. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." Then those memorable words, at the beginning of John 14 – "Let not your hearts be troubled! I go to prepare a place for you!

How much more, then, since we see Him on this side of the empty tomb, and has entered His high and exalted rest! Not only has Christ died, and raised from the dead, and ascended on high as an all-conquering Lord; but you as well, dear believer, have died in Him, rose in Him, and seated in heavenly places in this One who is over all, who rules all, and is coming again to this world?

This fact instructs all of us to be living a certain kind of life here and now. All of us are to be seeking and setting our hearts and lives upon things above, and not on things below; that is, living as new men and women, and putting the things of the old life to death.

The things below, the ways of death here, are like a review of a graveyard of our works of the flesh. Here is a tombstone with immorality on it; on another, impurity; and so on and so forth. Some are bigger than others, and some smaller, but all signify death. We were dead in our trespasses and sins.

These are the ways of man – contrary to that peace we considering today. See how impossible it is that a heart filled with the ways of death could be at peace. God's thunderous voice has boomed across our sky – repeated in Isaiah "there is no peace, says my God, to the wicked."

But here is the good news, Christian; your names are no longer here. You have passed from death to life by faith in Christ Jesus, who is the Resurrection. You are raised with Christ, hidden in Him, and gloriously

renewed in the image of God in true knowledge and holiness. You are changed, called, and chosen of God.

And so you walk in a new suit, a new life, a heavenly and gracious life: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another. These are various facets of love as the bond of perfect unity.

And such things then issue forth, not in self-congratulations or pride but in worship – thankfulness, singing, doing all in the name of our Lord Jesus.

And it is here - like a crown upon an attractive prince or princess – is peace, peace ruling, peace ruling in the heart – the heart of God’s people. Peace ruling is the crown worn by every believer.

This is the peace of God – a *true* peace; *sure* peace; *present* peace; *righteous* peace; *heavenly* peace; *eternal* peace; *complete* peace, pervading the whole soul. One writer says: *It calms our storms, removes our burdens, breaks our bonds, strengthens us for warfare, and cheers us in trial.* (Horatius Bonar)

This peace is Christian peace, found exclusively in the Savior Himself. Listen again to the testimony of the Word about Him: He is your peace (Eph 2.14), gives us His peace (Jn 14.27), declares a gospel of peace (Eph 6), dispenses a covenant of peace (Isa 54.10), and brings peace in heaven (Lk 19.38).

In Philippians 4, the peace of God surpasses all understanding, guarding your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. This is something supernatural, something from above and not below; something from the Lord and not from ourselves. We cannot give this present to ourselves. A peace which surpasses all that men had conceived or imagined. (says Barnes) In Philippians, Paul reverses the nouns – instead of the peace of God, it is the God of peace who will be with us.

That is what I want you to consider before finishing this first point. The God of peace – God’s own peace! What is that like? What is God’s peacefulness in Himself?

He is Himself the Fountain of all peace; what is that Fountain like?

Perfect tranquility reigns in His whole Being. God is never disturbed, worried or upset by anything, either within or without Himself. How could He be? Nothing can possibly take Him by surprise, for ‘known to God are all His works from the beginning of the world’ (Acts 15.18). Nothing can ever ultimately disappoint Him, for ‘of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things’ (Rom 11.36). Nothing can to the slightest degree disrupt His perfect composure, for He is ‘the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning’ (Jam 1.17). Perfect security ever fills Him.” (A.W. Pink)

Now, God’s children are to be like Him. God’s peace is given to us in Christ. We are sealed, enveloped in this Prince of Peace. This peace is “...the conviction that the sins of the past have been forgiven, that the present is being overruled for good, and that the future cannot bring about separation bt Christ and his own.” William Hendriksen

Christ’s Spirit produces this fruit in every believer – the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**! It is Christ Himself, Christ in our hearts, Christ in you, which brings this about.

Now that brings us to our second point – seeing that this is a divine peace graciously given, we see that this peace rules in the heart.

But before going further, may I ask you here – how is your peace? How is your heart today? Are you a soul at great peace, an eternal peace, a peace that is beyond our understanding? For this is what the Lord holds out for those who come to Him.

Now let us consider further that this is not some weak or thin peace. It is not a false veneer, easily scratched and compromised; no, it is in the very hearts of believers.

The heart does not mean an inward peace. Peace is seated there, inwardly, but as the heart is the center of man – his thoughts and purposes – the whole man is pervaded with this peace.

