

GOING TO THE "A" LIST PARTY

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

**GOD IS THE ONE WHO CALLS US, EMPOWERS US,
AND GUARANTEES OUR CELEBRATION DAY IN HEAVEN.**

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We Did Not Choose God. God Chose Us.

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Going To The “A” List Party

Colossians 3:12-17

Last time we were together, we said that Paul commanded the Colossians to take off and throw away everything that belonged to their sinful natures. Because of the society the Colossians lived in, Paul especially noted they should abstain from all sorts of sexual immorality and outbursts of anger. In other words, they were to put to death their earthly passions of lust and self-absorbed thinking, speaking, and behaving. Further we said that this message was appropriate for our culture as well.

In this morning’s text, he is going to tell the church to imitate Christ in thought, words, and behavior. Over the years, I have come to enjoy reading Warren Weirsbe’s books. Here is how he summarizes this morning’s text:

“This section completes Paul’s exhortation to the Christian to live a holy life. It continues the illustration of *garments*: “Put off ... put on” (Col. 3:8-10). He exhorted his readers to put off the graveclothes of sin, and the old life, and to put on the “graceclothes” of holiness and new life in Christ.

The emphasis in this section is on *motives*. Why should we put off the old deeds and put on the qualities of the new life? Paul explained four motives that ought to encourage us to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).”

Weirsbe then names the four motives as: The Grace of Christ; The Peace of Christ; The Word of Christ; and the Name of Christ. He is so good at making difficult subjects easy to understand. And in person, one can see easily that he does exhibit the qualities listed in this passage.

The thing about motives is this. We can’t see them. Only God can see people’s motives. People may look rough on the outside but truly noble on the inside. On the other hand, people can look really good on the outside, but be totally rotten on the inside. Jesus called the Pharisees whitewashed graves.

All of us know what it’s like to be caught looking less than our best. Early one morning a woman made a mad dash out of the house when she heard the garbage truck pulling away. She was still in her bathrobe. Her hair was wrapped in big curlers. Her face was covered with sticky cream. She was wearing a chinstrap and a beat up old pair of slippers. In short, she was a frightful picture. When she reached the sidewalk, she called out, “Am I too late for the garbage?” The reply came back: “Nope, hop right in.”

She was probably a wonderful wife and mother but the garbage man only saw garbage. However, it would be much worse to look good on the outside, but be garbage on the inside.

People who try to look good on the outside while neglecting their inner life forget this. It is God Who puts in us the will to obey Him and then empowers us to obey Him. To focus on our own goodness or accomplishments leads to living a lie. In Jerry Bridges’ book The Discipline Of Grace he quotes this saying by Jack Miller often throughout the book: “We should preach the gospel to ourselves every day.” I’m going to paraphrase what this practically means to Bridges. Even though there may never be a day so bad that we are beyond the reach of God’s grace ... there is likewise never a day that we are so good that we are not in the need of God’s grace. And that leads me to the main idea of this morning’s text. **GOD IS THE ONE WHO CALLS US, EMPOWERS US, AND GUARANTEES OUR CELEBRATION DAY IN HEAVEN.**

In theological language, God justified us, He sanctifies us, and He will glorify us. In simple language, God is the One Who died for us, forgives our sins, and restores our broken relationship with Him. That is justification. At the present, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, He is preparing us and perfecting us to live in heaven. That’s sanctification. And then one day through death or through the rapture, we will be perfected totally and welcomed into heaven. That is glorification.

Let's look at it this way. One day there will be a great celebration in heaven, a day when evil is defeated, when the evil doers are sent to hell for an eternity, and the faithful are brought permanently to heaven for an eternity of joyful worship. This truly is an "A" list party. But we must keep in mind that the party is about Jesus. Our worship is to be all about Him. The church is not a place we can come to feel good about ourselves. It is not a social club. And it certainly is not a place for us to exercise power and look good before others. Church first of all is not a building. It is the faithful gathered together for the purpose of worshipping God. Church is about God not about us.

I. INVITED TO THE PARTY (VS 12a)

We Did Not Choose God. God Chose Us.

