

# Sufficiency, Grace, Unity, the Glory of God

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Date: 20 September 2015

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[ 0 : 00 ] Sisters and Brothers, Before anything else, I want to thank you.

Thank you for the privilege of fellowship with you in the Gospel for those many years, and we will not count how many. I am truly grateful.

Bracha, my wife, asked me to convey her gratitude and her thanks and her great disappointment that, amongst many places that I visited, having left her in Seattle, of all places, she was particularly looking forward to being here with you.

Two. Sufficiency. Grace. Unity.

The glory of God. Those four threads run throughout the ministry of Paul. They run throughout Paul's letters, particularly, amongst others, the letter to the Colossians.

[ 1 : 24 ] Sufficiency. Sufficiency. The sufficiency of Christ's work. Jesus did it all. And on the grounds of that sufficiency, grace.

Grace as the only threshold for entrance into the church and for life in the church.

Grace obtained by the perfect, sufficient work of Christ. And the unity of the church that issues out of that grace, that sufficiency.

So that one needs not to be Jewish or Gentile, male or female, a slave or a freeman. One does not have to speak English or Korean or Pakistani.

One does not need to be black or white. There is only one requirement. Grace. Grace. A grace purchased by the sufficiency of Christ and declared by the unity of the church.

[ 2 : 40 ] So that where there is no unity, grace is put in question. And where grace is put in question, the sufficiency of Christ's work is denied.

The glory of God. The glory of God has to do with that perfect sufficiency, with that marvelous grace by which God incorporates not only men and women, boys and girls, people out of every tribe, tongue and nation together into one body, but embraces them into what Paul describes as the glory of God.

So we exult in the hope of the glory of God. And in context, that glory is not that God would be glorified, per se, but that we will be glorified with him and in him, and he through us.

That's the message of the gospel. That is what Paul meant when he says that all Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free, have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

And that is why Paul talks at the end of his letter to the Romans about our duty to receive one another as Christ has received us to, not for, but to the glory of God.

[ 4 : 21 ] A glory which Paul describes amongst other ways by speaking of the fact that those who are in Christ have been predetermined, predestined to be remade, refashioned, conformed to the image of his Son.

That is the theme of Paul's message to the church in Colossae. And in chapter 3, verses 12 to 17, which we will look at together this morning, Paul enunciates the practical implications of those four threads.

The sufficiency of Christ, establishing the grounds of grace, thereby creating the unity of the church all for the glory of God.

I'll read the passage to you and I will be reading as is my want, not from a version you'll be acquainted with, but from the MAV, the most authorized version.

My attempt will be to not render a kind of a flowing English translation, but to give you a little more of the literal sense. And by the way, this will give you something of a sense of what we're trying to do in Hebrew, although there we labor for a little more of a literary flair than I will have endeavored to obtain here.

[ 5 : 59 ] Colossians chapter 3, verses 12 to 17. So, as God's holy chosen ones, and having been loved, put on great sympathy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing one another and forgiving each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, you forgive as well.

Above all of these, love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, the term there, your is plural, in your hearts, to the which you, in plural, were actually called in one body.

And be thankful. Let the word of the Messiah indwell among you richly, teaching and admonishing yourselves with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with grace in your hearts, singing to God. And everything whatsoever you, in plural, do, speaking or acting, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Paul has insisted that in the church there is no distinction, there is no room to think in terms of Greek and Jew circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free man, but he has said Christ is everything.

[ 7 : 45 ] He is all in all. Therefore, so, in consequence to what Christ has done, live out your church life compatible with that work.

Paul was painfully aware of the realities of church life. He didn't think there were angels in the church.

In fact, he knew there weren't. Nor was he surprised or disappointed to discover that the church was made up of sinners struggling with their sins and tempted to avoid struggling with those of others.

And so, he says, since there is in Christ no grounds for us to separate ourselves one from another, as God's holy chosen ones, having yourselves been loved, put on this great sympathy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing one another and forgiving each other if or since or when anyone has a complaint against anyone.

