

God has revealed to us here that there is a strong correlation between gratitude and relational peace. Those who are grateful for God's grace, the message concerning the Christ, of our union with Him, are far more apt to be gracious towards others than to be destructive towards others. They are apt to break down obstacles to peace, through repentance and forgiveness, than they are to build obstacles to peace through covetousness, slander, and abusive or belittling speech.

It is so imperative that we recognize the centrality of this grace, this kindness of God in uniting us to His Son, that He mentions thanksgiving three times in verse 15-17. At the end of verse 15, it is a command, “and be thankful.” It is the manner by which we are told to sing, “with grace in your hearts”, and finally, we are told to do whatever we do in word or deed, to do it in the manner of giving thanks to God the Father through Jesus Christ. A life lived in gratitude to God is a life which honors and glorifies God in all things.

This undeserved kindness, that warm-hearted love which God has lavished upon you, is not felt by God nor obligated upon His Spirit because you and I have been good, or even enough. It is solely and utterly because this love flows from His heart, uncompelled by anything but His own nature, the heart whose purity is so good and so beautiful that He shines in light unapproachable. That heart, that eternal, never created, never corrupted, never lying, never failing, never changing, heart has set its sights upon you who are in Christ Jesus. You who have been shown peace because of it. You who have been shown compassion because of it. You who have seen God humble himself and

take on the form a servant, being made in the likeness of humanity, because of His great and overwhelming grace.

How shall we not be thankful? Shouldn't such an obvious thing not even need to be commanded of us? Yet, it is. Why? Is it not because we so quickly and easily forget the great goodness of God? We drift away from remembering and valuing the significance, the weightiness, of two vital truths. First, we forget how holy God is. We lose sight of the depths of His righteousness, the clarity of His purity, the glory of His justice and goodness and greatness. We think of Him as "the man upstairs", which so badly misses the reality of His being it's as if we never thought any reasonable thought at all. We naturally, in our weakness, or our foolishness, or our arrogance, remake God into our image simply writ a bit larger. And this lie has a devastating effect on our gratitude, and therefore upon our 'putting on the new humanity', our compassion, kindness, and the like. It leaves us somewhat grateful to God for His blessings, but not for Himself. It leaves us grateful, but more like the gratitude that we feel towards our parents for coming to graduation, or buying us a birthday present, than the gratitude of a slave set free, or an orphan made a son and given the gift of a Father, a family, a belonging, and a place to call home.

Or, we forget the significance of our sin. We lose sight of the depths of our depravity, our foolishness, our incapacity, our wicked thoughts and intentions and desires, let alone our actions. We think of ourselves as weak, but not rebellious; as sick, but not dead; as needing some help, but not needing to be remade and redeemed and reborn. We think of ourselves as a little lower than God, narrowing the distance between us from eternal and infinite to manageable and obtainable by religious works, good deeds,

rituals, or the like. So, reconciliation with God is then seen as something to be thankful for, but with the gratitude that we feel towards vitamins for making us healthier; Theraflu rather than resurrection from the dead; as expectation rather than miracle. When we forget these two things, we lose sight of the greatness of God's redemptive grace, of His kindness, of His compassion, of His great and abundant love. Therefore, our gratitude is too small, too sporadic, too inconsistent with the glorious surprising phenomenal, utterly unexplainable and inexpressible marvel that God's great work of reconciliation should induce.

So, how are we to walk in the truth, to live consistently with Reality, to be grateful, to walk in peace, to put on the virtuous clothing of vv12-14? The answer is in v16: let the word of the Christ dwell richly among you.

You see, the means of our gratitude and of our growth, of seeing rightly and truly, is to be confronted, often and always, by the gospel; to be utterly remade by the message concerning the Christ.

It is this good news of the great Reconciler, the Son of God who destroys the eternal obstacle between the holy infinite God and the rebellious mutinous sinner in order to bring them together as friends, more than that, as family, by destroying the very cause of the animosity between us and God, sin.

