

Having Peace in Making Decisions

INTRODUCTION

A. Desiring of God's peace – Humans (saved and unsaved alike) face decisions many times a day. Most of us prefer having a peaceful feeling during and after decisions are made – some internal confirmation that the decisions are correct, the best choice we could make. The Apostle Paul wrote “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (Col 3:15). Many use that verse to support the idea of seeking or expecting some internal peace from God when making decisions in life.

1. Situations – In that regard, are we supposed to expect such a peace in the following situations?

a. When making even “minor” decisions (e.g., clothes, food, furniture, paint color, toothpaste)

b. When there's NO time to wait for for a feeling of peace before we must decide to act (e.g., a child or a pet or a blind person wanders onto a busy road, a mugger or robber is attacking, someone is drowning, we're looking for a way out of a burning building)

c. When making potentially risky, dangerous decisions (certain sports in old age, mountain climbing, swimming with thunder nearby, driving on major roads or through certain neighborhoods, vacations or missionary work in certain areas or countries, speaking out on some things in some groups)

2. Strata – Related to this is the question of whether there's a different standard or higher level or strata of peace to be expected for MAJOR decisions in life (e.g., **financial** – beneficiaries, investments, charity donations; **medical** – physicians, procedures, and prescriptions; **residential**: neighborhood, renting or buying; **parental** – having and handling children; **matrimonial** – dating dilemmas, wedding doubts). Biblically, believers certainly OUGHT to have FULL assurance of their salvation – but what should we expect about God's peace EVERYTHING else in life?

B. Discerning of God's peace – Some say it's possible or actual to have peace in every area of life. Yet, it would seem that no one has reached that point yet. Many claim to have been “led by the Lord” and have “full peace” about it – in certain things, at least. However, one wonders – looking at their lives and also looking at their beliefs. How sure (at peace) can we ever be?

1. Exhortations of speakers (and writers) saying it's possible (and wise, even “spiritual”) to have peace regarding our choices in life – and they go on to exhort believers to seek such peace. For example, F. B. Meyer wrote that God's will is when 3 things concur – 1) Bible, 2) circumstances, and 3) an “inward impulse.” David Howard (in his book *Knowing God's Will – and Doing It*, p. 89) says peace “is a **feeling** we have when things are **all right**.” Is HE right? Pastor David G. Hill lists 7 ways for “**Hearing** the Voice of God.” The sixth is what he terms “an affirming peace (Colossians 3:15): If throughout the decision-making process there is an underlying peace in the heart, one can confidently know that this is **God's perfect will** for his life” (emphasis added). Does sound like what Colossians 3:15 is saying?

2. Exclamations of “saints” – Many believers say “God told me to ...” or “God gave me peace about it.” Back on January 11, 1980, Elizabeth Hara, used an umbrella in a threatening way to rob a small town bank. Police were able to get all \$2,000 back. Her excuse? “I heard the Lord tell me to do it.” By the way, she was a resident of a foster care home – one that deals with the mentally ill.

No doubt much more well-known is David Koresh's claim that God gave him direct revelation and peace about stockpiling weapons and fortifying the Mount Carmel Center in Waco, Texas. His absolute conviction that he was executing God's plan resulted in a deadly 51-day FBI siege in 1993, ending in the deaths of Koresh and nearly 80 of his followers.

In light of the confusion caused by much of what has asserted and advised from Colossians 3:15, we need to take another look at that verse. Let's see how the idea of peace is misused – & then, in context, see what Paul actually meant.

I. The precept on peace (“let peace ... rule”) It sounds strange, doesn't it? What does it mean? Governments rule and armed forces can make war or peace, but **how can PEACE RULE?**

A. The misuse of the concept of peace (by 2 groups)

1. By society – People with a lack of passion or conviction for what's right and best tend to make peace their ruling principle. How?

a. As a substitute for participation – They may say “don't stand out or speak out” or “don't rock the boat.” “You can't fight city hall,” so why try? Don't waste your time and energy trying to swim upstream against an evil tide. In effect, let the wealthy, the successful, the powerful, the assertive ones win. – **Believers not voting (intelligently, wisely, biblically) in political elections surely DOES let the wicked rule.**

b. As a substitute for perseverance – settling for a “pragmatic” peace, a “peace at any price” (true of many leaders in our country and in our churches). British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain leading up to World War II attempted to appease Adolf Hitler. Sadly, with people like Hitler, you give a country, and he'll try to take a continent.

