

New Life Living in the Lord

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

✎ **...as a precious gift of unity. (vv.3-5)**

✎ **...as a precious gift of grace. (vv.6,7)**

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

When you're really hungry, you want a nice thick burrito shell that can hold up under pressure. Overstuffed with all that juicy meat and cheese, the salsa and lettuce – makes your mouth water. And you always appreciate the specialist on the other side of the counter wrapping everything up tight for you. It's great to pull back the foil and enjoy one of God's great gifts from south of the border. But if the side tears open and juice runs down your arms, the salsa feels hotter when things fall apart.

What holds our lives together? What keeps all God's great ingredients wrapped up in a secure package even when we're tired and hungry? Blessings we have, but if they're spattering our clothes, how can we have what we crave? "What you crave" for real life is more than White Castle sliders. The longing of our hearts and souls is love from God. And for **New Life Living in the Lord**, the tie that binds everything together is **peace**. **By conduct**, living and breathing, **Guard God's peace...**

✎ **...as a precious gift of unity. (vv.3-5)**

It is uncanny how hard we concentrate or complain about the ingredients of our lives when our problems sometimes come more from the wrap. So at the end of last week's Stewardship sermon, the Holy Spirit exhorted us through the Lord's Apostle Paul: "***Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.***" (Ephesians 4:3 NIV) As one of my dear professors put it: "Peace works like a cord that holds a package together or like the ligaments that hold the body together. If believers cultivate assiduously [diligently, constantly] the virtues [of humility, gentleness, patience], they will preserve peace and unity. If the opposite attitudes are allowed to creep in, there will be irritations, anger, resentment and with them a disruption of the Spirit-wrought unity. When people have as much in common as believers have, they ought to let nothing arise that could divide them. Their oneness is too precious."¹

That oneness is in our service theme today as the Lord teaches us to **Serve God in Family Life**. One reason family is so important to society is that here we learn to put up with each other and face issues we might ignore. For instance, the Lord says, "***There is one body.***" And He's not talking about the one that woke up and got dressed for church this morning. But in the factory of the family God makes our human body, feeds it, clothes it, and uses the family to teach us priceless lessons about the "***one body***" of which Christ is the Head. He redeemed His **body** as His holy bride, the Church, by shedding His blood. His unselfish sacrifice puts us to shame the way we treat those closest to us. Why must I admit that one of my most challenging "Daddy duties" was to help cut up my children's food before eating my own? High metabolism is no excuse. It just proves this sinful earthly flesh always wants "me first." When I see selfish singles and couples living for selfish pleasure, I must shamefully admit, I'm no better.

That's why I am thankful, "***there is one body and one Spirit...***" We often forget this in our dismay about denominational divisions. The ecumenical movement and American Fundamentalists have tried to make a visible church which God already built. They ignore the Spirit wrought unity that formed the invisible, hidden Church of Jesus Christ whose only members all believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The true Church, the "***one body,***" is God's creation "***built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined***

¹ Habeck, Irwin J. *Ephesians: Amazing Grace*. (Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House, 1985), p. 77.

together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:20-22 NIV)

Thanking God for the invisible Church is the opposite of compromising God’s Word. God’s Word calls us to the hope of everlasting life. Wouldn’t our relationships in family and congregation improve dramatically if we would only remember? *“You were called to one hope when you were called.”* All eager expectation of good from God centers around one outstanding promise. Our crucified, risen and ascended Lord Jesus has given His Word: *“I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* (John 14:3 NIV) Sometimes the best thing you can do in a conflict is step away from it. Walk alone with Jesus and pray for fellow believers who also have this hope of heaven in their hearts. Pray for God to bring them home to glory and keep the hope fires burning until then.

Finally when you go back to deal with whatever, you can keep this front and center: *“There is... one Lord....”* And it’s not you. Winning arguments is not as important as winning hearts for Christ. He is the Lord of life. *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”* (Proverbs 3:5f NIV)

Instead of wandering through many traditions and many faiths, trust God. He says only *“one faith”* saves. *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12 NIV) And the saving Name of Jesus gives us only *“one baptism.”* It’s wrong to talk about “spirit baptism” versus “water baptism.” *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace”* by talking about *“one baptism”* the way the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Sacrament of Baptism belongs to God. It’s not ours to change. Only when we recognize **God’s peace... as a precious gift of unity**, can we **guard it by our conduct** in church and family. We appreciate this most when we realize **God’s peace** is threatened by our sin. Then more than ever you see it...

 **...as a precious gift of grace. (vv.6,7)**

There is also only *“one God and Father of all....”* The God of the Bible is not some distant “Force” we can never touch or some “Higher Power” to make up as you go along. God is so personal that He reveals Himself as our Father by sending His Son Jesus Christ to be born of the Virgin Mary. People who turn away from religion because they feel it was forced on them need to slow down and look in the manger in the weeks ahead. Why would you run from a Baby? Jesus fulfills all His Father’s promises to come and save us from our sins. He gives us peace with God **as a precious gift of grace**. Especially if your earthly father was a great disappointment, the *“one God and Father of all”* will prove to be the greatest Source of joy. Just listen to His forgiving voice and let Him have your heart. His Good News of sins-forgiven will open the door to a right relationship with God that He guards in **grace and peace**.

Then you’ll be glad to trust our Father in heaven as God *“over all”* for powerful protection, *“through all”* for powerful purpose that *“works in you both to will and to do of God’s good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13 KJV). God is *“in all.”* When you think how God’s powerful presence dwells in your fellow Christians in church and at home, you treat them with respect, forgiving their little flaws because God has forgiven you so much more. And when you see how the same God who enriches them with His precious gifts of grace and peace also enriches you, your heart will swell with thanks and praise.

One famous philosopher claimed, “Life is a box of chocolates; you never know what you’ll get.” Today a minor preacher might leave you thinking life is a burrito that needs a thicker shell. Fortunately, we’re not in cooking class banging pots and pans. Our gracious God loves to give more to us who deserve less. *“To each one of us grace has been given as Christ”* measures it out. Next week we’ll explore these gifts that God gives each of us for the common good. We’ll see how knowing the Giver keeps us from conceit over what we have and depression for what we don’t. But today our gracious God just wants us to see how kindly He wraps all His gifts in **peace** that holds together in **precious unity and grace**. Guard it like a college student when some classmate wants what’s on your plate. There’s a time for a fork in the hand of Satan or your own sinful self. **Guard God’s peace...by conduct.** Amen.