

“Goals for 2025”
December 29, 2024
Colossians 3:12-17

I. Introduction

For the last few weeks, we have been getting ready for Christmas—the birth of Jesus Christ. As a church, we have considered the prophets, the angels, the Wisemen, and the shepherds and their various involvements with Christ’s birth. During the same time, we all decorated our houses, sent out and received Christmas cards and letters, finished buying presents and wrapping them so that they all could go under the Christmas tree. In many homes there was a Christmas meal with family and friends which also took weeks of planning and organizing.

Now, except for a household here and there, it’s all done. Another Christmas has come and gone. There may be wrapping paper in some weird out-of-the-way places, but all the presents have been opened. Now we need to decide where to put all of them. Some presents were “Just what I wanted” and already have a place to stay. But there are others that—well, let’s not go there. The Christmas meal is done, company is gone, the fine china is washed and put away, and now we’re eating leftovers. One advantage of living in the “frigid north” is that we can sometimes use the garage as an extra refrigerator!

Tomorrow most of us will go back to our normal schedule—at least for the 1st part of the week. Then we will celebrate New Year’s Day—parades, football games and, for some, putting away Christmas decorations. For many people, the time between Christmas and New Year’s is a time to look back over the past year—a time to take inventory. As each of us looks back, there are going to be things and people for which we are thankful—they bring pleasant memories. But there are going to be other things, perhaps even people, that bring back unpleasant memories. This coming week is also a time to look ahead to the coming year and figure out how we can repeat the pleasant memories and reduce the unpleasant ones. Some people even make New Year’s resolutions which they may keep for a week or two.

As Christians, we need to take inventory, too. Have we grown? Do those around us see Jesus in what we say and what we do? Are we more Christ-like today than we were last year? Do we have a better understanding of God and who He is than we did last year at this time?

We also need to look ahead. How can my Christian life be more pleasing to God, to those around me and even to myself? In today's Scripture, Paul gave 8 characteristics or traits that should be seen in every Christian's life. Characteristics we can aim for; Paul would say, "Strive or struggle for." As we prepare for a New Year, let's review these traits of a Christian which are seen in how we deal with those around us.

II. Christian Traits

A. Compassion The 1st trait that Paul listed is compassion. The word Paul used means "*pity, mercy, sympathy, as well as compassion.*" Believers need to display a tender feeling of compassion and mercy towards those around them. We must not be indifferent to suffering. BUT we must also be concerned about meeting people's *spiritual* needs as well as their *physical* needs. As people who have been chosen by a merciful God, we need to show mercy and compassion to others in the same way. Turn to Philippians 2:1-4. Do you put the interests—the welfare—of others ahead of your own? Jesus did. Some Christians are very good at caring for the physical needs of others, but what about their spiritual needs? Are we showing compassion to others if we don't tell them how they can have eternal life? Which is more important: a comfortable life here on earth or eternal life in heaven?

B. Kindness The 2nd trait of kindness is related to compassion. A *kind person* is *as* concerned about his neighbor's good as he is about his own. He is helpful to others. Turn to Luke 6:35-36. God is kind even to ungrateful and evil people—at one time that could describe each one of us. Now as God's children we should do the same. We need to follow the example given in the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Everyone is your neighbor, and everyone needs your kindness. Then there's ...

C. Humility As we have seen before, humility is not thinking poorly of yourself; humility is having a proper estimate of yourself; of who you are. Romans 12:3 says, "For 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.” Humility allows one to serve others without caring whether it is noticed or not. Humility is the absence of pride and selfishness.

D. Gentleness The next characteristic of a Christian, “gentleness,” is closely related to humility. Gentleness, or as it is sometimes translated “meekness,” isn’t being spineless, but rather being willing to suffer injury instead of inflicting or causing it. Jesus demonstrated gentleness when He allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross. Obviously as the Son of God, He could have resisted successfully, but He didn’t. In Matthew 26:53, Jesus said, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” but instead He willingly suffered death on the cross for you—this is “gentleness” or “meekness.” The gentle person does not fly off the handle, he has everything under control. Gentleness is the mark of a Christian under control of the Holy Spirit—it is a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. And then there’s patience.

E. Patience The patient person never gets unduly mad at others; that is, he doesn’t get mad without a just cause. When a person is patient, he can put up with irritating people or circumstances without retaliating. 1 Timothy 1:16 says that Jesus had “unlimited patience,” but at the suitable time, He did get angry—like when He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple in John 2:13-16. That’s what meant when Ephesians 4:26 says, “In your anger do not sin.” The commentator William Barclay put it this way: *“This is the spirit which never loses its patience with its fellow-men. Their foolishness and their unteachability never drive it to cynicism or despair; their insults and their ill-treatment never drive it to bitterness or wrath.”* Patience is the opposite of resentment or revenge. Turn to 1 Peter 3:8-9. There are times—although few in number—when it is appropriate to get angry—to defend others, but it is wrong to get angry at the wrong things for the wrong reasons.

