

Learning to live together in wisdom

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[0 : 00] This is taken from Isaiah 6, and this is where Isaiah encounters God's holiness in a very particular way before he receives his commission, and it says, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim, each had six wings, with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one called out to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And you know how it goes that Isaiah, standing before the Lord his God, a prophet who is responsible for speaking, recognizes that he is a man of unking lips, yet given the very task of speaking with those lips. And God makes it possible for him to do so.

Well, let's come to our next song before we move any further. Thank you, Phil. Read, then pray, and then come back to Colossians after that point.

So Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 12, through to chapter 4, verse 1. Now hear God's word.

Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you. So you also must forgive. And above all, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ roll in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another into all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

[2 : 49] Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting to the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service as people please, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do work heartily as to the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ, for the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven. Let us pray.

Father God, this morning, having read and heard of your holiness through the eyes of Isaiah, we recognize your holiness in our presence as well. We recognize that it is both a good thing and a fearful thing. And we thank you, as we have read here, that you have made us holy, and that we are considered, because we belong to your Son, as a holy and beloved people. We pray then, Father God, that your holiness would be seen in us, would be known by us, and would be lived through our very lives. We pray, Father God, that we would bring lies before you that bring you glory.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, sometimes, before we can move forward, we need to go back and remember where we've been.

And hopefully this isn't too much of a difficulty, given that we only covered a few verses in chapter three so far. Chapter three began by teaching us that we need to learn how to live, because sin not only destroys people's lives, it destroys the knowledge of how to live.

[5 : 16] Now, that's really important, that we understand that sin has destroyed the knowledge of how to live. And what we see in the rest of this chapter into chapter four is that that knowledge is destroyed, not just for a person personally, but it's destroyed in terms of relationships within the church, it's destroyed in terms of relationships within the home, between masters and bond servants.

Sin destroys everything, and it destroys the knowledge of what is right. We're not to think that sin only reaches certain parts, and, you know, the knowledge is left untouched.

No, sin permeates everything, and it corrupts everything, and therefore even our very knowledge of right and wrong is corrupted, even our very knowledge of what is forgiving is corrupted, and it all needs to be readdressed in light of the gospel.

Now, this is done with a sense of ease if God's people are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And as I said, that as you are called to seek first the kingdom of God, what are you doing? Now, of course, if you don't know what you're being asked to do, then it follows that you're not going to do it.

[6 : 41] Not because you're necessarily unwilling, but because you don't know what you've been asked to do. So, here we have Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount, seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

We have a rough idea about what righteousness is. We have a rough idea about what the kingdom of God is, but we don't know the imperative to seek first the kingdom. We don't know what that looks like, or may I say if we don't know what that looks like, then it doesn't happen.

Now, of course, when something doesn't happen that is meant to happen, and it doesn't happen, it leads to problems down the line. And so Jesus isn't saying these things as, well, here's something for you to do until I get back.

But rather, this is how you establish your witness on earth. And so the witness of the church is highly dependent upon whether or not God's people are committed to the things of God.

Now, I would very much love for conversations in the church to be about the kingdom of God and his righteousness. I'd very much love pastoral conversations to be about the kingdom of God and righteousness.

[7 : 50] But most of the time, they are disjointed. And so we end up talking about the virtues or how other people don't have the virtues that they should have.

They're not that loving. They're not that kind. They're not that forgiving. They're not very patient. There's a number of things that they don't have. But what I've often found, and you probably have as well, that those qualities which are godly virtues are often talked about as qualities separated from the kingdom of God and righteousness.

In other words, the conversation that they should be within aren't. And so we take these qualities out and expect them, but then the fallback is, how are you seeking first the kingdom of God?

And then suddenly, well, you're not being very patient with me, or you're not being very kind, right? And suddenly we use these virtues to battle things out.

So what Paul is moving on to here is, look, not only do you need to know how to live, but now you need to know how to live together. You need to know how to live together in the church, and you need to know how to live together in the home.

[9 : 01] And this is because we think we do, but actually we don't. And so the virtues that are mentioned are clearly mentioned in the context of forgiven people.

And they're clearly mentioned within the context of the church because we are the forgiven people of God. And of course, they are mentioned within the home, wives, husbands, children, masters, and bond servants.

You must remember that the home within biblical times was a place of productivity. It was not a place of rest. And so when the home becomes a place of rest and the place of productivity becomes out there somewhere, this changes the home in quite a negative way, but most modern people don't see it because this is a modern structure.

