

## New Life Living in the Lord

✠ **By conduct: Guard God's peace... (vv.1-7)**

✠ **...as a precious gift to you. (v.1)**

✠ **...as a precious gift to share. (vv.2,3)**

In the name of Jesus, our divine Peace, dearly beloved of God:

Have you ever tried to wrestle with God's Word? Honestly, I try to just accept it, but every once in a while I find myself wrestling with God's Word and end up limping like Jacob. He wrestled with the pre-incarnate Word of God, the Angel of the LORD all night. Remember what Jacob said? ***"I will not let you go unless you bless me."*** (Genesis 32:26 NIV) God wants our determined prayers as we focus our time and energy on God's Word. But sometimes like this week I see my Lord smiling as He reminds me: ***"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*** (Matthew 18:3 NIV) God's Word is stronger than all of us combined and greater than the combined minds of all people put together. This sermon which started out to proclaim thirteen verses will have to settle for three today and the rest on coming Sundays – all emphasizing Stewardship.

Today we bow the knee before our gracious God who gives us so many blessings of time, talent and treasure to manage for Him. As good Stewards under God the focus here is time and talent for **New Life Living in the Lord**. Today **By conduct: Guard God's peace...**

✠ **...as a precious gift to you. (v.1)**

It took three days of hard work in the Greek original. But about the time it dawned on me what the Lord was doing with this sermon, I couldn't help remembering First Grade. There was the blackboard. Here was my paper. All those words would not fit on one side. Determined to follow the rule, I tried again. Oh, what trauma we suffer in our youth! The third try wasn't going any better. Miss French saw my distress, came over and kindly told me it was okay to write on the back this time. "I said that, but you weren't listening." How many times have we done that to ourselves? And isn't it amazing how some teachers have the skill to make you feel better even when they have to scold you?

That's the attitude of the Lord's Apostle Paul as the Holy Spirit inspires him to build on everything said so far in the first three chapters. Standing beside you with an arm across your shoulders, Paul says, ***"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*** Were you listening last summer when we studied Ephesians in Sunday morning Bible Class? Have you been reading and paying attention to these words? Along with Jesus' words in John 14-16 and the victory chapter Romans 8, Ephesians 1-3 can lift your spirits from the doldrums and even carry you out of deep, dark depression and excessive misery. Sometimes you just feel, "If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all..." but God wants you to know that "luck" has nothing to do with it. He's been saying this for years. Are you like that first grader? Too much talking and not enough listening? Are you causing yourself and maybe those you love excessive misery trying to cram your whole life onto one side of the paper when God has more space for you? Are you shackled by the law or living in grace?

Freedom in Christ is ***"the calling [we] have received."*** So what's Paul doing in prison again? Why did he do more time than most American felons, here in Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians and Philemon – the "Captivity Letters" of the Lord's own ambassador? Paul was suffering for Christ. And why was he willing to give up his freedom for someone he had persecuted in his hotheaded youth? Because Paul was convinced that Jesus died and rose again for him. When you finally realize what God has done for you, your whole life changes to "not my will, but Thine be done. Not my time, but yours, O God. My times are in your hands. And you, my dear Ephesians, you Christians at New Life hearing this

two millennia later, you all have been called out of the darkness of sin and unbelief, of gory guilt and stubborn despair into the glorious light of God's grace in Christ. It's worth it for me to be in prison again to write this, so that you can **Guard God's peace...as a precious gift to you.**"

Do you know how long God has known you by name? From all eternity. That's in the first chapter. Do you know why you're here listening to God's Word today? God brought you to hear how His dear Son Jesus paid the ransom price for all your sins with His holy, precious blood. Do you know Paul was praying for you from prison? That's all in the first chapter too. What must you do to earn God's grace? Nothing. Otherwise it would not be grace. Grace is God's undeserved love as in chapter 2 where God actually says God loved you when you were still dead in transgressions and sins: ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*** (Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV) Spend your life marveling at grace and you will never walk alone, never need to feel useless, always know God's great purpose for your life is to do the good things He sets in your pathway – all out of gratitude for **God's peace**. Don't let life's little irritations or big problems like fitting all the words on one side of the page – let nothing rob you of **God's peace**. That's why God is calling you onward and upward to Him with **God's peace...**

 **...as a precious gift to share. (vv.2,3)**

***"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*** Now that will take a miracle, in fact, a whole series of miracles and lots of energy from God's Word and sacraments working in our hearts.

***"Be completely humble..."*** In his "Captivity Letter" to the Philippians Paul writes: ***"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."*** Total humility is the only proper attitude for believers. ***"What do you have which you did not receive?"*** Paul asks us. (1 Corinthians 4:7) Think about it. We know only a few sins of others against us, but who can count our daily sins against God in thought, word and deed? Where is there room for a pharisaic attitude toward others? We're called to be **"gentle"** in Christ-like kindness that would rather yield to others and suffer hurt than give it. ***"Be patient"*** doesn't mean with clenched teeth. Learn to pray: "Lord, please be patient with me, and give me that long-suffering attitude that will not fly into a rage with others. Help me submit to injury as you did when you took my place on the cross." ***"Bearing with one another in love"*** gives a new "Serenity Prayer": *God grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change, The courage to change the one I can, And the wisdom to know it's me.* (Received by email. Author unknown.)

Where did we get this idea that church people would always treat us right? They were the ones who crucified our Lord, and we were right there with them in our sins. Jesus' closest disciples argued about who was the greatest right after He told of His suffering, death and resurrection – and shortly before they all deserted Him to arrest and torture. All this for you and me. Is it too much to ask that we patiently ***"bear with one another in love"*** instead of letting minor flaws and weaknesses get the best of us?

***"Make every effort,"*** our Lord says through Paul. **New Life Living in the Lord** hurries and keeps charging like a fullback. He sees victory on the other side of that defensive line if he can just keep his balance and momentum moving forward. But he wants his teammates with him in victory. If such is the treasured goal of earthly athletes, how much more for us in Christ to ***"make every effort to guard and treasure the unity of the Spirit."*** In worship and Bible Class from the basics to the greater truths of God's Word, these nuggets of gold unite us with God and each other in the mind of Christ. This is not unionism by compromise of doctrine. This is **"unity"** which the Holy Spirit has already created through Word and sacraments. What holds us all together is the unbreakable ***"bond of peace"*** from sins-forgiven to us and by us to each other. ***Guard God's peace...to share*** with plenty for our community.

You can't find a better management job than **New Life Living in the Lord**. **By conduct** – like Christ: **Guard God's peace – as a precious gift to you, as a precious gift to share.** Amen.