This is the intent of the verb, “rule.” Peace is not simply existing in our hearts, or sleeping dormant there, or hiding in one of the corners. This is no momentary peace of men, easily broken and overturned. It is something that

fills and controls the heart in a mighty and powerful way. This peace exercises a supreme command here in our spirits.

The word actually comes from the Olympic games, and described the president who was seated over the events. He was both the umpire over all, and the rewarder of the prizes to the victors.

So the idea Paul seems to have is to let Christ, the Prince of peace, be the president in your heart, as well as reward you with His crown of peace.

In this light, let us take up a few considerations about this peace.

First, it is not to be as is too often found in our lives – a great idea on Sunday morning while we are sitting in church, but little more.

John Eadie saw this when he wrote:

Let it not be a state of mind admired or envied, but one actually possessed;

Let it not be hovering as a hoped for blessing on the outskirts of your spirits, but let it be within you;

Let it not be an occasional visitor, often scared away by dominant and usurping passion, but a central power, exercising a full and unlimited administration.

Christ as **Lord** is to rule in our hearts; He commands us, as a Master to a servant, in the depths of the heart.

Secondly, all of us need this. Think of how many storms have raged in your heart!

We are so easily agitated and passionate; we need something, someone to preside over these hearts of ours. And what can compare to the calm peace of the presence of God through Jesus Christ, of His eternal favor and the pardon of all our sins?

A mighty and reigning grace must fill the heart.

And consider further, brothers and sisters, you are going to have something fill and rule your heart anyway, aren't you. One way or another, you are going to be ruled by something or someone. Everybody serves somebody. And the choices are slim.

Spurgeon said:

If nothing governs, I tell you boldly the devil governs. That man who does not control himself is controlled by the devil, for he must have a master somewhere. We cannot have two masters, but it is quite as certain that we must have one. One power or another will master you. Shall it be your Creator, or his enemy? Your Savior, or your destroyer?

Now I hope you see not only your need of this ruling, dictating, presiding, heart-filling, rewarding peace from a real and present Jesus. I hope you see too that His peace is able to do this very thing in you.

As sure as He stood and commanded the waves, "Peace, Be Still," the waves of your heart cannot but obey when He says so. His peace is irresistible – none can stand in its way; how can it? The Lord's peace is sovereign peace.

Think of it for a moment: Christian peace is eternal, everlasting, unchangeable – no duration or variation can alter, much less destroy it. The Bible says that it is perfect peace.

The great Jonathan Edwards said this: *This Peace will remain when your body dies: it will remain when the mountains depart and the hills be removed, and when the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll. (p 92)*

Now if it is based not upon us but upon such a sure foundation, and it is so to all eternity, will it not be sufficient for time? The assurance and comfort of our salvation is a much smaller matter than salvation itself. If you have a title to peace with God in Jesus Christ to all eternity, is His grace somehow insufficient for the little thimble of time?

I read recently this thought – that Jesus dying for our sins on the cross is far better in fulfilling the curse and wrath of God than if I suffer forever in hell for my own sins; and that Jesus fulfilling all righteousness for me in His

perfect life, being God, is better by far than my own righteousness, if I had perfectly obeyed God's law myself.

If you have a sure promise which not only endures but shines through the gigantic destruction of all things at the last day, does it not have strength to endure the heat of life's little day? Of our problems? If the Lord of all said that He has overcome the world, can He not overcome your heart?

Oh, believer, look more closely all around you: Look back, look to the sides, look to the future.

You should be filled with peace as you look back, at the great foundation of God Himself being your Redeemer and the so great salvation of the cross! Your peace is a blood-bought peace!

You should be filled with peace at the great and powerful regeneration and change given by the Spirit of Christ; Christ has sovereignly said to your soul, "Peace, Be Still." You are no longer of this world, and have been translated into a new Kingdom – the Lord's Kingdom – Your Kingdom!

You should be filled with peace at the singular future before you; your new world – new heavens and new earth. Jesus said: "I go to prepare a place for you – a place of everlasting peace – and I come again to take you with Me, that you may be where I am."

Now that brings us to this important question: Why is it we can come so short of such peace in our lives?

Well there are three different answers to be given here, to three different people.

The first reason why you have no peace here is because some of you are unbelievers, and have no share in this Savior sent from heaven. How can you have peace when you are not reconciled to God by Christ? When God is against you as you are still in your sins?

Oh, you may desire peace, just like all want to go to heaven. But you go about it in a way that keeps you as Lord over your own heart and life. Men seek peace falsely by *forgetting God* – you lull yourself that everything will work out fine, and you speak to your soul, 'soul, peace be still.'

