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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Col. 3:12-17
Title of sermon: **Great Gratitude**
Series: Against the Tide - #9

Colossians 3:12-17 NIV:

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. **14** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

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

If you would, turn in your Bibles to the Book of Colossians, where we are in this series called "Against the Tide," and tonight could not be -- I think -- a more apropos message. Why? Well, it's what Paul is talking about. I'm in Chapter 3, and I'm going to be looking at verses 12 through 17 tonight. And one of the things that we've become aware of -- we've always had it, we've always seen it. We've always had people who have rubbed us the wrong way. We've always had people maybe that we didn't get along with. Wow, it's in spades nowadays! I mean, everybody is having this incredible tension and they're talking about how our country's split -- and even here tonight in Salem, we have these folks showing up and wanting to do vandalism, and wanting to express their hatred and anger. And Paul, in this text, is talking about, how do we -- the body of Christ -- love people that are difficult. People that are broken, people that are not at all the way we wish they were. And the reality -- sometimes we even have to ask that about the body of Christ. One of my favorite passages in the Bible, Psalm 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity! It's like the precious oil flowing down." And that's true! It's wonderful when it happens! But the reality is, that doesn't always happen. Not everyone gets along with you. And you don't get along with everyone else. And so, it's in that time that we turn to a passage like this and we ask the question -- "God, how do you enable me, how do you call me, how do you strengthen me and move me into this place where I can live this grace-filled life?"

Oh, he begins with a lot of that exhortation. If you'll turn with me into Colossians chapter 12, he says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with all of these things." And as you read through this text, you're going to see a repetition that should jump off the page at you. Whenever you see repetition in the Bible, it should be one of those things that kind of causes you to take notice. Well, what is it? It's this idea of gratitude. This idea of giving thanks. Three times Paul notices or mentions it in this text. Why? Because I think it's the foundation for grace-filled love. I think, in fact, that when I become a person of thanksgiving and gratitude, I will find it easier to love people who are imperfect. I think when I become a person more filled and aware of gratitude in my own life, imperfect situations won't get to me. And so, what Paul I think is introducing to us is this idea that it is gratitude in my life, and the way I think and the way I live with people, that enables me to live with imperfect people -- to love them. Well, how do I become thankful? Paul says, "Well, be thankful." Well, how do I do that? Well, he tells us in this text. And it's interesting, because I want to suggest to you that I think gratitude flows out of -- in other words, it is a secondary feeling. It is something that comes to us when we encounter and engage with God -- when I'm involved with God, when I am being loved by God. Why do I say that? Well, he says in verse 13, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive" -- as what? -- "the Lord has forgiven you."

So, what he is saying in this text is, I believe, is, number one, that the foundation of grace-filled love towards imperfect people comes from a person who is filled with gratitude, and gratitude comes

from what? Having an encounter, an experience, with God. My ability to forgive, grace-filled love, comes from a person who has received forgiveness. It's true. Forgiving people have been forgiven. And people who struggle with forgiveness probably haven't been forgiven. So, you could flip the same way -- people who are thankful are not just thankful because they tell themselves to be thankful. No, Paul says they're thankful because they've received something. There are benefits. What are they? Well, number one, gratitude involves being aware of the benefits that you've received. If I'm going to be thankful, it's because I am aware of what's been given to me. If I am thankful to my wife, it's because I'm aware of the kindness that she -- I was out working today, and she texted me and said, "I have a sandwich ready for you." That was amazing! It was a great sandwich. I am a beneficiary, if you will -- I am a person who's received the benefit of what my wife has given to me. It's true in Psalm 103. It says, "Praise the Lord and forget not all of his benefits." Well, let's look in the text. What are the benefits? Let's go back up to verse 12. What does he say? "Therefore, as God's chosen people." Stop there. That's a benefit. God has chosen you! You weren't forced on God. He didn't take you because He didn't have any other options. It wasn't a trade deal gone bad for God. He chose you, He wanted you, He selected you. What a benefit. It goes on -- it's "God's chosen people, holy and" -- stop there. Who on earth made you holy? How did you get there? Seriously. I wasn't born holy. You weren't born holy. It wasn't something that all of a sudden we just kind of infused something into us. It is -- what? A gift of God. It is the byproduct of the Holy Spirit coming into my life and changing my life and overhauling my heart.