He is spelling out the practical implications of the demands which grace placed upon the Colossians. and through that he is indicating for us the practical implications of the demands that the grace of God in Christ places upon us as we live in community.

[ 9 : 35 ] We, like the Colossians, are God's holy chosen ones and are required to act as such. in spite of their many sins they are God's chosen ones.

Not choice but chosen ones. He set his heart upon them in full awareness of their sin.

And we must set our heart one upon another in full awareness of the fact that those whom we have chosen to love are not perfect.

Love is not like influenza. It's not like the flu. You don't catch it. Love is a choice. And there are things we are not to love.

Love not the world. And there are those whom we are bound to love. And those sitting beside us in the pew and in front of us and behind us, those who belong to the community of Christ and those who are not sitting in the pew beside us, behind us, or in front of us and should be, should all be the objects of our choice.

[ 10 : 58 ] Our determination to love them because God chose us. We didn't choose him. He chose us. And we must love because he first loved us.

Having been loved, it is our duty to love our fellow Christians by putting on, that's an active, decidedly conscious choice.

Put on these characteristics. I got up in the morning, I put off my pajamas and I put on. I had to choose what I would put on.

You and I have to choose what we will put on every morning as we get up and go out to face our family and the world at large. Put on.

And what are we to put on? first, says Paul, not just sympathy, but great sympathy, much sympathy.

[ 12 : 15 ] What is sympathy if not the willingness and the ability to see things from the other person's point of view? Is that not one way we could resolve conflicts?

that would be the solution to the Middle East conflict, would it not? If Palestinians saw the Jewish point of view and if the Jews saw the Palestinian point of view, surely out of a recognition of the concerns and interests and fears and troubles of the other, we would be equipped to reach out one to another instead of reaching out one against another.

great sympathy is the opposite of selfishness. It's the opposite of setting ourselves up as gods, where nothing matters but what I want or what I think I need or what I think I deserve. And it is therefore a reflection of Christ likeness. Isn't that what Paul says in Philippians when he calls upon the Philippians to follow the example of Christ by not thinking of their own interests but also of those of another?

And is that not what Christ did when he bore our pains, our sorrows, our trials of life, and is therefore able to succor us to the full extent of our need and beyond our need?

[14:01] Was Christ not, and indeed does not the letter to the Hebrews tell us that Christ is now sympathetic with us, able to feel with us, and therefore intercede on our behalf.

And this is the first thing we should put on because his sympathy should be the grounds and the motivation of ours towards others.

Such great sympathy especially is necessary to enable Christians of diverse backgrounds and social standings and preferences and theological opinions to live together in gospel harmony. An openness one to another. A willingness to bear with radically different personalities, radically different preferences, radically different theologies.

ways of doing things. After all, the way we do things might not be the only right way.

[15:18] In fact, it might not necessarily be the right way. These are all necessary for a happy marriage, for a holy church, for a healthy society.

great sympathy. The next requirement that grace places upon us is kindness. That kind of good natured willingness to please others and to do them well.

Its relationship to sympathy, I'm sure, is obvious to you as it was to me, at least in theory. It's the practice where the challenge comes.

Because all too often we find ourselves engrossed with our own needs, with our own challenges, with our own pains.

kindness. And kindness means that we are willing to do good for others, happily, joyfully, with no grudging attitude.

[16:41] This is where we give ourselves one to another for God's sake, because God gave us his son. God so loved that he gave.

And like in the family, and to a slightly lesser extent in society, a real honest concern for others is what oils the hinges of relationships and makes them that kind of positive experience of grace that edifies.

that builds not only others up, but ourselves. Real kindness makes us alert, aware of, sensitive to others and to their needs.

It means that we give others leeway. We give them space to be themselves, and we forgive them liberally when they err. We're quick to expect others to forgive us.

I mean, no one's perfect. But we apply that to ourselves far more quickly than we do to others, who are like ourselves, imperfect.

[18:02] kindness is what makes us patient under trial, particularly in relationships, and generous when we see others in need, indeed, even when we are in need ourselves.

In other words, kindness, once again, is nothing less than Christ-likeness. It's a spelling out of the implications of grace. It's a living of the gospel.

