

Christ Reformation Church

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Hold Fast to Christ!

(Col 2:2b-3 ESV) to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“The New Israel”

May 26, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 4:5-18

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians
12

Introduction-

(2Ti 1:15-18 ESV) ¹⁵ ¶ You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among

whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶ May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, ¹⁷ but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me-- ¹⁸ may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!-- and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

(2Ti 4:9-17 ESV) ⁹ ¶ Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. ¹² Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm;

the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵ Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. ¹⁶ At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! ¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

Phi 3:17-19 ESV) ¹⁷ ¶ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

We do not need to read the letters of the Apostle Paul very long before we realize that he experienced many, many disappointments with many people. He was abandoned. He was betrayed. He was slandered. And quite often by the very people he ministered to – people who claimed to be Christians.

And yet, listen to how he closes off this letter to the Colossians –

(Colossians 4:5-18 ESV) ¶ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

⁷ ¶ **Tychicus** will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹ and with him **Onesimus**, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. ¹⁰ ¶ **Aristarchus** my fellow prisoner greets you, and **Mark** the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions-- if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called **Justus**. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹² **Epaphras**, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has

worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ **Luke** the beloved physician greets you, as does **Demas**. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to **Nympha** and the church in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to **Archippus**, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." ¹⁸ ¶ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

What stands out? The names. People. And you find the very same thing at the end of many of his other letters:

(Romans 16:1-27 ESV) ¶ I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. ³ ¶ Greet **Prisca** and **Aquila**, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also

the church in their house. Greet my beloved **Epaenetus**, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶ Greet **Mary**, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet **Andronicus** and **Junia**, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet **Ampliatius**, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet **Urbanus**, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved **Stachys**. ¹⁰ Greet **Apelles**, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of **Aristobulus**. ¹¹ Greet my kinsman **Herodion**. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of **Narcissus**. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**. Greet the beloved **Persis**, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet **Rufus**, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴ Greet **Asyncritus**, **Phlegon**, **Hermes**, **Patrobas**, **Hermas**, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet **Philologus**, **Julia**, **Nereus** and his sister, and **Olympas**, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. ¹⁷ ¶ I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸

For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.¹⁹ For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.²¹ ¶ **Timothy**, my fellow worker, greets you; so do **Lucius** and **Jason** and **Sosipater**, my kinsmen.²² ¶ I **Tertius**, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.²³ ¶ **Gaius**, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. **Erastus**, the city treasurer, and our brother **Quartus**, greet you.²⁴ ²⁵ ¶ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith--²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

There are some 35 names here, actually more because some are greeted as “the family of” and so on.

(Phi 4:21-23 ESV) ²¹ ¶ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you.

²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

²³ ¶ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

(1Th 5:25-26 ESV) ²⁵ ¶ Brothers, pray for us.

²⁶ ¶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

(2Ti 4:19-22 ESV) ¹⁹ ¶ Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

²⁰ Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus.

²¹ Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.

²² ¶ The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

(Tit 3:12-15 ESV) ¹² ¶ When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.

¹³ Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing.

¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works,

so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

¹⁵ ¶ All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

(Heb 13:22-25 ESV) ²² ¶ I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

²⁵ Grace be with all of you.

We could do a very similar study of the Lord Jesus' experience in His earthly ministry. People. Names. Betrayals and slanders and abandonments.

Herein lies a message and encouragement to every Christian who has ever said to himself: "I am through with people. I am through with church. From now on I will serve Christ alone." I am one of those people and I suspect that many of you are as well. There are some very good lessons and some excellent wisdom here for us.

Let's take another look at the list of names in Colossians 4 and the descriptions Paul gives of them:

(Col 4:7 ESV) **Tychicus** will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,

⁹ and with him **Onesimus**, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

(Col 4:10 ESV) ¹⁰ ¶ **Aristarchus** my fellow prisoner greets you,

(Col 4:10-11 ESV) and **Mark** the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions-- if he comes to you, welcome him),

¹¹ and Jesus who is called **Justus**. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

(Col 4:12-13 ESV) ¹² **Epaphras**, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his

prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

(Col 4:14 ESV) ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you,

(Col 4:14 ESV) as does Demas – if this is the same Demas mentioned here:

(2Ti 4:10 ESV) ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

...then you see that here was another one with Paul who would prove to be untrustworthy.

But what are some of the foremost qualities we see in these companions of Paul? --

1. They are *brothers*. Fellow believers. They evidence genuine fruit of the Spirit. They know Christ.
2. Faithful. They are people who join in serving Christ and they “have your back.” You can rely on them to be there even in tough times. Aristarchus was a “fellow prisoner” with Paul.

3. They are an encouragement to Paul. People who EN-courage us, not DIS-courage us.
4. Fellow workers and a comfort to him. People who grab hold in the work and bear the load. And when we are hurting, as Paul was for example in prison, people who comfort us. Not like Job’s “friends” who only increase our suffering.
5. People like Epaphras who work hard FOR others. Other-focused. Not self-serving.
6. And Paul calls Luke the “beloved” physician. Such people as these, we grow to love, and rightly so.

What do we learn from these things:

- There ARE people who are genuine believers, who genuinely love Christ and love us, who want to serve Christ, who want to encourage us. They may not be many in number, but they exist.