The eternal party in heaven is by invitation only. In the first half of verse 12 we find how we get invited to the party. Jesus told the Apostles very clearly they did not choose Him, He chose them. We must always remember **WE DID NOT CHOOSE GOD. GOD CHOSE US.** If there comes a time in which we think we received Christ because we were intelligent or spiritual or good in any way, then we have missed the whole message of the Gospel.

A. CHOSEN

Verse 12 starts out with the phrase, "Therefore, as God's." In other words, Paul is going to argue that since we have been chosen by God, certain characteristics should manifest themselves in our lives. So let's first talk about how we became Christians. It says that if we are Christians, it is because God chose us. The word in Greek is *eklektos*. You can hear in that word elect. Paul says in other places that we were predestined and elected by God. In other words, because we were born into and infected with original sin, and because of our personal rebellion against God, there is no possible way we could choose God on our own. When we take time to contemplate our salvation, we should always remember that it was the work of God, fall down on our knees, and simply sing the "Doxology." Paul put it like this in his letter to the Romans:

"²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called." (Romans 8:29-30a / NIV).

Too many times I hear testimonies about how people became Christians. To be sure, they are honest and authentic stories. However, I don't recall too many testimonies that started or ended with something like, "My salvation was planned out by God before the foundations of the earth. No matter how it is that I came to Christ, the truth is that it was totally God's work from beginning to end."

You see, when we talk about the salvation process omitting the fact that it was God's work, we may come to think that we are Christians because of a wise choice we made. We may think we made a holy choice or a good choice but the fact is that we are no different from unbelievers except for the fact that God chose us. I have not a clue why God chose me. But I constantly remember what He told the Hebrews through Moses:

"⁷The LORD did not choose you and lavish his love on you because you were larger or greater than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! ⁸It was simply because the LORD loves you, and because he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the LORD rescued you with such amazing power from your slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 7:7-8 / NLT).

God chose me because He chose to love me and call me. There was nothing good in me that He should choose to focus his love on me, but He did. Andrae Crouch wrote a song that goes like this:

"I don't know why He loves me,
I don't know why He cares,
I don't know why He sacrificed His life.
Oh but I'm glad, so glad He did."

That clearly expresses my feelings about my being a Christian today. I have no clue why God singled me out for salvation, but I'm sure glad He did.

B. HOLY

Secondly, and as a result of being chosen by God, we are holy. We just finished reading through the book of Leviticus. Let me just remind us of the theme of that book:

"⁴⁴ ... I, the LORD, am your God. You must be holy because I am holy ..." (Leviticus 11:44 / NLT).

Holiness has two aspects. The first part of holiness belongs to God. The word holy means to be set apart for a specific purpose. When articles for worship were made holy, that meant that they could not be used for any other purpose but for worship. God set His people apart to be priests among the nations. The Hebrews were meant to be God's representatives on earth of His love, His holiness, and His desire to be in relationship with human beings.

If we are Christians then we belong to the church. Our purpose is to be ambassadors for Christ. We have been set apart from the rest of humanity to be living appeals of God to human beings. The word for church in Greek is *ekklesia*. It means to be called out. God has called us out of the world, set us apart from the world, and given a mission. The Apostle Peter summarized it like this:

"⁹ ... you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, His very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

¹⁰ "Once you were not a people; now you are the people of God. Once you received none of God's mercy; now you have received his mercy."

¹¹Dear brothers and sisters, you are foreigners and aliens here. So I warn you to keep away from evil desires because they fight against your very souls. ¹²Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will believe and give honor to God when he comes to judge the world" (I Peter 2:9-12 / NLT).

That is the first part of holiness. The second part of holiness is our responsibility. God is changing us and molding us into the men and women He wants us to be. This process is called sanctification. Our cooperation with this process is called by Jerry Bridges, "The Pursuit Of Holiness." In other words, we are to cooperate with God's working in us by reading and studying our Bibles, and by submitting to the truths it teaches us.