2. By saints

a. Applied to defense of life

1) Individually – some Christian leaders wrongfully apply parts of the Sermon on the Mount to believers today (e.g., “blessed are peacemakers” and “resist not evil” (Mt 5:9,39) to say:

a) Don’t defend yourself – against landlords, employers, health officials, lousy neighbors government
b) Don’t defend others – against bullies, burglars, muggers, kidnappers, abortionists

2) Nationally – some professing believers are against ALL war (conscientious objectors / passivists take Matthew 26:52 (“Put up again THY sword...; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”) out of context. This was said only to one of Jesus’ Jewish disciples (never to New Testament churches).

b. Applied to decisions in life – Some use Colossians 3:15 to advise believers to make NO decision that they don’t “have peace about.” – HOWEVER

1) This takes the verse out of context. It is dealing with harmonious relations between believers – NOT an individual’s making of personal decisions.

2) Also, the Bible says nothing about discerning God’s will through having a feeling of peace about it.

a) No criteria or examples to differentiate God’s so-called “Yes,” “No,” or “Wait” in prayer requests or making decisions
b) Nothing about delay (doing nothing – waiting for peace to come)

B. The meaning of this precept of peace – So what does Colossians 3:15 actually mean? Note 3 elements in what Paul says:

1. **The tranquility** (“the peace of God” – godly peace)

a. **Negatively** – opposite of disharmony, antipathy, even hostility

b. **Positively** – amnesty, amity, even unity

2. **The authority** (“let ... rule” – *brabeuo* – only here in NT) – arbitrate, decide, direct, judge, rule

a. **What’s intended?** – How does peace rule? It rules when the people strive to let it preside and preserve order – letting it be a deciding (ruling) factor in church life, having it be a prevailing principle in a church.

b. **Who’s involved?** (“your” – plural) **Paul is writing to a group of believers** – They are to have peace as a guiding and governing principle among them (cf. the term “one accord” in the Book of Acts).

3. **The locality** (“in your hearts” – cf Php 4:7 “hearts & minds”)

a. **It’s mental** (“in ... hearts”) “The heart is deceitful above all things & desperately wicked” (Jer 1:9)– “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Pro 28:26).

1) NOT – a) material (bodily organ that pumps blood) or b) merely or mainly emotional
The popular sermon idea of belief in the head but not in the heart, sometimes called “missing Heaven by 18 inches” (distance from head to heart) is NOT in the Bible. The Hebrew and Greek idea of “heart” refers to the brain (head), not the emotions (heart); the Bible put the human emotional center in the “bowels” (“of mercies” – Col 3:12).

2) BUT a) immaterial and b) intellectual – **“Heart” in the New Testament is the center of THOUGHT** (Mt 9:4; Lk 9:47; 24:38; Ac 28:37; 1Co 4:5; Heb 4:12), **BELIEF** (Rom 10:9f; Heb 3:12), and even **DOUBT** (“not doubt in his heart” – Mk 11:23). God’s peace refers to mental conviction, not emotional calmness.

b. **It’s plural** (“your” – not singular, so not just each individual believer) – **All the believers are corporately to aim for peace as a guiding, controlling, deciding factor in group** actions, decisions, missions & disputes.

II. The purpose of peace (“to the which also ye are called”) – This clause is inserted parenthetically by Paul.

A. When? – When was this calling? – The verb here should be “were” (past tense in the Greek), not “are” (present tense – KJV). The past (aorist) tense (“were” – not “are”) is also used in Ephesians 4:4 (“ye are called in one hope of your calling” – KJV). “Calling” in the New Testament was BEFORE our salvation (in the past – Rom 8:28-30; 1Th 4:7; 2Th 2:14; 2Ti 1:9), NOT during our Christian life (present). So, it’s not something we feel (experience) now.

B. What? (“called”) – cf. **1Co 7:15** = “God hath called us to peace”) – What does it mean to be called to peace? The Bible contains different types of calling. For example, the calling of Apostles is different from that of other believers.

1. **Apostles – called to WORK** (to do / action). Of all the Apostles, “call” is used of Paul and Barnabas only: to their work (Ac 13:2), to evangelize (Ac 16:10), to be an apostle (Ro 1:1; 1Co 1:2; 19:9).

Ever heard of a “pastoral call” or a call to the mission field? Those ideas are NOT in the Bible. What happens instead? Does He leave it up to individuals (to FEEL called) or churches (to FEEL they should call someone)? NO! So, how does a man or a church or mission board decide about the fitness of a prospective pastor or God missionary/evangelist?

Believers differ greatly on what’s important for pastoral or missionary work. A 1994 Murdock Trust survey found that **LAYPEOPLE** value (in this order): 1) spirituality, 2) relational skills, 3) character, 4) communications skills, 5) doctrinal knowledge. By contrast, **SEMINARY PROFESSORS** have this list of priorities: 1) doctrinal knowledge, 2) character, 3) leadership, 4) communication, 5) counseling.