You seek peace falsely by *following the world* – you have your heaven and peace here; you are spiritually drunk and satisfied with the pleasures of this life, and yet you know that they are not lasting or satisfying (even though you return to them over and over again).

Or perhaps you seek peace in morality or in religiosity, like the Pharisees.

But without a changed heart, without trusting in Christ, without turning from your sin and surrendering to Him on His terms, you are at war with the God of heaven, and you will lose.

Your heart needs to be changed before you can have peace: *It is impossible to unrenewed human nature [to have peace]. Man by nature is worse than any one wild beast... There is lion in him, and there is serpent in him; there is tiger in him, and there is wolf in him; there is dog in him, and there is devil in him, says Spurgeon.*

All you can do is cage and chain such wild animals up for a while.

Now here is another person addressed, one trusting in a false peace. Here is a professed believer, who says he knows Jesus, but who, as Christ Himself pointed out, they deny Him by how they live.

A lack of peace is a mark of such a one. What often happens is their sins are kept for a while from the eyes of others. They hide their evil, their adultery, their stealing at work, their addictions to drink or drugs, or their love of money and power. Maybe they are secretly in love with their own beauty or looks – they love the mirror and the praise of people.

This is a peace that cannot endure the true light shining on it. This peace is like a mushroom; it only lives and grows in the dark, and does not like it when the light of the living Word of God shines upon him or her. If the truth shines upon it, fear and turmoil fill the soul.

It is the exact opposite to true peace, which grows in the light of the gospel. Beware of the false peace of a false prophet, promising, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. One author describes this peace as a dream, a sleep, on the lip of an active volcano! The hot heart of sin has not been changed, and

nothing can stop the flow of lava erupting upwards, and disturbing his rest and peace.

Now, true peace is not this worldly sort. Christ's peace is perfect – the world's is partial, in pieces. Christ's peace reaches the conscience, the heart – that of the world's numbs and intoxicates the conscience. Thus worldly peace is unholy. Christ's peace is satisfying and comforting, setting contentment in the soul – but the world's is unfilling and shallow. The peace of Christ ruling is stable and steady, where the world's is easily ruffled, broken, and ever-changing. (Bonar, in his Thoughts on John)

Why then, we must ask, is the rule of peace weak in true believers? The answers to that fall along three lines.

First, Christians can still fall into the error of looking to themselves for peace, and mix their faith with unbelief. How often are we found trying to manufacture earthly peace, by wrong motivations (such as self-esteem), wrong standards (compromising God's law), or to a wrong purpose (for a momentary aim instead of God's glory).

We could but cannot expand on these areas of a wrong motive, standard and goal.

Secondly, unrepentant sin, a not battling with our sin, can injure your peace greatly. And nothing is more fatal than nursing and indulging of these foul and angry passions which the Apostle calls us to abandon in verses 5-9. How can peace rule when such antagonists and enemies are welcomed into your heart? You must cast the Achen out. Show them the door quickly, and peace will return.

Notice here that it is not as though your sins are greater than the Lord's rule and power. That is not it at all. Rather, it is the Lord withdrawing His injured Spirit, that you might better to prize the worth of His presence, which will never entirely leave or forsake you.

Thirdly, if you would see Christ's peace sovereignly commanding your heart, you must nurture and cherish the graces outlined in the text.

Perhaps you can drive out the angry passions for a while. But if you do not invite the beauties of a calm, peaceful, self-control into your soul, you leave it swept and cleaned for those foul things to return.

Put off must be followed by put on. Do not fall short; do not think that having addressed your sins of commission that your sins of omission can be ignored.

How will you then know that you are seeing this rule of Christ expressing itself in your life, and expanding in your heart? Keep an eye out for these fruits mentioned here for a purpose. You have gardens, some of you. You know how to patiently wait and look for fruit or vegetables, right? Well look for this love, this thankfulness, this worship in the body of Christ. The first fruits of a new heart is love fellow-believers, members of the same body.

Vs 15 – Thankfulness in everything – even the hard and difficult matters of life, remembering that God has a purpose even for these things.

Vs 16 – The Word of God filling the heart – leading to worship, song, and praise.

Vss 17ff – A radical Christ-centeredness – acknowledging Him in a full and continuing way.

All of this, remember, is of grace, from Christ, freely given, and not earned from Him: He gladly gives His gifts with Himself.

Close with this great thought:

*Thus the peace of God rules, takes the lead in the conscience, rules **always**, the offer being **always** the same, the righteousness and atonement of Jesus **always** the same, my lack of them **always** the same, and my interest in them **always** the same; which I daily learn to maintain by all means, against all corruptions, enemies, and temptations from every quarter. (Quoted)*

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.