It is this gospel, this story about the Christ, which is the power of God for salvation; it is by beholding the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ Jesus that we are transformed from one degree of glory to another, it is by the word concerning the Christ that our minds are continually renewed to love one another well, to have compassionate hearts, to show kindness and humility, etc. As we have seen, the true myth of the Christ to whom God has united us changes everything, and it is this truth, this true story of the Christ and His work to which we must let make a home among us. You see, that is the word used here in this verb, “to be at home in”, is the literal translation. The message, or story, of the Christ is to be at home among us.

This idea of home should not be overlooked. to dwell, the ESV word, almost feels temporary, but a home is seen as permanent. It is that sense of belonging and rest, of settlement and security. Therefore, the command here is to make the Word of the Christ, which is the story which is centered upon Jesus as God’s Son sent to redeem us, the primary resident of our congregation. Whatever can be said to bind us together, it must be the message of the Christ. Whatever could be said to be the purpose for our existence as a family, it must be the message of the Christ. Whatever could be said to be the reason that we do anything, or say anything, it must be the message of the Christ which does so.

The gospel is the center of all which we are and of all which we do and of all which we say. It is the only center which can hold together under the mountain of assaults which

come upon our hearts and souls and bodies in this world. Every other center cannot hold us together, for we were made only for His story.

Paul knows this. We were made, as the household of God, as the Temple of God, to have a resident, and only one resident: God. And Paul, in speaking of our union with Jesus, the Christ, makes this union clearer by commanding us to make sure that His message of His Son is the dominant story upon which we build our home. I mean, a house is not built for the sake of the house, but for the resident, for those who dwell within it. Therefore, the Church of Jesus Christ is not built for the sake of the Church, but for the resident, the Christ to whom she is united, and as such it is the resident's story which should be center stage of all which we say or do or believe or hope in.

So, how do we 'let the story of the Christ make its residence among us abundantly'? How do we, then, grow in the grace of God and in gratitude? **We do so by telling the story to ourselves *richly, or abundantly*.** To center our corporate life together, our gatherings, our worship, our service, our work together, upon this one story of the Christ, always. You cannot tell the gospel too much, too often, or too loudly. You and I must hear it always, and every work which we set ourselves upon must be centered upon His story and find its place in it. Every act of service must be centered upon His story and find its place in it. Every act of worship, whatever we do in word or in activity, must trace its way back to its center and serve its place in that great and glorious story of the God of grace, who according to the riches of His grace, raised our dead hearts to life by uniting us to His Son's death and resurrection, to give us new life,

a new heart, and His own Spirit to see His work all the way through. We must hear the gospel, speak the gospel, and sing the gospel story, and strive to understand its implications for all our life.

We do this in a few particular ways the apostle mentions, and the first two, teaching and admonishing, are the same as those which he, himself, uses to describe his own ministry in 1:28 and the third, singing, he issues by example just previous to that in 1:15-23, which resonates as a hymn.

First, the manner by which we give residence to the gospel of the Christ is that we teach one another. Notice that this is a communal effort, a participation by all of us towards one another. We cannot have any room cut off from the gospel, any person isolated from the ministry of God's Word, the message of the gospel. We must, all of us, be helping one another learn the gospel, grasp the gospel, fathom the implications of what it means for us, in our particular situations. What chapter of the story of the Christ is misunderstood by a brother? How can I remind them, or instruct them if they don't already know, what the story of Christ is and means? When a sister is struggling in grief at the loss of her spouse, what difference does the story of the Christ make? Maybe it is the grieving tears of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus. The Christ knows loss. He knows the pain of it, the searing and incessant pain of grief. Maybe it's the resurrection! He not only knows the grief of losing a loved one, He knows death from the inside, from travelling that tunnel and crossing that River. And He came back. He defeated it, so that while it may have a momentary foot upon the throat of our hearts, it

will be thrown down and defeated and never rise again when the Christ raises those who belong to Him up never to die again!

