

Colossians 3:12-21

Perfect Harmony

I'd like to teach the world to sing, in perfect harmony.

If you are like me, and lived in the 1970's you would recognize this phrase from a Coca Cola commercial which, as Wikipedia says, "portrayed a positive message of hope and love, featuring a multicultural collection of teenagers on top of a hill appearing to sing the song."¹ As soon as I hear the words, I begin to sing the melody in my head, "I'd like to teach the world to sing, in perfect harmony..."

It was actually "I'd like to buy the world a coke", but the remake of the jingle into a full-length song has the edited version in my head.

Regardless, this line from a song was what came to mind as I read the words in the letter to the Colossians where Paul says, "Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (3:14) And though music and clothing are not something I would have compared in the same sentence; it is an interesting way to talk about how to live the new life we have been given in Christ.

Paul begins this section with "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 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. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."² (3:12-14).

Professor Stan Mast describes how we clothe ourselves for Christian community in this way...

When we get dressed each day, we begin with what? Our underwear, what old timers called "foundation garments." When Paul talks about compassion and humility, he is talking about the foundation garments of life, because those two character traits are fundamental to human relationships. They summarize how we feel deep down inside about each other and about ourselves. Putting on compassion means that we feel with each other. And humility is how we feel about ourselves—not negative feelings about ourselves, but a lack of focus on ourselves. Humility will keep us from insisting on our own way, our own rights,

¹ [I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing \(In Perfect Harmony\) - Wikipedia](#). Accessed June 22, 2023.

² All Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

our own agenda. Without compassion and humility, human relationships don't work.

Next, Paul calls us to put on the basic work clothes of the Christian life—kindness and gentleness. Those are the jeans and sweatshirt we wear in the everyday world. Kindness means, at least, be courteous and considerate of other people. That's not very fancy or sexy, but simple human kindness will do more to demonstrate the life changing work of Christ than almost anything else. And put on gentleness, because we are all so fragile that we need gentle treatment. In a violent world, the children of God must wear gentleness like old worn out jeans.

Then, each day we must put on the shoes of patience. The world is filled with problems, but problems become splits, divisions, and warfare when we run out of patience with the problem. So, says Paul, put on the shoes of patience and keep walking with each other, even when it feels like an endurance race. And just because we humans can so easily annoy each other, we need to carry a full wallet of forgiveness. Realistically, we can't keep from "grieving" each other, as Paul says. So we'll need to reach into wallets daily and pull out a big wad of forgiveness, sometimes 70 times 7.

The final article of clothing Paul mentions is the overcoat of love; "and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity." Indeed, we can't and won't put on any of the other articles of Christian clothing without love...Paul says the main thing you need for Christ-like living is...Christ-like love that covers a multitude of sins.

[In this verse from chapter 3 Paul] describes the Christian's workaday wardrobe.³

So what's this got to do with perfect harmony? Well, I guess it depends on your fashion sense, but in this case it is about things working together. Christian community is not perfect community. We get things wrong. Sometimes deadly wrong. For most of us though we are just humans trying to do our best and we mess it up... over and over again. Which is why Paul writes about forgiveness, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

When these qualities can be found in community...not perfection, as that is not attainable...but rather an abiding sense of connecting, compassion, and care, grounded in love, then we are truly a people living a new life in Christ. That is what Paul is referring to when he talks about being called into the one body. We are the body of Christ in the world and in this body the peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts. That peace is apparent even in times of conflict, turmoil, change, transitions, or struggle. It is a peace that is felt deep within regardless of the circumstances one is facing. It comes

³ [STAN MAST Colossians 3:12-17 - Center for Excellence in Preaching \(cepreaching.org\)](#). Accessed June 22, 2023.

from trusting that God is with us. God is with us as individuals and in the community that is the church.

And we are called to be thankful. Again, this is not a flippant thanksgiving. It is being thankful for our life in Christ which brings that deep peace. Thankful for each other, thankful for Christ dwelling in us, with us, and working through us.

How do we get to know this life in Christ, this peace, this understanding of Christian community? It is through abiding in the word of Christ, dwelling in it, which means taking time for learning through the reading of scripture, worship, and prayer. Sharing and learning with one another, working together, teaching one another in wisdom, and that overarching word of love. Love, that again, is compassionate, kind, humble, meek and patient.

And we rejoice together. One of the beautiful ways of being in community is through music. When we sing together there is something that can touch us deep within. When music is shared with us it can stir us to tears, applause, healing. It is said that music is a universal language. Paul instructs the community of faith saying, "with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God." Music in the community can heal. It joins us in body, mind, and spirit. Music is something that we can do together, as one body in Christ.

Paul's instruction in this part of the letter to the faithful of Colossae is about how to be the body of Christ. How to be in community with one another offering hospitality. A place where we sing songs offering our praise and giving thanks.

How loudly would it speak to the world...demonstrate to the world...if Christians really lived out this word of love? If in whatever we did, in word or deed, we did everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him?

Yes, we get it wrong, a lot. Still, we are to strive to be a faithful community of Christians who love. A community where love is demonstrated in connecting, compassion, and care. In Paul's words, a community of holy and beloved children of God who clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Who bear with one another, and forgive each other. Who above all else, clothe themselves with love, binding everything together in perfect harmony.

Let us sing songs of praise, love, forgiveness and grace in our hearts. and in our heads. and with our voices. May our love for each other and for all we encounter, knowing that there is no face you will see that God does not love...may our love for all make music that resonates with harmony so beautiful that it is healing, makes others and ourselves curious about this loving God, and flows out from this place on the wings of the Holy Spirit.

In Christ, with Christ and through Christ. Amen.