The next characteristic to which Paul calls the Colossians is humility. And once again, I'm sure you'll agree that the relationship between humility and sympathy and kindness is clear, because humility is what teaches us that other people are at least as important than ourselves.

humility is what helps us avoid putting ourselves in the center of the universe. Humility is what places us alongside others and teaches us that others are as dear to God as we are, and they therefore should be as dear to us as well.

we should love others as we love ourselves. Is that not what Christ our Lord taught us? This kind of humility is what enables husbands and wives to love one another.

[19:47] It's what enables wives to accept their husbands' leadership. Parents to lovingly respect their children and allow them to be children.

And children to follow their parents' lead by obeying them willingly, happily, lovingly. And pride, on the other hand, is one of the most destructive forces on the face of the earth.

It lay at the root of all imperialistic aspirations down throughout history. Pride destroys families. Pride divides churches.

Pride paves a straight path to hell. And we should beware of pride. We need to remind ourselves how Christ humbled himself, turned his face to the smiters, gladly bore shame, became one of us, underwent our temptations, experienced our mocking rejection, bore our sins, suffered and died and was buried for our sake.

For our sake. His humility for our sake surely should be the grounds and the motivation that we would embrace and seek to cultivate humility.

[ 21 : 16 ] And remember, this is something we have to put on. We can't ask God, God, give me humility. It's not something that God gives. It is something that we are called upon to cultivate, to labor for, to strive for.

Next, Paul calls upon the Colossians to put on meekness. Now, in Roman times, of course, meekness was considered a fault.

Prowess was either military or political or social or economic or any kind of combination of these. And morality, the kind of humble fear of God, a kind of unselfish kindness were signs of feebleness of heart and feebleness of mind.

Do today's values significantly differ? I was talking to one of my grandsons.

He had a friend. He has a friend. This friend is extremely competitive. Not quite a friend for the real reasons, because this so-called friend spends a lot of time with my grandson because he is constantly bettering him.

[ 22 : 48 ] And they're both on a football team, eight, nine years old. And I was talking with my grandson.

I was saying to him, son, don't compete with Troy. Compete with yourself. Try to better yourself. And when someone tackles you, say to him, good job, and reach out and let him help you lift yourselves from the ground.

And when you tackle someone, put out your hand and help him get up. And he said, but grandpa, football is all about aggressiveness.

I said, well, be aggressively kind. Aggressively kind means we're not selfish.

[ 23 : 47 ] That we put on a kind of meekness which isn't weakness. Paul calls the Colossians to go against the grain of their society and he calls upon us to do likewise.

I mentioned in the Sunday school period a growing weakness in the church in Israel that it is increasingly more Israeli and therefore less Christian.

Forgive me for saying that that is to a large extent the weakness of the American church. It is too American and not sufficiently Christian.

And inevitably those two go against one another to a significant extent. we must be known for our meekness.

Meekness is a take let me put it this way meekness requires the kind of strength that people will ultimately recognize. Was Jesus not meek?

[ 24 : 59 ] Was he weak? Moses a disciple of Christ an early disciple of Christ the meekest man on earth was he weak?

It takes a large degree of kind of personal sense of security to allow ourselves to be meek to endeavor to be meek.

This is not a lack of ambition it is not a lack of drive it is ambition and drive in the right direction mollified by a sense of a fear of God and a love of our fellow man and meek individuals can be highly motivated they can be highly ambitious a meek person is gentle he's not self assertive although he may be capable of projecting a sense of rectitude and of authority that will move others to submit to him and will move them to do so with the greater willingness because he will be standing for a principle rather than trying to conquer personal territory and he will therefore not constitute a threat to them as individuals we must learn to respect one another and therefore to allow ourselves this kind of meekness it's not a simple thing to be a

