

Embracing Each Other:

Lives Caught up by Gratitude and Love

Thomas Robinson, *The Fullness of God 3*, August 26, 2018

Colossians 3:1-17 (An Expanded Translation)

All the Wonder and Mystery that God Revealed in Jesus is part of Our Own Life

3:¹ If it's true that you've been raised with the Christ, that you share already in his victory over death, then seek the things that are in God's realm, where the Christ is one in God, "*sitting at God's right hand*," as the great Psalm says, uniting human life into God's life. ² Think in a way that always takes God's love and lordship seriously in your life, not in a way that's limited to things on the earth. ³ This is hard to grasp, I know, but in Jesus' death you also died, sharing in his overthrow of death! In his resurrection, your resurrection life is already present, hidden with the Christ in the very life of God, part of the great mystery that God is revealing. ⁴ When the Christ is made fully manifest – the one who is your very life – then you'll also share in that astonishing, transforming glory that he brings to light. Once you recognize that God has shown this amazing love, a lot of other things begin to shine with clarity.

That Mystery – Christ in Us – Means getting rid of an Old Identity and taking on a New.

⁵ For example, you'll want to turn down the volume on the tempting voices that don't take God seriously because they're limited to just this world. In fact, turn them off: The lures of sex that hurt and betray, all that corrupts your life and fills it with trash, passions that make you vengeful and proud, desires that hurt yourself and others, and all forms of greed for more stuff – a desire that always grows and can't be satisfied. That's the real core of idolatry, worshiping a false god. ⁶ It's in these things that God's wrath comes in as he gives us up to the full impact of our own sins. ⁷ You know this well because it was the way you lived, the very air you breathed.

⁸ But now! Now in your new life, you're pushing away the things that you thought showed your power but really enslaved you. Don't make any room for a seething anger inside you over some hurt, a passionate rage that destroys a relationship, malice and hatred that dehumanizes someone and makes it easy to injure them, readiness to think the worst of someone and to tell that to others, and a mouth that pollutes everyone's air with shameful talk.

⁹ Don't lie to each other! Remember Jesus: "Let your yes be yes and your no, no!" That's maybe the most telling change of all. It shows that God's real transformation is happening. You have stripped off that old person, that identity, that way of life with all its habitual practices.

¹⁰ Now you've taken on a new identity, a new person with new habits and new way of life. This identity gets renewed all the time as you learn more and live more in a way that fits the image of your creator, the God who becomes visible to us in the face of Jesus!

¹¹ Because there's one creator of all people, even our most obvious barriers that our world most strenuously enforces get broken down: No cultured Greek and backwater Jew! No ethnic covenant for one people that excludes the world! No foreigner, no alien, no one who's naturally a slave to others, no one whose elevated status is an automatic right! Rather we realize that Christ as creator is everything – the whole universe – and in everyone.

Love is the heart of the New People we are. It embraces all the character of the New Person.

¹² You are a chosen community where this universal reality, this mystery so challenging to the way we've trained ourselves to act, is being revealed. You've begun to see what it means to belong to this holy God and how God dearly loves you. Let God's image in Jesus shape you as you let his compassion go all the way down into your depths, as you practice being genuinely good and kind even to the least deserving, as you learn to think of others before yourself, as you live gently among hard people and in a fragile world, and as you take the long view of things. ¹³ That means that if we have a genuine grievance toward someone for a real wrong they've done us, we learn to bear the grievance ourselves and give grace to that person. This is so important so that we become strong and begin to share in God's life that we see in Jesus, in real freedom. That's exactly what he did for us, bearing all the wrongs we've done and giving grace to us. ¹⁴ The reality that incorporates all of this growth and binds it together in a complete and mature life is Love: self-giving love, the love that is the very heart and reality of God and that flows into us and through us to others.

Thankfulness flows from the experience of God's Peace in our lives.

¹⁵ As this new identity grows, a new kind of peace grows inside you, a peace that's independent of circumstances, even hard things like the fact that I'm in prison. Let that peace from Christ shape and mold your deepest thinking and decisions. God is calling to you into that peace, shaping all of you into a single body, so that together you embody Jesus in the world. In spite of difficulties, profound gratitude grows in you. Don't fight it! As you experience God's love in the middle of a life of struggle, become people who are genuinely thankful.

¹⁶ Let the message of the Christ, that deep mystery that he embodies, live and grow in your whole community as you learn its rich abundance. It will give you the wisdom to teach and guide and encourage each another. It will shape your poetry and music, your deepest and most heartfelt expressions of life as God's Spirit lives in you and his Grace lives in your hearts and bursts forth in your songs. ¹⁷ Every aspect of life is touched, everything you do, everything you say, because you are changed at the deepest level. The reality of Jesus as your creator and loving, self-giving Lord lets you see the profound glory of who you really are. Thanksgiving is inevitable, whether circumstances are hard or easy, thanksgiving to God as we see him in the beauty and reality of Jesus.

From Event and Story to Personal Reality – The New Person

Jesus' reality means that what God did in him shapes the life of every person who trust in him.

The change is deep, becoming a new person, new creation. Deep habits and cultural customs are now seen as deadly and enslaving. We take on a new identity shaped by Jesus.

Love that Embraces – The Heart of Transformation and Maturity

Jesus' self-giving love in the Cross shows God's deep love. It defines the New Person in God's image. God's image shows in compassion, humility, gentleness, giving Grace to each other.

Love embraces all these changes. Because it's God's life, it is the deepest maturity, perfection.

Thanksgiving – God's Peace shaping our Actions and Experiences

The experience of this New Person brings peace, even in hard experiences. The message/mystery of Christ feeds our hearts and heads on the deepest level with rich abundance.

We become people of gratitude, shaped into one body, embracing each other in thanksgiving.