The next benefit -- "dearly loved." Oh, absolutely. Every day the Father looks at you and is enamored with you. As one dear friend said, "If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it." You are loved. It doesn't stop there. It's you are forgiven, and you have received the word of God. This whole passage is filled with what? The benefits. Now, as a Christian one of dangers is, you can become kind of complacent, because it's like, "Well, I've had that all my life." And that's one of the dangers. And so, Paul exhorts us. Take a look at the benefits, and if there are benefits, then the understanding is always going to be that there is a benefactor, a person who has been kind to you. Look back at these texts again. "Therefore, as God's chosen people." Who? God did it. "As holy people." Who did it? God did it. "Dearly loved." Who did that? God loved you. Forgiven. You see, if I'm going to be thankful, I'm not thankful to electricity, I'm thankful to a person. I'm not thankful to a power. Power is impersonal. I'm thankful to people, I'm thankful to people who make a choice, I'm thankful for people who buy cards for me, I'm thankful for people who are kind and say kind things. I'm thankful for a person who took the time to write a handwritten note and send it to me. I'm thankful for that. Why? Because there is a benefactor. There's a person who took the time. And Paul says that this gratitude that flows out of our life is because I've encountered God. In other words, I have become aware of the benefits and have attributed them correctly to the right benefactor. If that's true, then gratitude also involves a beneficiary who receives the gift. That's you.

Now, what is the difference between the benefits and the beneficiary? It's whether or not you cannot just acknowledge the gift, but that you've received it. You see, God can want to love us all day. But if we don't receive that love, He can't. You say, "Is that true?" Yeah. Let me take you to one of my favorite passages, John chapter 13. Jesus kneels before Peter and says, "Peter, I want to wash your feet." God says, at the beginning of John 13 -- go look at it. It says, "And Jesus was going to show them the full extent of His love. And He knelt down to wash Peter's feet. And Peter said, 'No. You can't do it.'" The Lord Jesus didn't say, "Peter, I'm gonna do it! I'm God and you're gonna let me wash your feet! In fact, I'm gonna silence you and you're gonna sit here, and I'm gonna take care of you, I'm gonna love you, and you're gonna like it!" He doesn't say that. Why? Because God can't force His love on you. God can love you. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. He actually loved the world, and I believe died for the capacity of the entire world, but the entire world doesn't let the Father love them. So, if I'm going to be a person of gratitude, I have to be a person who allows Jesus to wash my feet. I have to be a person who allows the Father, as He chooses me, to love me and to receive that love, and to recognize that love on a daily, and sometimes hourly, basis. Gratitude. It's not something that we choose -- it's a byproduct of a life we live with God. Why is that important? Well, it's critical, because I believe that that's the foundation of these exhortations. How do I live with imperfect people? How do I love imperfect people? It's when I become a person of gratitude. How do I become a person of gratitude? It's when I realize

the benefits, the benefactor, and that I'm the beneficiary of God's love. You see, when that changes me, when that touches me -- I don't see imperfect people with judgment. Why? Because the Father didn't see me with judgment. He says, "Bear with each other. Bear up, and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." Why? Forgive is -- well, God forgave you. You see, the God-graced life is one that lives well with imperfection. You're going to have people who rub you the wrong way. You're going to have people who voted differently than you. You're going to have people who are celebrating when you're grieving, and you're going to have people who aren't always kind to you. And you can walk away from them, you can be indifferent to them. You can go find the birds of a feather that flock together -- or you can love imperfect people. Just the way the Father loved you.

How do we do that? Paul says, "I want you to be thankful." He says in other places, "I want you to give thanks in all circumstances." Why? One rabbi said it this way -- "One is obligated to say a benediction over evil as well as a benediction over good." Why? I think, number one, is because I can be thankful in all circumstances if I believe that God is sovereign in His rule over people and over all circumstances. I believe I can be thankful in any situation. Why? Because even in bad situations, God can use them for my good. Would you agree with me that the Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh and that that was not a good thing? In fact, it says it was a messenger from Satan, and anything that comes from Satan -- we would have to agree, I think -- that it's not a good thing. And yet, what did God do? Well, He did something marvelous. He drew Paul to himself, and He strengthened him, and He enabled him to accomplish great things without pride getting in the way. You see, if I believe that God is sovereign, then I can give thanks in all circumstances, because whether the circumstance is good or bad, it has the capacity for God to do something good. Another reason I think I can give praise in all and thanks in all circumstances is because, if I only thank God in good circumstances, then I will forever become more demanding in the threshold of what it takes for me to be thankful. And I think, third, when we bless God at all times, we are learning to bless God out of faith, that "God, I believe you. I absolutely believe you that in the midst of this difficult situation you have the capacity to do something great. I trust you." And so, the God-graced life lives well with imperfection. Why? Because it is learned to bless God, to give thanks to God, in any circumstance, whether the circumstance is good or bad, the relationship is hard or it's glorious.