Christian is it but these things are all necessary for us to live together as we ought Paul goes on to talk about the demands of grace saying that meekness leads to patience which in this case is described by Paul as bearing one another and forgiving each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone patience leads to our enabling so that we can bear one another and the willingness to bear one another is necessary because as we said none of us is perfect and because we want to live together as Christians James reminds us that we all stumble in many ways it's true in marriage angels neither wed nor are given in marriage we marry weakness because we're not angels and if

we only remember that we'd be spared many a disappointment marriage is a challenging edifying sanctifying humbling experience if we will allow it to be so and it will teach us the validity of much of what

Paul has to say in this portion of God's word it will equip us to serve in society and in the church it will make us more Christ like bearing one another doesn't mean all right okay bearing one another means forgiving each other when anyone has a complaint against anyone do you have a complaint against anyone do you what are you doing with that complaint how are you handling it are you bearing a grudge or bearing the person against whom you have a complaint have you reached out Jesus said that if your brother sin against you go to him and if he hears you you will have won your brother that's the purpose why we are commanded to go it's not an order for us to win a victory over our brother but to gain him or her or them and if a brother or a sister comes to you with a complaint he's coming in order to reestablish a relationship not in order to conquer personal territory so listen and open your hearts and if we would only come one to another and open our hearts not only the [ 30 : 03 ] Israeli Palestinian conflict would be resolved but those long lingering conflicts that exist between us would be resolved as well and Christ would be glorified bearing one another means forgiving each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone and the if here of course is an if of contingency not of doubt there's no question we often have complaints and how are we to forgive with what kind of attitude just as the Lord forgave you you forgive as well just as in like manner with the same bountiful willingness with which God as Paul says in Ephesians lavished his love upon us so we are to lavish our love one upon another we are to treat one another gospel wise as

God has treated us in the gospel he prepared the grounds for our forgiveness he did what was necessary remember sufficiency grace unity the glory of God God must be glorified in our relationships by our maintaining the bond of unity on the grounds of grace because Jesus did it all the gospel is not only something we preach to unbelievers the gospel is something we need day by day moment by moment we must have it preached to ourselves we must preach it one to another to remind ourselves how we should live love love love then the apostle goes on to tell us what else we should put on above all of these love interesting that he doesn't put love at the beginning but rather here at the end and of course love is expressed in all these characteristics that

Paul has mentioned earlier it's to a large extent the motive behind them but it is more than you know how you feel when you do a favor to someone all of a sudden you have a rush of affection for him we can teach ourselves to love by practicing it I mean how do you learn to drive how do you learn to play a piano I know more about driving than playing a piano but you get the point it's by practice above all these put on love but why should a slave love his master because of Christ what kind of transformation must the master undergo to love his slave the kind of transformation that the gospel works why should a

Jew love a Gentile or a Gentile a Jew because of the gospel because the gospel calls people out of every tribe tongue and nation and places them together in one church it never occurred to Paul to have messianic congregations and non messianic congregations or congregations in which various languages or rather which were divided into various languages there were even strenuous theological differences controversies in the early church Paul never thought of resolving them by dividing the church when we separate ourselves from one another what happens is that we have a process in which we need to justify those differences and therefore we accentuate them we enlarge the distance between us remember the sufficiency of

Christ the grace of God the unity of the church the glory of God these are all intertwined they all relate one to another take out any brick and the edifice falls love then is the bond of perfection or to put it otherwise the perfect bond nothing binds better than love and nothing blinds us more to other people's faults but love nothing moves us to care for them more to put on all those characteristics which Paul called upon us to put on it is indeed the perfect bond the bond of perfection so that rather engaging in conflict or in competition or in the tendency to compare ourselves always favorably with others

[ 35 : 43 ] Paul calls upon the Colossians let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts he doesn't mean be at peace with yourself he means be at peace one with another let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts by virtue of the gospel the same peace which Christ established between yourselves and the father could there be a greater difference than between him and us in every sense on every level in every way and yet he loved us with an everlasting love at the price of his son he established peace between us and that peace should rule in our hearts so that we would be unruffled by those who

differ from us and never threatened by the fact that they differ he may be

Jewish he may be a Gentile he may be black he may be white he may be a Baptist he may be a Presbyterian he might even be a Pentecostal God forbid but he is our brother in Christ and we must we must we are obliged by the gospel to love them not in theory but in truth to the which peace says Paul you were called in one body the terms are quite clear we were called in one body for this purpose after all God could have chosen to create two or three or more bodies of Christ he could have established a Gentile church and a Jewish church he could have made these distinctions but no he wanted to be glorified by demonstrations of grace lived out in the lives of human beings who are starkly different from one another it's one of the reasons why