We work out there. We rest at home here. And so when the church loses this sense of productivity that the family works together, that it has to live together, that it has bond servants if you're that type of family, then suddenly the structure changes enormously within the home.

And that doesn't mean that there are places of rest and relaxation and conversation. But what it means is the divisions that we live with today in terms of work and rest and productivity are not the same divisions that people lived with back then.

[10 : 37] Now, some people would say, as the old saying goes, Pastor, you preached a wonderful sermon right up to the last five minutes where you started meddling. And the pastor says, well, how did I start meddling?

He says, well, you started preaching on the home. Well, this is a common reaction that people think that I can only address what happens in here.

And Paul, what Paul does is he says, I'm going to address you personally. I'm going to address you as a church. And now I'm going to step into your home. And of course, for some, that feels like meddling because we have detached the home as a place of that which is private.

There's nothing that can enter into that unless I let it in through the front door. Not so, says Paul. The gospel must permeate every relationship. It must permeate your relationship with God, your relationship with the church, and your relationship with the members in your family.

And therefore, the message has to go beyond this gathering and reach back into your homes. So here's the summary of what Paul is effectively saying.

[11 : 51] He begins in verse 12 by telling you to get dressed. Get dressed for God. If you read Psalm 109 and Psalm 110, what makes those two psalms so incredible is that God is the one who dresses you, that God is the one who gives you these righteous garments in Christ Jesus, that you have something very special to wear.

You find yourself reborn, born again into Christ Jesus. You've taken off the old rags of sin in the old man, and you're looking at God and saying, well, I have nothing to wear.

And God says, yes, you do. And God is giving you this to wear. So he says, and put on as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

So notice now who you are. So we would be able to argue that a nurse would dress in a nurse's uniform, okay? A soldier would dress in a soldier's uniform.

Mechanic in overalls, painter and decorator, normally in white overalls, roofers, they get to wear whatever they like back in the day.

[13 : 09] Generally speaking, we can recognize certain people by what they wear. Well, you are holy and beloved. And therefore, there's a certain dress code that you must now adhere to.

You don't get to put on your old rags. You are going out with God into the world. And as you go out into the world with God, you are going to put on what God wants you to wear.

Because that will be the witness. That'll be what people see when they look at you. And of course, the virtues that continue through here, the forgiveness, the love, the meekness, the humility, the kindness, Well, these are simply things that are true of God and are now expected to be true of you.

As forgiven people, you will forgive one another. There's no reason. You can't say, well, I'm beyond that.

No, as forgiven people, we will forgive one another, verse 13. We will love properly understood because love has the capacity, the ability, rather, to bind us together.

[14 : 21] And the peace of God, that's verse 14, and the peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts. Now, notice it's the peace of Christ ruling. Ruling in the same way an umpire rules over a tennis match.

It gets to determine what's in and what's out. That's how the peace of God operates within a believer's life. It's determining the rules, if we can say, the boundaries of the Christian life, that this is how God's peace works.

Then in verse 16, we are to let the word of God dwell in us, and we are called to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. Now, this is important for a couple of different reasons, especially for those who perhaps read the Bible as sort of a reference manual for direct answers.

And they don't treat the Bible as something, as that which produces wisdom in the people of God. And so they think, well, if I've got a direct question and the Bible doesn't give me a direct answer, I'm therefore free and independent to make up my own mind.

But this would be to miss entirely what the word of God dwelling richly in you is meant to achieve. The word of God dwelling richly in you is to lead you to wisdom.

[15 : 43] So, yes, the Bible doesn't say about wearing masks in church, but when you take the whole of Scripture and you take everything together, especially when the Scriptures speak about quarantine in the Old Testament, you're able to put these qualifications together and go, okay, the wise decision would be this.

It doesn't say anything about COVID-19, it doesn't say anything about this, that, or the other, but the Bible is able to lead me to wise decisions. So those who simply look at the Bible as something to give them a direct answer, and when it doesn't give me a direct answer, you get frustrated, and then you make up your own mind, that's very unwise, very unwise.

And you're therefore unable to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. And that's why Christians' lives can look so independently from each other because they're not shaped by wisdom.

They're shaped by independent thinking because the argument can always be made, well, the Bible doesn't say anything about that. The Bible does, actually, but it says it in wisdom, not a specific verse here, there, or anywhere else.

That's how God's Word works. It does give us direct answers. Jesus did die and rise again. There's a direct answer, but in many other things, we need to grow in wisdom.