What does God say? He listed qualifications for bishops/elders (pastors) twice (see 1Ti 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9).

2. Saints – called to WORTH (to be / position). God’s calling of believers differs greatly from that of the Apostles: to be saints (Ro 1:7; 1Co 1:2), unto **fellowship of Jesus Christ** (1Co 1:9), into grace of Christ (Gal 1:6), unto **liberty** (Gal 5:13), in one hope (Eph 4:4), unto Jesus’ kingdom and eternal glory and virtue (1Th 2:12; 1Pt 5:10; 2Pt 1:13), unto **holiness** (1Th 4:7), to obtaining of glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Th 2:14), unto **et life** (1Ti 6:12), to **suffering** (1Pt 2:20f), and to inherit a blessing (1Pt 3:9 – Again, the Greek word is in the aorist (past) tense – so it should be translated “were,” not “are.” These callings can be divided into two main groups as far as peace is concerned:

- a. **To possess** / experience His peace inside (to have it) – called to **have peace** (Rom 5:1 peace w/God)
- b. **To portray** / exhibit His peace outside (to show it) – called to **be peaceful** – in unpeaceful world

C. Where? (“in one body”)

1. Location (It’s the same preposition as “in your hearts.”) – **“Your one body” or “your bodies” would make no sense.**

2. Relation – The phrase’s position in the sentence may be confusing.

a. It’s NOT the place of the calling. Paul does not say we were called to be “into” one body.

b. It’s the place of the peace (where the peace is to rule – in the ONE Body of Christ)

“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3) > “till we all come in the unity of the faith ... unto a perfect man” (Eph 4:13) – compare “that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God” (Rom 15:6) – “be of one mind, live in peace” (2Co 13:11), “Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith.” (Php 1:27)

III. The pathway to peace – How is this peace achieved? Note the context (& Php 4:6-7).

A. Appreciation (“be ye thankful” – An attitude of gratitude helps keep peace and produce grace. (Col 1:3,12; 2:7; 3:15,17; 4:2)

1. The thrust (“Be” – means “become” – i.e., become what you are not now – cf. (“giving thanks” (v. 17; also 1:3,12), (“thanksgiving” (2:7; 4:2) – As joy dominates the Book of Philippians, so does thanksgiving in Colossians.

2. The truth (“thankful” – Gr. *eucharistos* – 1x in NT) thankful for what? **EVERYTHING!!** “in everything” (1Th 5:18) – “giving thanks always for all things” (Eph 3:20)

a. Personally – for salvation – assurance of future peace AND blessedness of present peace

b. Corporately (local church) – for saints – others’ talents, time, and toil for God (& for the Body of Christ)

B. Activation (vv 5-17) – The context is one of **getting along with other true believers** in harmony and unity = peace.

1. Vices (5-11) = 11 perversions that **cause** divisions

2. Virtues (12-14) = 8 perfections that **cure** divisions – mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, endurance, forgiveness, LOVE

3. Values (15-17) = 3 prescriptions that **check** (block) divisions

CONCLUSIONS

A. Absence of idea of individual peace

1. Silence – Scripture is silent about seeking or experiencing peace when or after making **personal choices** in life (major or minor). There are **NO** Bible exhortations to do it, **NO** commendations for doing it, **NO** condemnations for not doing it, and **NO** illustrations of believers doing it.

2. Context – The context of Colossians 3:15 (especially verses 5-17 – including the 3 V sections, our calling, the body concept, the plural “hearts,” and the idea of singing) is **the believers’ corporate (not personal) life**. Paul wants the congregation to be peaceful in their walk, work, and words. Paul anticipates that not everyone will like or want what the majority think is best and decide to do – so keeping peace as a priority will aid in accepting what the minority is powerless to change. Paul is emphasizing human responsibility for peaceful church life.

B. Presence of idea of congregational peace

1. Priority – What Colossians 3:15 seems to be clearly saying is that congregations of believers should **AIM FOR GODLY PEACE** as a GUIDING FACTOR in making church decisions – rather than expect a personal, emotional experience of peacefulness. Believers may see things differently, but we should aim to end up **PEACEFULLY** – showing the world our love and unity in Christ.

2. Principles – Two key principles may help balance things in this respect as we stand up and speak out for what’s true and right in order to end up in godly peace.

a. NO silence with evil or error – We need to speak out when we see evil or error among saints.

b. NO settlement with heresy or immorality – We must not compromise with sinful things.