C. LOVED

But most of all, we need to let this sink in. We are loved by God. We are God's beloved. How can we complain about anything in this life? How can we be jealous or filled with lust for anything earthbound? The holy God Who created the universe, The righteous God Who will judge the living and the dead, The just God Who was our enemy from birth because of our sin and rebellion now loves us. How could we want for anything else? It seems that even food, water, and air are luxuries compared to knowing that we have been reconciled with God? Every day when we examine our lives, we can easily see that we deserve to spend eternity in hell. Then we recall that we are beloved by God and we are no longer condemned, it seems that everything else in life is a bonus. Listen to how Paul summarizes the thought of being God's beloved:

³⁷ ... overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

³⁸And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. ³⁹Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39 / NLT).

Let me just quote the rest of a passage I quoted earlier:

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Romans 8:28-30 / NIV).

Don't ever make a mistake in thinking that we are Christians because we are good or holy or intelligent. The fact is this. **WE DID NOT CHOOSE GOD. GOD CHOSE US.**

II. DRESSED IN PARTY CLOTHES (12b-14)

God Gave Us His Spirit So That We Could Be The Men And Women He Calls Us To Be.

We have been invited to that great party at the end of time when we all celebrate God's final victory over evil. But it's important that we learn to dress for success. The second half of verse 12 through verse 14 shows us what it looks like to be dressed in party clothes. **GOD GAVE US HIS SPIRIT SO THAT WE COULD BE THE MEN AND WOMEN HE CALLS US TO BE.**

Remember we have said that the lives we live now, we live in Christ. In other words, God is preparing us for our final destinations in heaven. But since we already belong to the kingdom of God, we ought to be living here like we will live in heaven. Here is what is very important to notice. Paul doesn't say Christians will be characterized by doing miracles or religious stuff. Anybody can do good works. But Paul says that Christians will be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. If you read through this section carefully, you can find all the fruit of the Spirit either named or referred to indirectly.

A. COMPASSION (12b)

First, compassion is the first characteristic named. Literally the word is the bowels of mercy. Compassion is a good word but it is more like empathic love. Compassion is a word that oftentimes has the sense of power attached to it. For example, compassion could have the sense of having pity on someone. Many times, people who are very helpful to others want to always have the upper hand. They often help people in order to make themselves feel better. On the other hand, empathic love, is actually entering the life and world of the other and journeying through their difficulties with them. Jesus took on human flesh and entered our world and lived as one of us.

B. KINDNESS (12b)

Kindness is a word that in classical Greek means kind, honest, respectable, and friendly. In New Testament Greek it is tied to God's gracious attitude towards sinners through Jesus. So being kind to others is being gracious to others based on the experience of God's grace in our life.

C. HUMILITY (12b)

Humility was not a virtue in the Greek and Roman worlds. It is not considered a virtue in our society. The word was used during the early church to describe one submitting to God's commandments. I think that too often church people fake humility. Their fake humility covers up incredible pride. To make it simple, I think humility within the Christian church ought to be one's self-evaluation before God. Listen to how Paul conveys this concept to the church in Rome:

"³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Romans 12:3 / NIV).

And remember this, the Bible is clear that God will not only oppose the proud, He will humiliate them.

D. GENTLENESS (12b)

Gentleness is the next characteristic described. The word means mild, gentle, tame, kind and useful. It can also be translated meek. However, meek gives the wrong connotation in English. This word gentleness when used of an animal describes a wild animal that has been broken and now is useful and friendly. For example, a wild horse is powerful and energetic. However, it is useless. When it is broken, it is still powerful and energetic, but now, it is friendly and useful. We could define gentleness as power under control. For example, I could intimidate my wife into doing whatever I wanted her to do. However, that would be a total misuse of power. When the kids were young, I could have threatened them and forced them to do what I wanted. However, these would be an abuse of power. Now that my kids are grown and so strong, I'm glad I didn't do that because I'd be paying for it now. Because I've chosen to be gentle, I have the love and respect and friendship of my wife and my grown up children.

We all spend a lot of time together and have a lot of fun. These days, I put myself in "time out." I have done stupid stuff and when we got home, I'd tell my wife, "There is no need to argue. I was stupid and wrong. I'm taking my pillow and putting myself in time out." I could have argued but what use would that serve? When we go on vacation with our adult children, Luig and I get put in time out at least once a day. It's all done in fun and gives us a chance to take responsibility for our wrongs without anger.