What hope does the appearing of the Christ give to us? What love does it show? What compassion and grace does it reveal? And what hope does his second appearing give to us? That we will be made like Him, incorruptible and unfading for the presence of the glorious God forever? We who know must share what we know with those of us who do not know yet, or have forgotten amidst the sufferings of life. That is how we give home to the gospel of Christ.

Secondly, we admonish one another. If teaching is the instruction of what we do not know, admonition is the calling forth of action in the light of the implications of it. It is the “therefore” which follows the “because God has done.” Admonishment consists of both encouragement and warning. It is likened to the guard rails put up along the road which help us stay out of danger, from falling off the cliffs of our doubt, of our sinful desires, of our distress. We are all to be admonishing one another, counselling each other on what the implications of the gospel of the Christ are, and calling one another to walk consistently with it. For example, what shall I do when I lose my job? In the light of the gospel of the Christ, what shall I do? How shall I go on? Admonition addresses the “how’s” of life in the light of the story of the Christ. How, then, shall we now live?

How shall I love? How shall I look for a spouse? How shall I work? How shall I treat that vacation time and that retirement and that windfall? What does the Lord say? “In all wisdom” said the apostle, that is, how we shall live consistently with the truth.

We are to be admonishing one another all the time, letting the story of the Christ be our center, the center of our hopes, the center which anchors us in our fears, the center of all which pursue. And all of this with thanksgiving to God the Father through Jesus.

Considering this call to admonish one another, I must ask you, brothers and sisters, to pray. Particularly, to pray for the repentance of a brother who has stood up with us to affirm the gospel as true and has committed himself to live accordingly, but who has now rejected that call to holiness, moved in with a woman who is not his wife, and lives with her as if she was. Knowing that it is sinful and inconsistent with God’s will, and being called to turn and encouraged to seek holiness over the past 10 months, he has refused. If he does not turn from his sin, then you will all be called together, as those who love Him and want him to turn from the sin which will destroy him, to admonish him as a brother. But, my hope is that it will not come to that, but rather that he will turn now and flee from embracing the things for which Jesus came to destroy and embrace the God-honoring and other-edifying virtues of Christ. Pray for him this week. Pray for the miraculous softening of the heart, of the seeking of holiness, of genuine repentance and faith which is suitable to those who are united to Christ Jesus. May the Lord answer us with his salvation and the protection and salvation of the woman whose holiness and honor he is diminishing. Yet, we are called to admonish one another according to the Word of the Christ.

And the third way we do that is, we sing. Wait, what? Yes, our faith is a sung faith. The gospel story is an aria, a sung story. The people of God sing in war and peace, victory and defeat, celebration and lament. We sing an ancient song with a hope-filled future, as the living one among the dead.

For, humans were made to sing, and we do it all the time. We sing to babies and we sing our kids to sleep. We sing “Sweet Caroline” at Cubs games, “Happy Birthday” at birthday parties, and movies without soundtracks feel strange. In the greatest moments of joy in our lives, we want music! And in the deepest valleys and darkest most terrible nights of our lives, it is song which speaks for us where no other light can shine. In the darkest moments of my life, it was the hymns of the faith which sustained me, when I couldn’t see straight enough to read, it was song that fed my soul the promises of God. In fact, one worship leader has said that every Sunday we prepare each other for a funeral, because singing the word of Christ etches the gospel upon our souls in the indelible ink of song.

We gather to sing of Creation, Fall, Redemption, New Creation every week, centering our souls again upon the story about the Christ, the Hero. We set ourselves, when we gather, through the preaching of the story, but equally through the singing of it, into the rhythms of grace which God has gloriously revealed through Jesus Christ. We need to hear it sung to us. We need to sing it to one another. Preaching is done by one person. Prayer is often by representative, but singing? We all get to sing the gospel and thereby serve one another with grace.