Sometimes in the midst -- I was having a conversation this week with an individual whose -- well, marriage is hard. It's just hard right now. It's not good. It's not light and airy and life-giving, it's difficult. And the focus always, it's always drawn to the behavior in the person who grates us, their dissatisfaction, their expectations that are unrealistic. Oh, and the list goes on. You know them. Can you give thanks in the middle of that? Yeah. You can. Why? Because you could realize that the sovereign God is in the midst of that, in the midst of that situation, and He is doing a good work, not only in them, but in you. The God-graced life lives well with imperfection -- the imperfection of circumstances and the imperfection of people.

Not only can we give thanks in all circumstances, but Paul says also that we can love people from a position of grace. That's what he starts off with, he says, is "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. I want you to clothe yourselves with compassion. I want you to put on kindness and humility and gentleness and patience. And by the way, I want you to bear up with people and forgive them -- whatever grievances." He's not, by the way, suggesting that we as Christians just become some doormat. No. Read on in the text. Later in the text, he also tells us that we will teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. How do you do that? It's that truth wrapped in grace. It's that love that is covered in the kindness of God. It is that life of grace that comes out in compassion and kindness and humility. It believes the best in people. Seeks the best for people. One of my heroes in the Christian faith is John Perkins. There was a time -- he wrote the book, Let Justice Roll Down -- and there was a time in his life he as a black man in the U.S. has experienced some really, really difficult seasons in his life. And there was one particular season, as he noted, where he had very few, at the time, white people in his life, but one of them was a Dr. Roberts. And he said that Dr. Roberts did not come to him as a theologian, which most people tended to do, but she came to him as a friend. And he said she was one of very few white people "that believed in me, that loved me, and saw me

through this difficult season." I think that's what Paul's talking about. When the word of God dwells among us, we will admonish, we will teach, we will clothe ourselves in love. Why? Because it's that loving compassion and kindness that, when wrapped around a person, tends to help them achieve what they could never do alone. How do we do that? We're people of gratitude because we've been loved that way by the Father. Sometimes I see people who are harsh and judgmental. It seems like they feel like their spiritual gift is finding what you did wrong. Oh, sometimes they'll come up to me, and, "Pastor, you know, did you know that you left a dangling modifier out there on one of your sermons?" And I'm sure I did. I've hung a lot of modifiers. And somebody will come, and I've seen it in the body of Christ, there'll be something that's marvelous about a worship set, and there's one thing that didn't go well, or one measure that something was wrong, and -- boy, they've got to make sure you know about it. I don't think that's what Paul is asking us to do when he talks about admonishment. Admonishing is to help move a person along, it's to shape them, to teach them, to -- not scold them and shame them, but to help them move along, to grow and to become their best. But you do it with kindness.

I couldn't make a meeting a couple weeks ago. It was a Zoom meeting, and I -- I just had an extremely busy schedule. I couldn't make this meeting, and I told one of the brothers later, I said, "I'm so sorry I couldn't make the meeting." And his response was so kind. He didn't ask for an excuse. He didn't say, "Well, you know" -- he just said, "Mark, I know you would have made it if you could've. Don't worry about it." His words to me were so kind and affirming. He believed in me. And I would have made it -- I just couldn't. My schedule was here, and I couldn't get onto the meeting, and -- but he believed that. And he gave me that grace. Imperfect? Well, maybe I could've scheduled all of life better, and maybe I could've made it, but the reality is, in that moment, for that team, I was imperfect. I didn't make it. But they loved me from a position of grace. They can do that when they are people of grace. When they've encountered exactly what Christ has given to them. Oh, see, you can forgive when you've been forgiven. You can be kind and gracious when you're a recipient of the kindness of God in grace. And that's why gratitude is so important, because it's a byproduct of a life with God and it enables us to live well with imperfect people. Not only does it enable us to love people from a position of grace, but also, this life of gratitude enables us to experience a peace in the context of conflict.