I'm so pained by this growing gap between Hebrew speaking Christians and Arabic speaking Christians in Israel we are denying the gospel by allowing this to happen by allowing our societies to pull us apart society has no right to divide the church and Christ is far more important than any differences we may have between us and sweet brethren when we allow a difference language culture gender whatever it may be when we allow a difference to divide us we are saying that that thing which divides us is more important than Christ who unites us we are giving that thing a priority over Christ remember sufficiency grace unity glory glory of God pull out a brick the edifice falls that is Paul's message that's why he is so deeply concerned about the unity of the church that's why he was imprisoned in

Jerusalem because he insisted that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile and therefore he was suspected of having brought Gentiles into the temple court and so the ruckus broke out and he was arrested he awaited two years in Caesarea and was finally brought to Rome and he writes to the Colossians and to the Ephesians and he says that he is a prisoner of Christ for the sake of you Gentiles that's the point it was Paul's heart throb it must become ours the church is to be one one the fellowship of grace is a fellowship to which anyone can belong on the grounds of grace and all are to mesh and to dash against one another so that we will undergo together this process of mutual correction and mutual sanctification as we grow together in the worship of

God as one body we are to learn from one another we are to love one another in spite of our differences because it is God's purpose to gather as Paul puts it all into one in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10 he says that that is God's order of things suitable to the fullness of time gather all things in heaven and earth in one in Christ that is what he is doing through the gospel and that sisters and brothers is what we should be doing because of the gospel and through the gospel all Christians acknowledge this truth we we pay it frequent lip service sometimes we even reach over the fences that divide us but those fences were created by our lazy preference for comfort because of our sinful pride and when we reach over the fence we consider ourselves exemplary the truth is that we are betraying the gospel by allowing those fences to exist we should not be reaching over them we should be saying to them what president

[ 41 : 52 ] Reagan said concerning the wall in Berlin break this wall down that is what we're called upon we are called upon to live in one body so as to exemplify a peace that transcends differences and gives expression to God's ultimate eschatological goal indeed gives expression to the glory of God to the sufficiency of Christ's work to the efficacy of grace then comes our next mission and in the light of what Paul has told us it is no small mission and be thankful let's put that in context as God's holy chosen ones and having been loved put on great sympathy kindness humility meekness patience bearing one another and forgiving each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone just as the

Lord forgave you you forgive as well above all these love which is the bond of perfection and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to the which you were actually called in one body and be thankful be thankful for what be thankful for being called in one body thankful for the privilege of belonging to the church of Jesus Christ thankful for the fact that grace is the grounds of our belonging because if grace is not the grounds not a single one of us would belong we'd all be out gnashing our teeth in darkness we do not need to learn another language or adopt another culture we do not need to alter our social standing or forgive me even subscribe to a denominational confession and in spite of what some might think i'm not referring to any specific recent events these things i have said and i will say long before i have said long before and i will continue to say but they are particularly pertinent to some of us who may be conscious of extremely painful and totally unnecessary controversy that has recently affected the community of Reformed Baptists.

And I say without reserve that such a controversy is nothing less than blasphemy. It is a denial of the gospel. And I weep and I pain over what has occurred amongst us.

And if you don't know what I'm referring to, be grateful. Next, says Paul, only after all of that let the word of the Messiah indwell among you richly.

It is an unusual phrase. But the word of Messiah is nothing else but the gospel, the message of Christ. And that message is to indwell the saints not at the expense of but in the context of our love and our bearing one another.

[ 45 : 21 ] It is to be our characteristic, the focus of our church life, the guide and arbiter of all our differences. It is the word of Christ that points to his sufficiency and pulls us back to one another every time we deviate.

We need the word of Christ. We do not need the word of a tradition or of aesthetics who claim additional revelation. We need the word of Christ.