One of the first lessons I teach in church leadership is avoiding the abuse of power. The seductive thing about power is that you can almost always justify the abuse of it. So the lesson I teach is to dilute the power you receive as soon as possible. By that I mean give it up and share it with others. Never allow yourself to be put in a position where you hold unrestrained and unchecked power. That's why we see so many pastors getting in trouble with sex, money, and addictions. I have always tried to dilute and share all the power I have received, and then try to work towards consensus on each issue. Provided people are honest and humble, the system works pretty well. It is important that we check our egos at the door and that we give up power in our relationship with others. I can tell you, my family has a lot of fun.

E. PATIENCE (12b)

And patience is something else that will characterize God's people. Literally the word means long suffering. Here is what is interesting. Last time we were together, we talked about an angry person going into a rage. This is an emotional and animated word. *Thumos* has to do with passion and emotion. It is when the angry person starts to yell and to scream, perhaps throw things or even hit people.

The word here is a compound word with *thumos* being the second word in the compound. The first half of this word is *makro*. Here it refers to time. In other words, *makrothumia* means that it takes a great, great, great, deal for this person to become angry enough to act out on it. I know we all have friends like this. They are so patient that if we ever see them angry we say,

“Wow, whoever set them off had to do something really, really, really bad.” Christians are to be characterized by patience not passionate anger.

F. FORGIVENESS (13)

Let's move to verse 13 where forgiveness is mentioned. Again, I don't think we take seriously the words of Scripture. We say we believe the Bible is God's word without error. Jesus said told a parable about forgiveness. In the parable, Jesus portrayed Himself as a King Who forgave a servant a debt that was impossible to be paid. The debt totaled millions and millions of dollars. The king called the debt even. Immediately this forgiven servant went out and found someone who owed him only a few thousand dollars. Instead of having mercy on this guy and forgiving him, he had him thrown into debtor's prison. When the king found out, here is what He said to the unmerciful servant:

³²Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴Then the angry king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny.

³⁵"That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart" (Matthew 18:32-35 / NLT).

It is very important to note what forgiveness is not. It is not saying what the person did was right. It is not saying that the person will have opportunities to do the same thing in the future. It simply means that I choose to accept the loss and pain the person caused me. It means that I will let him free from my emotions and my spirit. It means I will create a space in which God can deal directly with the offender. It is stepping out of God's way to work.

G. LOVE (14)

And finally Love will characterize God's people. The driving characteristic for Christians ought to be love. Because we are God's beloved, we must love one another. We define love like this. Whatever brings me pleasure, I love. I love ice cream. I love my car. I love the movies. I love my wife. But that's not the Bible's definition of love. Here is the Bible's definition of love:

⁸But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8 / NLT).

Almost everyone wants me to read and preach on

I Corinthians 13 at their wedding. However, the passage has nothing to do with marital love. The passage has to do with unity in the church. If you notice, chapters 12 and 14 have to do with spiritual gifts. People selfishly and egotistically using spiritual gifts can destroy a church. Look at verse 14 in our passage this morning. It says that love binds all the other virtues together in perfect unity. That is why there is neither Jew or Gentile, free or slave, Greek or barbarian, male or female in Christ. It doesn't mean that no one is a Jew or a Greek or a slave or a free person. It doesn't mean there are no males or females, etc. What it does mean is that we are all blended into one Body, the Body of Christ. Unity does not mean unison. Unison is where everyone is the same and there is no difference. Unity is harmony and harmony necessitates differences. Listen to how the I Corinthians 13 passage is to be used. It is to be used in the context of unity in the church:

¹If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. ³If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my

body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever.

⁴Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. ⁶It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

⁸Love will last forever, but prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will all disappear. ⁹Now we know only a little, and even the gift of prophecy reveals little! ¹⁰But when the end comes, these special gifts will all disappear.

¹¹It's like this: When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. ¹²Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.

¹³There are three things that will endure—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love" (I Corinthians 13:1-13 / NLT).

Over the years I have seen very few people who really operate with this view of love in the church. Most people are so caught up in the worldly idea of love; they are blinded to what Bible love is all about.

