

October 31, 2021
Teach and counsel each other
Colossians 3:1-17

Some things people teach us is wonderful. Some things people teach us are a bit suspect. I ran across this teaching from *Lady Gough's Etiquette*, 1863: "*The perfect hostess will see to it that the works of male and female authors be properly separated on her bookshelves. Their proximity, unless they happen to be married, should not be tolerated.*" Ok ...

We're all aware of that these days. Some of the information we receive is based on solid research by credible experts; it's peer-reviewed; it's genuinely trustworthy and some is ... not.

As the people of God, we look to God's Word for good teaching – for God's truth – during these times, as we do in all times. This morning we will read from Colossians 3:1-17. God's Word is good truth – God's truth – for us, now and always. **COLOSSIANS 3:1-17**

Paul is teaching us that our normal point of view – my normal point of view – is very much centred on (what Paul calls), the "earth." I can think of this as my "this-is-who-I-am-and-what-I-do-as-a-responsible-citizen-of-Canada" life. Paul is not teaching that functioning – well – in the world is bad. In fact, it's a necessary part of who I am:

- I get up and I exercise (which is a good thing)
- I eat a good breakfast (a good thing)
- I check the weather forecast and the news (maybe a good thing? – maybe not?)
- I work at writing sermons, study guides, emails, phone calls, administration, conversations with other staff (all – generally – good things)
- I have supper (a good thing)
- I spend (most) evenings with my wife (a VERY good thing).

Paul does also teach us to recognize some things that are typically part of this "earthly life" are harmful for us and for the community around us. We should STOP doing things like

- sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and following evil desires.
- Greed, anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, dirty language, and lies.

You will be happy to know that I don't think ***I*** do any of the bad things Paul identifies (well, the anger one catches me up occasionally). I am generally a "good" person. But Paul calls us to recognize that just being "good" is not "BEST." There is an even better way to live than just being "good" or "not bad" ***in the world.***

Paul teaches us that, as people who follow Jesus – who "*have been raised to new life with Christ*" – we are different than the people we once were. We still are "responsible citizens of Canada" (citizens of this earth, ***IN*** the world), but we are also "citizens of the kingdom of God/heaven," not ***OF*** this world. We are new people through our relationship with Jesus. So we live BOTH as responsible citizens of Canada AND as responsible citizens of the kingdom of

God. So we see the world around us, the community around us, the people around us, and our own lives, differently. We have more than simply an “earthly” perspective. We live, fully engaged in the world, but we also live out that engagement as Jesus would live if He were here in our circumstances. We aim to live lives more and more like Jesus.

So, Paul says, as you go about your life here and now – in the real nitty-gritty world of work, family, Covid, traffic, shopping, social media – *“Set your sights on the realities of heaven ... think about the things of heaven ... Be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him ... Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us ... God has chosen us to be the holy people he loves.”* Paul then goes on to talk very practically about how these great truths changes who we are, how we live, how we speak, and how we act in the world:

- *Clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Forgive others as the Lord has forgiven you.*
- *Clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.*
- *Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts.*
- *Always be thankful.*
- *Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives.*
- *Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.*

In summary, Paul says, *“Whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus.”*

Paul is NOT teaching us to disengage with the world. We don’t become so heavenly-minded we’re no earthly good. In fact, as citizens of the kingdom of God, we are the MOST earthly good we can possibly be. We live as fully-engaged citizens of this country called Canada, while we live out those kingdom of God values in our lives. We live out God’s tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, peace, thankfulness, and love.

We are very much **IN** this world; but we are definitely not **OF** this world. We live fully engaged with all the realities of real life. BUT we do so, as children of God, saved by Jesus, and renewed and filled with His Spirit. Our character is shaped by Jesus. We live differently.

Practically, along with other things that **I** do in my day – to keep my eyes on heaven:

- I spend time every morning reading the daily devotion and praying
- I try to pray “at all times, without ceasing” throughout the day
- I try to see God’s Spirit at work in the world, in other people’s lives, and even in my own life, in ways I never noticed before. I see my circumstances differently; I see that God is with me through the good – and the very difficult times. In fact, through those toughest of times, He can help me grow the most.
- I live my life differently. In whatever I do and say, I **TRY** to do it as a representative of Jesus. I **TRY** to live out those practical principles of tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, peace, thankfulness, and love (and those Paul lists in other places, like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23).