And next, as the word of Christ richly indwells amongst Christians, they are to be engaged in teaching and admonishing yourselves with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Of course, when we enjoy such grace, it's easy to sing together, is it not? In fact, it would be hard not to.

Maybe that's why John describes heaven as a chorus, a thunderous chorus of song to the praise of God who has bought us out of every tribe, tongue, and nation.

[ 46 : 41 ] In other words, John saw they were different, but they all sang the same song. Teaching and admonishing yourselves with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Here is a solid standard for song in the church. Of course, there's little, if any, distinction between songs, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs.

But according to Paul, singing has an important role in the church. It has to do with not self-expression, not with creating an atmosphere of openness or good feeling or giddy happiness, but teaching and admonishing.

That's what spiritual songs are for. We sing songs that should have real substantial content, and certainly the Trinity Hymnal is a great example of that kind of a collection of hymns.

We should sing, therefore, in the same way we listen, hopefully, to sermons. Not focusing on the melody, but allowing the melody to serve the words, to emphasize the words, and therefore we pay attention to what we're singing so that we don't just glibly go through them, muttering words like pagans, but rather that we sing with the understanding and we sing with the heart because we intend the words that we sing.

[ 48 : 33 ] Dare I put it this way, Christian hymnody should be nothing less than heartfelt theology put to music.

That is what we should be singing, that is how we should be singing. with grace in your hearts singing to God with a sense of grace, with a sense of gratitude, with a sense of love for God and with a sense of love for one another because we sing together as a community.

And that's why there should be far more we than I or me in our hymnody. Far more than there is in a lot of modern hymnody.

When we sing as a congregation but everyone sings as if he is alone, me and I. It's we should be the primary focus as a community when we turn to God.

And finally, our singing should be to God. On the one hand, we teach and we admonish one another but on the other, we worship.

[ 49 : 48 ] We don't entertain, we don't perform and therefore there's to my mind no room for clapping and appreciation for a choir any more than there would be room for clapping and appreciation for a sermon.

We should be engaged in worship. And finally, Paul would again have the Colossians focus on Christ as they aspire to increase spirituality and to communality.

Everything, whatsoever you do, speaking or acting, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

There is no sphere of life, everything, even when we're speaking or acting, there is no sphere of life from which we are free not to serve God.

Everything we do, whether it's licking ice cream or driving a car or relating to one another or reading a book or watching TV or what we do in computer in the secret of our rooms or whatever else we may be doing, everything should be done before God for the glory of God giving thanks to God the

Father.

[ 51 : 19 ] Sufficiency, grace, unity, the glory of God. God himself is an eternal fellowship of persons loving one another, serving one another, adoring one another and man created in the image of God must live in harmonious relationship with his fellow man so as to reflect the image of God.

It is not good for man to be alone. Not only because it wasn't good for man but because it could not achieve the ultimate purpose of God to gather all things in Christ.

All creation is in view. Paul tells us that the day will come when creation will no longer be subject to the futility and to the viciousness of present reality but will be indeed summed up in Christ.

will we then therefore conduct our familial life and our congregational life summed up in Christ.

Let's pray. Lord, you're the only wise God.

[ 52 : 59 ] You made the world and you purposed its redemption through Christ before you made the world. and you will bring all things to subjection to Christ.

You will unite all things in him. We adore you for that beautiful plan and we thrill at the thought that the awful effects of sin will be undone and that all the world including ourselves will be made subject to Christ.

Help us subject ourselves to him now. Help us to do so eagerly, willingly. Help us to live with others by focusing on your son, our savior.

Help us to live with others by loving them and ignoring what sin would use to divide. help us to live with others by relating to them selflessly rather than seeking to compete or to conquer.

Oh God, please give us grace to show grace and in this way manifest your son's presence among us in the sufficiency of his work and the beauty of grace so that we might live together in unity and you might have the glory that you deserve.

[ 54 : 41 ] Lord, we humble ourselves before you and we freely confess that we need your help to be what we ought to be because we are not. And so we turn to you in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.