[17 : 11] Now, as we do this, we are to do everything in the name of the Lord. Now that the peace of God is ruling in us, now that we've got dressed in the qualities of God, now that we let the Word of God dwell richly in us, now that we have wisdom, we are able to function as a church, but we're not able to function as a church until that happens.

Then Paul moves now into the home. Now you've learned how to live as a person. Now you're learning how to live together in church. Now you need to learn how to live together in the home.

Husbands, wives, children, parents, masters, bond servants are all relationships, and they're relationships that have to reflect the same qualities that permeate through.

Now, of course, the reason why the home is so important to the church is because of the qualifications that need to be present in the home before they can be present in the church.

Just as one example, elders are meant to have one wife. Now, in this day and age, we think, well, how's that going to be a problem?

[18 : 18] Well, you've got to remember that when the early church received Christianity, there were men who came to faith who probably had two or three wives because that was the Roman practice.

It was not odd for a man, even in the Old Testament, for men of God to have more than one wife. And so, when the gospel comes, you must remember that it comes into an environment where a man having more than one wife is normal.

But now that the gospel comes and now that qualifications come, Paul has to say in Titus, an elder can only have one wife. Okay? So, therefore, the men that have more than one wife are automatically disqualified.

Not because they're sinful, not because they're bad, not because they're not Christians, but simply because the qualifications for being an elder is that you must have one wife, not two or three or four.

The qualification also is that their children must be believers. So, the qualification of an elder, to appoint an elder, you need to look at them and go, do they have one wife?

[19 : 28] Check. Are the children's believers? Check. Right now, you can qualify as an elder. They can qualify to be appointed in the church. Titus 1.6.

So, the reason why the home has to be addressed is not just to make sure that harmony exists within the home, that the right relationship exists between a husband and wife and fathers and their sons and daughters and masters and slaves, but because the home has a direct impact on the church.

And that is that if a man is not qualified in the home, he will not be qualified in the church, even though in many churches, unfortunately, certain positions within the church is sort of a softener for failure in the home.

And I don't say that easily. I say that with the seriousness it deserves. So, before we get on to the home, let's learn how to live together as church.

As we consider the qualities here that Paul expects of all of us, it follows that we must first know how to live as an individual before God, which he has addressed.

[20 : 45] Now he moves on to how to live together. And you'll notice that the foundation of our relationship, that's not our relationship within Christ, but the way that we relate to one another is that we are all forgiven people.

And this isn't a place where we get to brag, where no one's going to go around and say to one another, now, worldly bragging might be, I have more in my bank account than you.

My car is bigger than your car. My house is bigger than your house. I have this, that, and the other. But when you get saved, you don't have people in the church bragging, saying, I have been forgiven of more than you.

Because we are ashamed of the things that we are forgiven of. Right? As Paul puts it in Romans, we look back on all the things that God has forgiven us and we think, I don't want to talk, I don't want my testimony to be about all the things that God has forgiven me of.

I don't want you to know. But you are to know that I am forgiven. And I know that you are forgiven. And that becomes the very foundation of equality amongst the people of God.

[22 : 02] That we are all forgiven. Period. Now, because we are all forgiven, there cannot be any one-upmanship. It's just, I didn't require as much forgiveness as you.

As if to say that your forgiveness required Christ dying on the cross, but not mine. A lamb on an altar could have covered it. No.

The death of Christ covered every sin for us, regardless of how deep or wide that particular sin is. So, forgiven people forgive because we have been forgiven.

That's the very nature and foundation of how we are to relate to one another. Now, when it comes to love, properly understood, remember, there's a worldly version of these qualities as much as there's a biblical version.

But, but biblically speaking, the love leads to harmony. And the illustration that I've often used with Ian on the piano is that you have black keys and you have white keys sitting beside each other in perfect unity.

[23 : 10] But unity is a far cry from harmony. Harmony is what is brought out of those keys being played together in the right order. So, when something is harmonious, it's not just that it's unified, but that it functions within that unity.

And so, for a church to be harmonious, what brings that out in the same way someone who can play the piano can bring it out in black and white keys is that love is able to bring out properly understood, that love is able to bring out harmony amongst the people of God, remembering that none of us are perfect, that it's doing this with people who've been forgiven of sin and who still every now and then sin.

So, this isn't of a clean slate and no one's got any problems and let's hit the road running. No, no, this is much more of a struggle than that, than simply just moving forward without any kind of difficulty whatsoever.