My friends, I hope you can take this text and let it rule in your heart. He says, in verse 15: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." It's like an umpire. It's an umpire that comes into a game and calls a game. It literally is the umpire, and he's saying, "Let the peace of Christ, let Christ's peace *umpire* your life, *umpire* your relationships, *umpire* your responses, *umpire* the way you perceive and interact with life." Conflict's not fun. It's never fun. Anyone who loves conflict is sick. Oh, you can see the benefit of it. There are things that come out of conflict that are beneficial, but to say you love conflict -- ah! You're crazy! But the reality is, it happens. That's why you have to bear up. That's why you need the peace of Christ to rule your hearts. Why? Because we are members of one body, called to peace, but we don't always experience it. And so -- the life of gratitude lives well with imperfect people. We experience peace. It, too, is a fruit of the spirit. It moves us not towards separation, but towards a solution. It moves us not towards distance, but harmony and moving together -- when I allow Christ's peace to rule in my life.

It's like coming into a room filled with conflict, and when your heart is settled with God, you bring that into the room. It's like when your heart is at rest, and you come into a situation that you know is explosive. You can come in defensive and armored-up, and ready to defend yourself, or you can come in with the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. How do you get that? Through an experience with God. And that's why Paul says in this text -- "Yes, share songs, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Why? Because what we're singing about is the grace of God. What we're sharing about is the work of God. What we're admonishing each other is what God has given to us. And when that happens, we live well, really well, with imperfect people.

It's not easy. It's not easy in these times. They're really hard. These are some of the most challenging times I've ever experienced. I was chatting with a person this morning, and -- in fact, I kind of came in on their conversation, and -- they were both expressing the exhaustion. They're tired. I went up to

the one individual, and the guy put his hand out, and then he looked at me and he goes, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm not sure what to do." And it's like, "It's okay. I'll even hug you if you need." He just expressed how hard it is living in this era. It is. But my friends, think about it for a moment. If you're a person filled with gratitude, you're going to be one of the sweetest gifts to our community in the world. Why? Because you're going to live well with imperfect people. You're going to live well with people who need to be forgiven. You're going to live well with people who need a soft touch. You're going to live well with people who throw maybe insults at you.

There's a story that came out years ago from the Salvation Army. It's about a lady by the name of Warrior Brown. She was a hard woman. Really hard. She had a fiery temper, and she was often drunk, and whenever she was drunk, you put her fiery temper together with her drunkenness, and she was just utterly belligerent. And one of the days when they were doing this evangelism work and through the Salvation Army, Warrior Brown became a believer. And you don't always know how well, you know, what has happened in a person's life, and -- will it really transform them, and a week later, she was at one of these events -- it was a tent meeting, like they used to do -- and she was there sharing. And a scoffer came by, because he had known her. She was a town drunk. She was belligerent. Her mouth had gotten her in trouble before. And she was up there sharing about the transformation of Jesus Christ in her life. And this guy grabs a potato and just hocks it at her, and he hits her! Bruises her. She reaches down, she picks up the potato, and Warrior Brown sticks it in her pocket, and nothing else was said. A few months later there was a harvest festival. And the church was gathering. And Warrior Brown came. And she brought her offering. You know what her offering was? It was a bag of potatoes. She'd taken that potato home that was meant to shame her and mock her. She'd cut it in fourths. She planted it, and it produced a harvest. What happens when people of gratitude encounter imperfection? They rule with a heart of peace, and they bear the fruit of Christ. She brought an offering that day. She brought an offering of potatoes. But you know what else she brought? She brought a lesson. She brought a lesson to you and to me.

There's going to be people who rub you the wrong way. They're going to call you some things that you don't like. They're going to say some things about you that are not true. They're going to judge you wrongly. And you can fuss about it, and you can be angry about it, or you can choose, in that moment -- I'm going to be a person of gratitude, because I'm going to recognize the benefits of what God has given to me. And I'm going to receive from the benefactor who is my father all of the things, and I'm going to receive those things, and I'm going to let Him love me. And when you let God love you, you will live well with imperfect people. You will know how to respond to them, how to treat them, how to love them. And out of that, you will bring an offering to God. Probably won't be potatoes, but it will be a sweet aroma to the Father and a blessing to you.

God bless you -- live and love as a person of grace. Why? Because you're an object of grace.

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