It takes work to add this “setting my sights on heaven” perspective into my day. This does not come easily. It is VERY easy to simply do all those GOOD earthly things and ignore the BEST heavenly things like prayer, Scripture, and time with God – and living it out.

But when I do really work at making that time every day for God, I see the world differently AND I live my life differently.

Paul knows this is hard work. So Paul writes, says, *“Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. **TEACH AND COUNSEL EACH OTHER** with all the wisdom he gives. ...”* Our “one another” phrase we’re thinking about today is this one: **“Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. ...”** We need one another’s help to figure out how to live out our faith practically in this crazy world. This raises some good questions:

1. What do we teach?

We could simply say, “We teach the Bible.” OK ... but what does that mean? I can “teach the Bible” by forcing a child to memorize the Book of Ezekiel, word for word, making sure they learned it with a bamboo cane. I can “teach the Bible” by taking any issue, pulling a few “proof-text” verses out of context to make the Bible say what I want it to say. I can “teach the Bible” by reading it superficially – not doing the hard work of understanding literary genres, learning history, appreciating culture – and provide a very superficial “lesson.”

Throughout the Bible, good teaching happens when students of God’s Word have their hearts, minds, souls, and beings **informed** by God, **formed** in the way of Jesus, and **transformed** by the Holy Spirit. We are shaped by Jesus, so we become more and more like Jesus. This involves much more than rote memorization (although memorizing Scripture is good). It involves much more than knowing proof texts (although knowing what the Bible says on issues is good). Paul is concerned that we become “citizens of the kingdom of heaven” who think, act, and speak as Jesus would think, act, and speak if He were here. As one friend said, *“We learn the culture and language of the kingdom of God, and then we live it out in every part of our daily lives.”* What we know actually changes how we live.

Paul says it this way, *“I plead with you to give your life – body and soul – to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect”* (Romans 12:1-2). God’s Word and Spirit shape us to be more and more like Jesus.

2. Who does the teaching?

On the one hand, **we can all teach one another**. All of us who study God’s Word seriously, who spend time sincerely in prayer, and who have experienced God’s leading, can teach and counsel one another. We all have some knowledge and wisdom from living with Jesus. Some of the wisest mentors and teachers in my life have been informal teachers: (much more mature) believers who have been deep students of Scripture, genuine prayer

warriors, and battle-scarred veterans of the faith. I am thankful for wise mentors among my family and friends, and from the churches (including ours) of which I have been part.

On the other hand, **God has specially gifted some people with the gift of teaching**, both in the local church, and in the broader Christian world. We have people in our own church – kids’ teachers, youth leaders, adult class/study teachers, and pastors – who are knowledgeable, gifted, skilled, wise teachers. We thank God for these gifted teachers. I have been blessed by amazing small group leaders/teachers/pastors through the years.

And **some of God’s chosen teachers have a wider influence**: biblical scholars, professors, and authors. I am thankful for some of the amazing formal educators I have had the opportunity to learn from, either in-person in classes or seminars, or through their books. (To be honest, I don’t find the internet a great source of good teaching. Anyone can post anything online (we do realize that I trust). Not everyone can get a paper published in a proper academic journal, have a book published by a reputable publisher, or get a teaching position at a solid college. I have to be very discerning, really investigating the background, and credentials of online teachers/speakers/YouTubers, because many are ... well ... suspect.)

Good mentors/teachers/pastors/authors have a genuine heart for Jesus. Paul gives clues to the character of godly people, including teachers: people who teach and live out principles of tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, peace, thankfulness, and love. I ask myself, does this teacher genuinely know and love Jesus? Do they diligently search Scripture for God’s truth? Do they love those God has put under their care? Is the fruit of their teaching lives that model love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23)? Or something else (read Jude)? (This is hard to discern with online sources)

We ALL do influence other people. Whether we like it or not, others do look at us as examples of people who know and love Jesus. What is the fruit of our influence in other people’s lives? Paul says, *"Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, **fill your lives.** Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives."* If we are genuinely doing that, we will be teaching people about Jesus. We will be teaching people God’s Word: about tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, peace, thankfulness, and love. Is that what we’re doing? Or is some other message coming through? Are people learning anger, rage, and other things from us? Is the “earthly” part of our human nature taking over from the “kingdom of God” part?

- *"Whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus."* In what areas of life do I find that difficult to do? How can I live that out this week?
- Paul encourages us to teach and counsel one another – with virtues like tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, peace, thankfulness, and love. How can I pass on some of those blessings this week?