Every time we get together there are those of us who are lonely, who need to hear what a friend they have in Jesus; that He will never let go through the calm and through the storm. There are those of us who are merely floating, with our heads barely above the sorrows rolling like sea billows, who need to hear that it is well with our souls because God is near for our good and has worked to undo the curse of sin and death. There are those of us who are burdened with sin and guilt, buried beneath the shame which so easily snuffs out our hope, who need to hear that our hope is built on nothing but Jesus' blood and righteousness, that our sins do not define us, but that we stand on the solid rock of Christ alone. We need to hear how deep the Father's love is for us, how vast beyond all measure. We need to hear that He is thrice holy and will not be mocked, that He is justice and mercy, love and wrath, sovereign and near to us in the person of Jesus Christ. We need to hear the majestic glory of God's power in creation, the dirge of sin's curse and our fall from grace, of the triumphant epic of God's redemption of us through Christ Jesus, and the resonant hopeful anthems of the New Creation, the resurrection to eternal life which awaits us because of Jesus.

We do all of these by singing psalms. Now, you may have heard it said that the book of psalms are the great prayer book of the Bible. In a sense this is not wrong, but it is also not complete. The psalms are songs. It is the great songbook of the Bible. And we are to sing them, to sing Scripture, and to sing all of them, even the laments and sorrowful ones. Why? Because they plant the message about the Christ, and even the laments are the drone underneath the melody, the tragic tension awaiting the climax and resolution of the Hero's appearing. They are part of the story which exalt God in the waiting,

which lament the realities of the Fall, which glorify God as the powerful Creator, which wonder at His majesty and wonder at our sin, and counterpoint interplay between these two lines of the true story propel us towards that emphatic crescendo to the Christ. We sing the psalms because they tell the story.

We are also to sing hymns. These are doctrinal songs. It was hymns which Paul and Silas sang in prison. It was a hymn which Paul quoted earlier to the Colossians in chapter 1. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus sang hymns in the garden with his disciples, reminding themselves of the nature and character of God. Hymns teach us and admonish us by putting the truth to a form that we can remember and sing together.

And we sing spiritual songs. I think that this simply means songs which are consistent with the purpose of the Holy Spirit. His work of exalting Christ, remembering His work and words, and edifying one another through it. In fact, the word here, “spiritual”, is the same word of “spiritual gifts,” which is to say that they are songs intended and sung to build one another up in our knowledge of Christ, and in the implications of who He is and what He has done. They teach and admonish us, encourage us, exhort us, compel us, motivate us, not only to know the gospel, but, as Paul commanded in chapter 2 of Colossians, to “so walk in Him.”

In these ways, the singing of Scripture, the singing of doctrine, and the singing to edify one another, we teach and admonish one another in the story of the Christ and what our lines are in this story. By so doing, the story of the Christ takes up residence in us, we don the clothes suitable to our union with Him, as those holy and beloved,

belonging to God because He is kind and gracious, and we live it out in both word and deed.

This is why you and I are commanded to sing. It is not optional. The Bible contains over 400 references to singing and over 50 direct commands to sing. Because in our song, and through our singing, the story of the Christ and all its implications take up residence in us. Your singing increases your brother's thanksgiving for God, for His goodness, and for His generosity. Your singing increases your sister's thanksgiving to God for His holiness, for His purity, for His radical kindness towards sinners, increasing our hope, bolstering our weaknesses, encouraging our hearts, and increasing our goodness through it.

This letter to the Colossians has shown us that it is the gospel of the Christ which unites us, not music. And our differences are never so slight as they are at the foot of the cross. The story of the Christ, the work and word of God, is the center upon which the Church is formed and upon which social, political, ethnic, and cultural boundaries are obliterated and where Christ is all and in all. Music is not our hope of glory, Christ Jesus is. Song is not the one seated at the right hand of God having completed everything necessary for our belonging, for our acceptance with God, Christ is that one. Singing does not unite us, Christ does, and by so doing creates a New Humanity, a people full of gratitude for God's grace and unified in it. But, in response to Him, and because we are all so grateful to God...we sing, for we no longer find our identities in any other story, because no other story has so altered us, so grounded our fellowship together. They say that we find our identity in shared experiences with others. That is true, and for the Christian there is no greater shared experience, no former experience

at all. Jesus Christ, and being united to Him in His death and resurrection, finding our belonging, our place of acceptance with God through Him, is now the most intense experience of our lives that has transformed us. We identify, together, each and every Christian, with Jesus Christ, and so give thanks to God the Father *through Him*. God's grace towards sinners and fools unites us all.

Therefore, the manner of our singing, or the style of our music, is completely secondary to this purpose: to make this story of the Christ the resident of our hearts.

So much complaining about music style, has more to do with the complaining grumbling of the Sinai Desert than the grateful joy of the one united to Christ Jesus.

When we appreciate the gospel of God's work, *for us*, as the generous gift of His complete and utter graciousness, that we are united to the person and the work of Jesus Christ and by such a union are included in His death for sins and resurrection life, then we are united to one another no matter what preferences that may exist for music. Paul has just finished explaining how the gospel unites us to Christ and to one another, so that there is no barbarian or Scythian, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, but that we are all united to Christ Jesus the same way, regardless of our ethnicity, our history, our education, or economic status, and it is a sad commentary that we, instead, often divide over music style, which is a preference at best. We, too often, become like the grumbling Israelites, who preferred focaccia to manna, and so lost their gratitude and grumbled to the One who had set them free from slavery. Their preference took precedence and robbed them of their proper joy and gratitude. Do we not also let our preference for music style take precedence at times, and lose our joy and gratitude?

As long as our music and song is truly the Word of the Christ, is telling the story and responding appropriately to that true story with gratitude and truth ourselves, then the style in which we sing becomes a mere preference which cannot hold sway. As long as it is the true story, and as long as we can all sing it together, then let us sing with grace towards one another so that the story of the Christ may dwell among us for the glory of God.

Because that is the goal of it all. Paul finishes this section with the goal of thanksgiving to God. As if these three works of teaching, admonition, and singing were too narrow, we are told to do everything, whatever we may use our mouths to do, and whatever actions that our bodies may endeavor, as ambassadors of the one to whom we are united, in the name of Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. That's what "in the name of Jesus" means, by the way. It means "as ambassadors." We are not our own. Our message is not our own. Our story is not our own. It belongs to the one to whom we are united: Jesus. Therefore, whatever we do, we are to do as the cause of the Christ. Whatever we say, we are to speak as the representatives of the Christ. Whatever we sing, whatever we counsel, whatever we proclaim, whatever we rejoice in, whatever we grieve, whatever we do, we do as those who are united to Christ Jesus, and we are to do it all with thanksgiving in our hearts to God.

Gratitude. Thanksgiving. If there is any appropriate activity that is suitable to the Christian, it is gratitude. It is a thankful heart speaking grateful words to God and to one another. For, our salvation is a gift of God, and God has given it freely. Our

belonging is because God is kind, and He has poured out His kindness upon us without reservation. You don't know everything...He is kind. You don't do what you do know...He is kind. It is interesting that the word translated "with thankfulness" in verse 16, is actually the word "with grace". It has less to do with our attitude towards God as we sing, but much more about our appreciation of His attitude towards us: His grace. Therefore, it is not inappropriate to translate it as thankfulness, or gratitude, but it is grateful because of His grace.

Therefore, when we gather, let us fix our eyes upon the Christ, the preeminent Hero of God's grace towards us, who were enemies of God, haters of God, dead in our sins and self-reliance, who grumbled and belittled God when He was kind because we didn't like His preference. Yet, though while we were still sinners, God sent His Son to redeem us, and while we were enemies Christ died for us. The gospel, the good news, is that God is undeniably gracious, and our hope and our salvation and our place of belonging is completely and utterly His work alone...and He has done it!! Let us be thankful at all times for His great and glorious grace.