

Colossians 3:12-17 – God's people are to grow in grace

Growing in Jesus' character is what distinguishes the body of Christ.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

"God's chosen people" – this phrase was used of Israel, Deut. 4:37, then of the Christian community, 1 Peter 2:9. Being chosen by God, a frequent theme in Paul's letters, does not decrease our responsibility to live unselfishly. "He chose us... to be holy and blameless in His sight", Eph. 1:4.

13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

"Bear with... forgive..." – Jesus taught that having received grace and forgiveness from God, we must extend the same grace in forgiving others.

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

"Put on love" – which will look like attitudes of v. 12, and like the fruit of the [redeemed, regenerate human] spirit, Gal. 5:22.

IN PRACTICE The grace and glory of God become a growing part of us when we surrender our self-rule and independence, and ask Jesus to come in. That's the pathway towards Christian maturity. The story of young Samuel, called by God, and the young Jesus, the Son of God, speak to us about our growing up process. Words written to the church in Colossae challenge us to grow in Jesus-like attitudes and relationships. So why do we get conflicts and tensions in the church? Because we have an active enemy, always looking for unresolved tensions that have become sin, that he can use to deceive, divide or destroy. The remedy is the rule of the opposite spirit – someone attacks us angrily and we choose to respond in peace, or someone is hurtful or difficult, and we choose to love them anyway. This is grace and it disarms the enemy and brings God's glory – never more powerfully than when we choose to forgive, Matthew 18:21-35.

QUESTION "It's just the way I am" – but God may not accept that limitation! What can you do this Christmas that will release His change?

PRAYER "Lord, I thank You that You came – and have come for me. I give what I have, myself, to You and I receive from You new grace and life in Jesus. Amen."

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

"Peace of Christ" – where Christ rules and has lordship, His peace will act as an umpire and will result in unity embracing diversity, in Christ-like relationships.

16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

"Psalms, hymns and songs" – psalms of truth from Scripture, hymns of praise, and spontaneous, prophetic songs from the Spirit.

"Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" – keep on growing in Christian maturity and show Jesus to others by living as those who represent Jesus and His Way

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The Bible readings for December 25-30, 2018, with commentary notes

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **December 25 and 30**, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme, Christmas Day: The grace and glory of God appear to us

Isaiah 9:2-7 – The glory of God comes on Israel

Luke 2:1-14 – Shepherds experience God's glory in terror

Titus 2:11-14 – Christians are empowered by experiencing God's grace

Theme, Sunday Dec. 30: The grace and glory of God grow in us

1 Samuel 2:18-20,26 – Young Samuel is an apprentice in the tabernacle

Luke 2:41-52 – Jesus grows in grace at the temple

Colossians 3:12-17 – God's people are to grow in grace.

Isaiah 9:2-7 – The glory of God comes on Israel

The light come to a spiritually dark nation

2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

"Light has dawned" – Jesus, light of the world, John 8:12, brings truth first to Galilee, Matt. 4:13-17.

3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before You as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

"Enlarged" – after resettlement and growth.

4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat, You have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

"Midian's defeat" – the Lord using Gideon, Judges 7.

5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and

every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

6 For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

"And He will be called" – "Wonderful Counsellor" who carries out a plan with the power of "Mighty God" and the "Everlasting Father's" compassion and protection, and to rule as "Prince of Peace" bringing wellbeing to all.

7 Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Luke 2:1-14 – Shepherds are sent to find the Messiah

An angel directs them to seek out the visitors and their new-born baby

1-2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This

was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

"First census" – Jesus' birth and then flight from Herod the Great must have been between 6-4 BC, before Herod's death in 4 BC, in the first of two terms served by Quirinius.

3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

“Register” – for the Roman poll tax.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

“Bethlehem” – as in Micah’s prophecy, Micah 5:2.

5-7 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

“Living out” – between March and November. The time of Jesus’ birth is not known and the midwinter tradition arose much later from pagan origins.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

“Terrified” – majestic angels in blazing light appearing in the darkness.

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

11-12 “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13-14 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests.”

“Good news” – the word that gives us ‘evangelise’.

“On earth peace” – Jesus is the Prince of Peace prophesied by Isaiah, Isa. 9:6, to bring God’s peace; not to all, but all who would turn to Him and come to know God and God’s favour.

Titus 2:11-14 – Growing in grace while awaiting Christ’s return

Christians are empowered to live above themselves while living in expectation

11 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

“Grace... offers salvation” – grace is used in a specific way here to mean favour with God, never earned but made possible by Christ’s sinless self-sacrifice. It is offered to (not conferred on) all people – a response to Jesus is called for – but anyone in any state can turn to God and be changed by Him.

12-14 It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to

live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.

“Teaches us... to live...” – Salvation and holy living are “not because of anything we have done but because of [God’s] own purpose and grace, 2 Tim. 1:9. While expecting Jesus to come again, God’s grace enables us to live by these values.

IN PRACTICE The favour of God has come to us through Jesus being revealed to us and our choosing to ask Him into our lives; the Bible is clear that we cannot earn it. Nowhere does the Bible say that salvation is through the church, but it does teach that salvation is a choice to invite Jesus as Saviour. Before that decision we are all unable to see the spiritual realities of good and evil, walking in darkness. God’s glory over Bethlehem shows the most ordinary of people impacted by God’s grace. Later, believers in the early church are rejoicing in being “a people that are His very own”, knowing the grace of God helping them in their eagerness to “do what is good”.

PRAYER Lord, help us to see beyond the stable to Your Lordship and Your glory. May the impact of who You are, transform how we are, in this season of expectation.

1 Samuel 2:18-20,26 – Young Samuel is an apprentice in the tabernacle

He grows in stature and God’s favour, as was said later of Jesus

18 But Samuel was ministering before the Lord – a boy wearing a linen ephod.

19 Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.

“Linen ephod” – worn by priests in the sanctuary.

The contrast between Samuel and Eli’s sons, all young Levites, is that Samuel lived up to his calling.

20 Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord.” Then they would go home.

26 And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the Lord and with people.

“Grow in stature and favour” – like Luke’s description of the boy Jesus, Luke 2:40 and 52.

Luke 2:41-52 – Jesus grows in grace at the temple

He finds rabbis in the temple courts who allow Him to debate with them.

41 Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.

“Every year” – Good Jews like Jesus’ family observed three commanded festivals of Passover (especially), Pentecost and Tabernacles, Exodus 23:14-17; Deut. 16:16.

42 When He was 12 years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.

“Twelve years old” – preparing to take adult covenant responsibilities, usually at age 13.

43 After the festival was over, while His parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

“Unaware” – because whole villages and extended families travelled together.

44-45 Thinking He was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for Him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for Him.

46-47 After three days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers.

“After three days” – a day’s travel out, a day turning back, and a day finding Jesus in the city.

“Listening... asking questions... His answers” – the teachers were scholars of Moses’ law, who taught by question and counter-question. It was highly unusual for them to dialogue with a boy, even more to praise His scriptural understanding. Jesus was a prodigy.

48 When His parents saw Him, they were astonished. His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’

49-50 ‘Why were you searching for Me? He asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in My Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what He was saying to them.

“Your father and I...My Father’s house” – Jesus contrasts His Father with His earthly parent. He is aware of His unique relationship, His parents less so.

51-52 Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

“Jesus grew in wisdom” – Jesus was fully God, but also fully man, having laid aside His majesty to be born as one of us. The Expanded Bible renders this: “But He gave up His place with God and made Himself nothing, (lit. emptied Himself)”, Phil. 2:7 Expanded Bible. There is no suggestion in Scripture that Jesus had all knowledge and wisdom from birth.