The peace of God is to rule in our hearts and the word of God is to dwell in us richly. And what Paul is saying here is that the Christian now has a new found attitude of being receptive rather than rejecting the work of God rather than resisting the work of the Holy Spirit.

The believer is one who is submissive and receptive to this. This is why it uses the word let, let the peace of God rule in your heart.

[24 : 52] In other words, you come under its rule. You come under its governing power in the same way tennis players come under the rule of the umpire, deciding what is in and what is out.

So, you as Christians must let the peace of God rule over you. Now, of course, the peace of God is not so much a feeling as much as it is an eternal truth that God has made peace through the blood of the cross.

That's what you're letting rule over you and through you. It's the truth of how God has made peace and therefore, within the context of church, there's no need for conflict because this is, the moment everyone goes back to that, we should all go and just get on with it.

Now, let the word of God dwell richly in us comes down to moving the church onto wisdom because none of us live the same kind of lives and none of us will have the same kind of questions.

Nevertheless, we all need wisdom. We all need to be able to speak to one another and advance one another's wisdom so that people can make wise decisions because nobody's life is the same, therefore, nobody's life asks the same questions and therefore, if the questions aren't the same, the answers aren't always likely to be the same and therefore, wisdom is needed.

[26 : 17] What do I say at this particular time? And so, people who look to God's word simply for a direct answer can often become very frustrated and very disappointed that they don't find one.

who should I marry? It doesn't tell you. Well, it does tell you in one sense, but it's not going to tell you what color hair he has or what job he does or what kind of car he has. It just doesn't do that.

How am I to, which job should I take, this one or that one? Well, the Bible has nothing to say about computer security or mining.

Yeah, perhaps it does say about mining, but other more modern jobs. Well, how am I to make these decisions? If I'm to live my life and let the word of God dwell in me richly and I ask a question of which car should I buy, which house should I buy, where should I live, what should I do, and I'm not getting any direct answers, how am I supposed to be guided by God?

How am I to, how am I to, to submit my life to the will of God and be guided by him when my questions are not being answered? Well, they are being answered, but they're being answered in wisdom rather than with a direct answer.

[27 : 36] Now, those who don't pursue wisdom will often end up making independent decisions, decisions. And therefore, their decisions that they make are not guided at all by the word of God.

And their defenses, well, the Bible didn't tell me. And this is, this is not only a very unwise decision, but this is a demonstration of a person not growing and not becoming wise.

They've not yet learned how to live. And so we get back to the issue. So the Bible's not a reference, but it gives us a list of answers to every question we might have.

But it is to lead us into wisdom that we would hopefully make wise decisions. Now, what's the problem here? What's the problem? Because we have to learn how to live together and we have to go forward, what's the issue?

Well, the issue is a fairly, is a fairly big one. And that is, when a church cannot practice the clear things, there's, it's very unlikely that they're going to be able to practice the things that require wisdom.

[28 : 45] So the things which are clear in Scripture, you would imagine that every church would be doing them. You would imagine, wouldn't you, that every church would have elders and deacons, but they don't. They have boards, they have committees.

Why? God says, elders, deacons, pastor, what's the problem? The issue is, is that when we think we know better than God by thinking we can do it differently, then we are ushering in through the door multiple problems.

So you've heard me say the need that in the early church they practice communion weekly. I don't even think it's a contentious point. I think it's abundantly clear.

But how many churches do it weekly? Now, when you say, the answer would, well, not many, but then when you ask the question, well, why not when the Bible tells us to?

So if we can't get the simple things clear, we're not, we're going to get nowhere close to being able to admonish one another with wisdom as we're told to here.

[29 : 51] We're a long way off from that and the church is not able to grow. What about elders? When elders are told that they must have one wife and their children must be believers, it's plain and simple.

But how often does it happen throughout the churches in the land? Not much. What does that mean? Well, I mean, it ushers in problems further down the road. In other words, if we can't get the things that are clear and simple, I mean, who would have ever thought that in Scotland you would have a homosexual minister marrying two men?

So the things that were clear have not been adhered to. And therefore, it becomes almost impossible now for the church to admonish one another in wisdom.

Because they are unable even to do the simple things that are clear. So learning how to live and learning how to live together is difficult.

It is not easy. It is not something that comes natural to us. And it's not something that we're born with. And this is why the church needs to be taught by the word of God in this way so that we would know how to live.