The problem with most church people is that we try to be spiritual on our own power. Let me just summarize this section by comparing this passage to Ephesians. Paul said we are not to be drunk with wine but filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, we are to be under the control of God's Holy Spirit. **GOD GAVE US HIS SPIRIT SO THAT WE COULD BE THE MEN AND WOMEN HE CALLS US TO BE.**

III. PARTY BEHAVIOR (VS 15-17)

God Gives Us All We Need To Successfully Follow Him And Obey Him.

We have been invited to the party. We are dressed in our party clothes. And now it's time to learn proper party behavior in verses 15-17. The point here is that **GOD GIVES US ALL WE NEED TO SUCCESSFULLY FOLLOW HIM AND OBEY HIM.** I have to wonder if people who are always angry and joyless are authentically Christian or not? Look at the last phrase in each of these verses. Paul ends verse 15 with, "Be thankful," he ends verse 16 with the phrase, "with gratitude in your hearts," and verse 17 with, "giving thanks to God." People who are authentic Christians ought to be filled with joy and thankfulness. However we cannot manufacture the peace, joy, and contentment of Jesus.

A. FILLED WITH THE PEACE OF GOD (15)

Verse 15 talks about being filled with the peace of God. The interesting word in this verse is the word rule. It means the umpire in a contest. In other words, The peace of Jesus is to umpire our thoughts, our desires, and our emotions. Everything is to be brought under the reign of Jesus' peace. This is how Paul told the Corinthians to do this:

¹⁵...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Corinthians 10:5 / NIV). We need to quit allowing our pride, our hurts, our egos or our own wisdom determines what the right course of action is. The peace of Jesus is to umpire our thoughts and feelings.

B. FILLED WITH THE WORD OF GOD (16)

Next in verse 16, we are to be filled with the Word of God. I have hammered this point to death over the years. Let me say this. This verse tells us we are to teach and counsel one another. I know Christians are eager and ready to counsel and teach people. There is one problem. The text says with all wisdom. In the Old Testament, wisdom is the ability to apply Scripture to everyday situations. The problem with most modern day Christians is they have no idea what the Bible says about issues. They are willing to give their advice and opinions. The problem is they are leading people to the bondage of sin and death. Jesus describes these people nicely:

"14so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch" (Matthew 15:14 / NLT).

I have already said that being filled with the Holy Spirit meant to be under the direct control of the Spirit. Being filled with the Word of God means that we are directly under the control of Bible truth. That assumes we know and understand the Bible.

C. FILLED WITH THE WILL OF GOD (17)

And verse 17 is a verse that is going to summarize this section and kick off the next. Whatever we do, we need to do in the Name of Jesus. We have said that name in the Bible is not simply a sound that someone answers to. Name has to do with the character and nature of a person. Life is simple. Whatever we say and do directly affects the reputation of Jesus. God puts the will in us to obey Him and the ability to obey Him. He called us, He redeemed us, He filled us with His Holy Spirit, He has given us His Word. **GOD GIVES US ALL WE NEED TO SUCCESSFULLY FOLLOW HIM AND OBEY HIM.**

IV. EPILOGUE

Too much in church is about our wants, our needs, and our desires. The fact is that church ought to be all about God. **GOD IS THE ONE WHO CALLS US, EMPOWERS US, AND GUARANTEES OUR CELEBRATION DAY IN HEAVEN.**

God is the One Who justified us, sanctifies us, and will glorify us. And yet we forget what worship is all about. Listen to how David Garland sums up this thought in his commentary on Galatians:

"H. H. Farmer lamented half a century ago that so often we hear the comment, 'We enjoyed the service.' Would it have not been better to hear, 'I saw the Lord high and lifted up: woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips' (cf. Isa. 6:5)? He writes: 'The supreme test for them really is whether they have found the hour in church enjoyable, whether the music being good, the singing hearty, the decorations no offense to the eye, the curtains the right shade, the building beautiful, the come away "feeling" better. The sense that truth, saving truth, the truth that liberates, is at once infinitely valuable and infinitely difficult to come by is almost completely absent. I have sometimes caught myself wondering whether aspirin would not have served as well.'"

If we are Christians then not only church, but every moment of our life is meant to acknowledge and proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior.