

Col. 3:12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. **13** Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. **14** Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. **15** And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. **16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. **17** And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In the last 6 years, I am pretty sure that we have gone over these words from Colossians at least once. I have always wished that we could literally make posters, even laminated ones, that people could take home, and we could put them up around our church building. And they would have these special words. I wish we could see these words every single day, and of course, take them seriously. There are 6 verses here, and each one is so good that it really almost has it's own story.

I suggest today that if we could only have one poster of one Bible passage that we could all have hanging up to influence us every day, it would be this one. And I will talk to my friend in the Hiram College print shop about making something for us, with the name of our church on it, ***because this is so good.*** And, if we could just write these words in our hearts, I think we could face *just about anything*, if we honored these words. And these words speak directly to how we see each other, how we see ourselves, and how we should treat each other. If we could do this, and all churches could do this, it would be such a great thing.

I am very thankful that the beginning of May is approaching. As of May 1, due to me having my Covid vaccinations, I am relieved to say that by May 1, I am pretty sure that I cannot carry the virus to anyone else, which means that I can carefully be with others who have their shots. While I don't want to get it myself, even more importantly I don't want someone else to get it from me. That is why I will continue to wear my masks, and keep a little distance. I am thankful that up to this point, we are pretty sure that we have not spread the virus due to activities in our church. So it seems like things will be getting better. I know that my Bible Study groups will be gearing up to meet again in person. We will still wear masks to be safe, and I imagine we will be fine. And little by little, more people will return to our sanctuary. But I must share comments that I have been receiving from our own people.

I have heard from some people that they will not return until they *do not have to wear a mask*, and they can *sit anywhere they want*, and they can *touch anyone that they want*, and that they won't be back until these things are this way. They will be back when there are NO restrictions. Okay. I have heard from others that they will continue to stay away and stay on the computer until things are totally safe, and that nothing will change their minds on this. Okay. I have heard others say that the whole thing was a hoax, that Covid was nothing worse than the flu, and that we all let our First Amendment rights be trampled by a hoax. So they are mad at us that we ever closed! Okay. I have heard from others that all

we really needed to do was to pray to God to keep us safe, and that would have worked fine, and we wouldn't have had to do anything else. God will protect his own. Okay. One last one; some have suggested that maybe we could only let people in who have proof of their vaccinations. How might that work out? Okay?

So, I have heard all of these kinds of things, and more! With all those different feelings out there, all of those different attitudes from people who are a part of our church, then just how easily are we all going to just blend back together as if none of this ever happened? I would hope that some of you are shaking your heads, wondering the same thing. How can this ever be patched back together, given the fact that everyone has different ideas, and that everyone knows that they are right? Can anything help us? Well, we have this passage, and we have three letters that I hope we will memorize: E G R.

E G R is not some new medical test! It is simply an abbreviation for three words that we know well. E G R stands for these words: **Extra Grace Required**. And these little letters, E G R are at the heart of our words from Colossians today. Like I mentioned earlier, these little verses are so great that each one has its own message. So let's let them teach us, that these things might be written on our hearts.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Wow. This is an amazing start. Colossians does this, and we are not sure how to handle this. *'As God's chosen ones, holy and*

beloved...” Do we hear those words? The writer of Colossians talks this way. Do you want to know why are you within the Church of Jesus Christ? Because you were chosen. God needed you to be in this, to make a difference. You are chosen, set apart and loved by God! I know that Methodists don’t usually talk that way, but this is what it says! Now, we could hear these words and get all smug and full of ourselves. Or, we could hear them and be moved to silence before God. *I was chosen by God to be a part of the Church of Jesus Christ.* I was called into this, not for my own benefit, but for the world’s benefit. This is by God’s grace, so that I cannot boast or brag. That is what I believe. If we think we did this all by ourselves to make sure that we got what we wanted from God, then we might need to look at that again. So let’s just start with this. We were called into the Church. Our hearts were touched, and so we are here. If we realize that that is true for us all, then we should see each other in a special way.

¹³ *Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

Again, this is not complicated. I always joke with people that it does not say “Be a Bear with each other!” We see the words here to “*Bear with one another,*” but the literal Greek word here is better than that. It actually says to “lift up each other,” which can also mean to really pick up someone, or to bear them. But it means that we honor each other, we esteem each other. Lift up each other, and be gracious with each other. If we could do this with each other, could we get beyond our differences? If

Rule #1 was “*Lift each other up, and be gracious,*” might that not do the trick? I think we know the answer to that. We move along.

¹⁴ *Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

We shouldn't need any big explanation on this. I love the language here. *Clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together.* What beautiful words. We heard about loving each other on Holy Thursday as is always the case on that night before Good Friday. Jesus asked his people to love each other so that the world would know that we belong to him. Here the emphasis is different. Let's just be loving, and this will bind us together.

¹⁵ *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.*

Again, there is not much comment needed here. When we are told about the peace of Christ, the idea is that there is in fact a spiritual presence of Jesus himself that should be within us, and it should rule in our hearts. May this be so for us all.

¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.*

This beautiful passage reminds us of something that has been disrupted for 13 months now: we have not been able to have our weekly gathering as we did in the past. We need to be together in order to hear the Word of Christ, to be taught and admonished with it, and to sing praises to God. Friends, it does something to us, things are reinforced within us, when we go

through this thing we call “church.” That is why it matters to honor and keep the Sabbath, and to gather as God’s people, every week. It actually is supposed to do something to us over the long haul. I hope that people will long for it and to rejoice when we get to do it again. And in the face of everything that we are facing today, we hear the closing words:

¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This might just be the key to everything: whatever we do, do in the name of the Lord Jesus. If we want to make statements and fly our personal flags to score our own points, can we really do that if we are doing it in the name of the Lord Jesus? Doing it in his name would mean that we would be honoring all these other things that were just said for us! We would have to remember the honor of being chosen, and that the other people were chosen too! We would have to remember to lift each other up, and to be gracious and forgive, not to hold grudges and make stands. We would have to clothe ourselves with love, and to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

In the face of any differences that we might have with each other, we cannot just stay mad and separated. We were called together into this church, to be a part of The Church in the world. This special teaching from Colossians asks us to be quick to adopt E G R, Extra Grace Required, as we deal with each other. We can do this. We just need to let these words soak in and do their work. May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. All shall be well. AMEN.