Here is another wonderful example:

(2Ti 1:16-18 ESV) ¹⁶ May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, ¹⁷ but

when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me-- ¹⁸ may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!-- and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

See the qualities of Onesiphorus? He “refreshed” Paul as Paul was in prison, not turning away from him. He diligently sought out Paul in order to help him.

Here is another example – Epaphroditus:

(Phi 2:25-30 ESV) ²⁵ ¶ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need,

²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.

²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men,

³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete

what was lacking in your service to me.

Notice how these trustworthy people *take risks for Christ. They are willing to pay the price.*

- WE should strive to BE those very kind of faithful, genuine, encouraging people.
- There are people, conversely, that are unfaithful, untrustworthy, discouraging, self-serving, whose profession of Christ never seems to cost them anything. For example:

Demas, as we have already noted. When things got tough, Demas go going alright – back home. Consider some more:

1. (2Ti 1:15 ESV) ¹⁵ ¶ You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.
2. (1Ti 1:18-20 ESV) ¹⁸ ¶ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this,

some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

So here is wisdom, isn't it? When we experience grief at the hands of people who prove themselves untrustworthy, unsafe, unfaithful, self-serving, discouragers, the right response is not to withdraw from everyone. Rather, it is to grow wise. To learn to recognize faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, and to recognize false ones. Don't entrust yourself to the false, but stand with the faithful and work on becoming more faithful yourself.

Now let's relate this to the history of redemption – God's great overall plan in Christ:

- Following Christ entails relationships with His people.

Why? Because it is God's intent to raise up for Himself a holy nation, a nation of priests, a new creation civilization of divine image-bearers in Christ so that the glory of God fills the earth. Listen to it from Scripture:

(Gen 1:26-28 ESV) ²⁶ ¶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let

them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

People, you see. Again –

(1Pe 2:9-12 ESV) ⁹ ¶ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ ¶ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when

they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

See it? A people. A nation. A new creation. A new Adam and a new people. We call this the Church, the body of Christ. The real body of Christ. Every genuine believer is a member of it. We are all one body, professing one faith, baptized into one Head and joined then to one another.

All of this New Testament teaching and instruction about how we are to live, how we are to relate to and love one another, is training for us to become more and more the new creations that we are, the holy nation that we are.

Furthermore then, this coming together as a holy people also entails *coming apart from* unholy ones. And there are plenty of Scriptures in both Old and New Testaments that speak to us about people who we are not to be in relationship with, who we are not to trust by entering into covenants with them, even if they claim to belong to Christ:

(2Co 6:14-18 ESV) ¹⁴ ¶ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?

Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,

¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

(1Co 5:11-13 ESV) ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler-- not even to eat with such a one.

¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?

¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

I hope that you begin to understand how FREEING this is meant to be to us. We have the authority of God's Word itself to seek out true, faithful people who belong to Christ, who serve Him and serve others, who are a comfort to us and who encourage us, who are willing to pay the price to follow Jesus, and we have that same authority to dissociate ourselves from those who are unfaithful, who say they are Christ's but are not, who are self-serving, and who discourage us and abandon us.

And I think that Christians are often put under an unbiblical, false load of guilt in this regard. How? Well, how many churches for instance announce "everyone is welcome here." "We are to love everyone." "That person there is a brother in Christ because he says he believes in Jesus." "That person there said they are sorry, so we must all extend full trust and comradeship to them."

But Jesus did not do this. Paul did not do this. The Bible does not teach such things. Everyone is not welcome in this church fellowship. The devil is not welcome nor are his servants. People who claim Christ's name but live and walk in unrepentant sin are not welcome here. Christ chastised some of the churches in Asia (Reve 2-3) because they had NOT expelled

wicked people, and Paul did the same with the church at Corinth (1 Cor 5).

I was looking at a new church's web page this last week and found the following statements on their "values" page:

Community.

The single attribute that makes church life unique from all other spiritual disciplines - it takes a community. We are called to be together in order that we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Hebrews 10.24-25

Grace.

A lifestyle of love, acceptance, and forgiveness. We strive to create an atmosphere where all are welcome, both in word and deed. We are a place where everyone is welcome regardless of race, religion, sexuality or background. John 1.39

Servanthood.

Following in the footsteps of Jesus, we are all called to serve. Not just those we like, or are like us, but everyone. Serving is an essential for growth and life change. 1 Peter 4.10-11

Now, of course what leaps out at us is that matter of "religion or sexuality."

IF what is meant here is that unsaved people are welcome, then we agree. People who don't know Christ but who want to come and hear, yes, they are welcome. And I would even expand this "welcome invitation" further: *people who profess to be Christians and who are practicing a sinful lifestyle but are confused about it and willing to listen are welcome.*

But it certainly could have been stated more clearly. Anyone professing to know Christ but living in immorality, or embracing a false religion, who has no intention of turning from these things, is not welcome. Scripture, you see, does not demand that we trust everyone, even if they claim to belong to Christ. Paul did not. Christ did not. And we do not.

But the Word of God also tells us that Christ always has His people. Always. And that there are His sheep in this world who are true brothers and sisters to us, who we can trust to be faithful, to encourage us, to comfort us, to stand with us.

And that is a very encouraging thought.