F. Bear with each other Bearing with each other means to endure or hold back—the KJV translates it as “long suffering.” In 1 Corinthians 4:12 Paul gave an example of being “long suffering,” “When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it.” He did not respond in kind, and neither should

we. If we have agape love, sacrificial love, for one another, we can endure and we can make allowances for each other's faults; we can be long-suffering; we can **"bear with each other."**

G. Forgiving each other Not only are we to endure problems and not retaliate, but we must also forgive the one causing trouble. If Christ can forgive us as we sin over and over, we must be able to forgive each other. Every Sunday as we pray the Lord's Prayer we say, **"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"** (Mat. 6:12). Turn to the verses following the Lord's Prayer, **turn to Matt. 6:14-15.** If we want to be forgiven by God and by others, we must be quick to do the same.

H. Love Finally, Paul wrote **"put on agape, i.e., love."** Agape love is the belt that holds all these virtues together. As **1 Cor. 13:4-6** says, **"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth."** Agape love is all 7 traits rolled together. **Turn to 1 Corinthians 13:1-3** Not only is love the "glue" that holds these virtues together, nothing is acceptable to God if not motivated by love—to try to practice these virtues without love is legalism. But if one loves sacrificially, these traits will flourish.

III. Christian Priorities

Paul then wrote that if these 8 Christian traits are to be present and growing in a believer's life, he must keep his priorities straight. These priorities begin with ...

A. The Peace of Christ The *"peace of Christ"* (and of God) is to rule or be the umpire in our hearts. This peace is to guide a believer in making decisions. When one obeys the will of God, he will have God's peace within; but when a believer steps out of God's will (intentionally or unintentionally), he loses God's peace. Sin offends Christ and destroys the rest and security and peace of our hearts. But be careful, peace of heart alone is not always the peace of God. When Jonah was running away from God, he was able to sleep peacefully in the boat while a storm raged outside. Having a feeling of peace about something isn't sufficient evidence that one is in the will of God.

If one is at peace with God, he will also be at peace with his fellow believers. If we are out of peace with God, we will bring conflict and troubles to the church and even to others around us. Jonah thought he was at peace, but in reality, his sins created a huge storm for those around him.

When there is peace in the heart with God, there will be praise on the lips—Paul wrote, “Be thankful.” Turn to Psalm 32:1-5. Before David confessed his sins, he “groaned all day long” and his “strength was sapped.” But when he confessed his sins, he had peace with God and then he could sing. Do you find it hard to praise God? Perhaps you are walking out of God’s will.

B. The Word of Christ A 2nd priority for a Christian is “the Word of Christ.” If a Christian is to experience the peace of Christ; if his life is going to demonstrate the traits of a Christian, the truths found in the Bible must dwell in or live in his or her life. Paul wrote that “the Word of Christ” should feel at home in your heart, i.e., it should “dwell in you richly.” The Word of Christ must fill your life. This book must be more than a bunch of facts or trivia, it must influence everything you think and say and do. The truths of Scripture should be evident in every aspect of a believer’s life and govern every thought, word, and deed. For this to happen, every Christian must read, study, and live the Word of God.

As well as causing the characteristics of a Christian to grow, Paul wrote that another result of being filled with God’s Word is that within the church body there will be teachings and warnings based on God’s Word—the Word of Christ. There will be singing of Psalms—*songs from the Old Testament*—and hymns—*songs of praise to God*—and spiritual songs—*songs of testimony telling of what God has done for you*. In spite of whatever is around us, if we are in God’s will and if we are filled with His Word, our singing will be done with gratitude to God. In Acts 16:22-25, after being flogged, Paul and Silas were put in the Philippian jail and their feet put in stocks and yet they were able to praise God even while they were suffering because they were filled with the peace of God and the Word of God.

C. The Name of Christ The 3rd priority, “the Name of Christ,” is the simplest and most basic rule of thumb for living the Christian life. Everything a Christian does or says should be done and said in the name of Jesus. By our actions as well as our words we should glorify the name of Jesus Christ. When

people look at us, they should see Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

One of the best tests of any action is to ask yourself some questions: “*Can I do this thing asking for Jesus’ help?*” “*Can I speak it and in the same breath name Jesus?*” “*Would I be willing to ask Jesus to do this action with me?*” If the answer is “No,” then it shouldn’t be done at all—it is sin.

IV. Conclusion

As a Christian, you bear the name of Jesus. You belong to Him because He died for you. Bearing the name of Christ is a great privilege but it carries with it a tremendous responsibility. Just as our earthly families have expectations of us to bring honor to our family name and not disgrace it; our heavenly Father has expectations of each one of us to bring honor to the name of Christ as well.

Are the traits of a Christian visible in your life as you go about your daily activities? Are you compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient? Are you long-suffering and do you forgive others? Is everything you do regulated by agape—sacrificial—love? What are the priorities in your life? Where do having peace with Christ and living your life as God’s Word says rank? Is your prime concern what others think of Christ and Christianity or what they think about you?

Since we have the Holy Spirit within us, we have the resources we need to live a Christian life and to grow. As Philippians 1:6 says, “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” But we must allow the Holy Spirit to melt us, to mold us, to fill us, and to use us.

As you begin a new year, purpose in your heart and mind to allow the Holy Spirit to make you more Christ-like than you have ever been and to grow these traits in your life. In your heart and mind choose to make the Peace of Christ, the Word of Christ, and the Name of Christ the priorities in your life.