[31 : 09] So let's not expect a wise and mature church when the church cannot perform the simple and clear things. And that's not a criticism.

Okay? It's an observation of all churches. It's a criticism of me as a minister after 10 years of not being able to persuade you to do it. Okay? But my patience isn't running out yet.

Maybe next week. But what I'm saying is that you must hopefully you understand that my desire is to for you is for you to be and have what God wants for you.

And I we may collide down the line of how that happens and hopefully you would at least appreciate that what I'm saying is indeed wise and not simply a matter of opinion.

If it's got to that stage then it would be a sad departure wouldn't it? It would be a sad departure for me. You may be quite happy to finally.

[32 : 14] Took us longer than we thought but we got there in the end. Well let me close with this. Living together in the home there's an overlap and there has always been historically between the church and the home.

How much influence should the church have in the home? How much influence does the home have in the church? And that would be the better way of addressing it. That the church what happens in the home will influence what happens in the church.

What happens in the church will have some influence of what happens in the home. But the pastor doesn't have the right to tell a father what he should do in the home just because he does it in his home.

What he should say is this is what God expects of us as fathers and this is what God expects of us as mother and wives but the person themselves has to live that out in wisdom.

And it's the same with children. You know when you look at some of the tensions that you have with children in the Old Testament you think well that looks a bit harsh then you have children and think actually it's not that harsh at all.

[33 : 22] I'm quite happy with that because suddenly you realize this is it's not only difficult but sometimes it's impossible to know and you're on your knees and you're praying before God and you're fasting and you're thinking I don't have a clue can you help me?

And so Paul must address the home because husbands are harsh to their wives wives don't always submit to their husbands children are not always being their parents and these are issues that need to be addressed the whole congregation needs to hear what God has to say to the family which means that the whole family including the very youngest child has to be in the congregation so that the child can hear God say to their dad be nice to your children and so that the parents can hear God say to the children and the children hear it at the same time obey your parents the reason why the children need to be in the same fellowship as the adults is because everyone needs to hear God speaking to them or else children will grow up thinking well it's one rule for you and it's another rule for me what's the problem?

well the problem is is that we've not yet learned what it is to adhere to headship now when headship in the home comes down to who drives the car and who controls the TV remote controls when headship is who has the tie breaking decision let's go and ask dad you're in deep deep trouble and it doesn't look like deep deep trouble at those moments because the issues are often small but headship biblically understood is to guide and lead the home in the same way Christ headship over the church does exactly the same and so when the highest standard in the home for the father is he gets control over the TV remote or he gets to drive a car when you go out on a family trip or he gets the tie breaking decision which is an awful way of understanding headship when that becomes the highest level and standard within the home that's very very low compared to what God is expecting the standard to be why is this important well Paul doesn't say it here but it's clearly in the

New Testament that men have to be qualified in the home before they can be qualified in the church and they are disqualified in the home long before they are ever disqualified in the church so we are not to neglect these things Paul is teaching and I'll finish with this we need to learn how to live as individuals we need to learn how to live together as a church and we need to learn how to live together in the home because we don't know how to we don't know how to so I'll finish with this is the exhortation when a person travels in the wrong direction for 30 years the amount of time that he's traveled in that direction doesn't legitimize the direction as if to say what does all of this count for nothing well if it's been in the wrong direction for 30 years yeah it does count for nothing and I know of a lady actually I know the minister whose mum it was where she says for me to turn to Christ now on my deathbed would be for me to admit that I've lived my whole life under a lie and I'm not willing to do that such was her pride that she could not admit that she'd been traveling in the wrong direction for so long she couldn't admit that and because she couldn't admit that she would not turn to Christ well that there that kind of tension is something that we must all come over the cross it's not just true of her it's true of all of us it all depends on what the issue is so we ask here this morning that God would teach us how to live that he would teach us how to live as an individual he would teach us how to live as a church he would teach us how to live in the home because they all overlap so that we are able to be a people who do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus amen well as we close we'll listen to our thank you Phil final hymn thank you praise you in the morning praise you in the evening praise you when I'm young or when I'm old praise you when I'm laughing praise you when I'm grieving praise you every season on the soul if we could see how much your worth your power your mind your endless love and surely we would never cease to praise praise you when I'm praise you when I'm young praise you when I'm young praise you when I'm young praise you when I'm young praise you when I'm young calling all the nations to your praise if they could see how much your worth your power your might your endless love then surely they would never cease praise praise you when I'm young name