

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
(NIV 84)

Theme: The Spirit of Christmas is Year-Long

1. Clothe yourself with Christ.
2. Let Christ's Word Dwell in you Richly.

For many people, by now—one week later, Christmas is over. The trees have been put away. The meals and cookies have all been eaten, and they have caught up with friends and family. Now it is back to regular decorations and work; and, as part of a New Year's resolution, a diet has been started. And because Christmas has ended, so has the Christmas spirit.

We may be tempted to have the same reaction—it's now January, so Christmas and everything that goes along with it can be forgotten until next year. But today we see that the spirit of Christmas is year-long. And we are told to clothe ourselves with Christ and to let his word dwell in us richly.

During the weeks leading up to Christmas all of us, undoubtedly, saw and heard the bell ringers. They would stand in front of business ringing their bells all day long. Next to them would be a bucket in order for you to put some money. The last couple weeks, you probably have received more phone calls than usual. Or perhaps you got a few more things in the mail than normal. They are asking you to donate money for this event, for this purpose, or that need.

Commercials showing hungry dogs, cats, or children in Africa—all asking for your donations, are more prevalent around Christmas. People call the church more often looking for handouts as well around Christmas.

And why all of this? Why the increase of all these requests? Because it's Christmas, and it is the season of giving. To many people the spirit of Christmas is about being kind, it is about being considerate. It is about taking care of those who are less fortunate. It is about being nice to others. Being kind to someone no matter what. And people give around Christmas—more than they usually do. Because it is Christmas, and that is what you are supposed to do—it's the Christmas spirit. But now that Christmas is over, so is the Christmas spirit. Now we don't have to worry about being nice to people we don't like. We don't have to put on fake smiles. We don't have to feel guilty about not donating money to the poor.

That is the shallowness of a Christmas without Christ. Being nice to someone only because it's expected of you at Christmas, is nothing short of a scam. But that is not what Christmas is about for Christians. We know that Christmas was about the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And his birth is just the beginning of his work to save us. He would go on and live a perfect life in our place. He would take away our sins when he died on the cross. And he would rise from the dead to assure us that we will live with him forever in heaven. Christmas is about the birth of God who would go on to save us. So Christmas for Christians, doesn't end on December 26th; rather it continues throughout the year.

And the peace we had on Christmas Eve stays with us forever. That night we heard a prophecy from Isaiah, which called Jesus the **Prince of Peace**. On Christmas day we heard the angels announce to **Peace on earth** to the shepherds. The peace of Christmas is the peace of forgiveness. This is the peace that only Christ can bring us. And this peace of forgiveness doesn't just last a few short days. This sticks with us the rest of our lives. And it is this peace that runs our life. As Paul tells us, **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.**

Since we know that our sins are forgiven, we strive to follow his word. As we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, we will have the Spirit

of Christmas. After all, this is what we were chosen to do. We were called to be children of Christ. And we were called to obey him. So Paul goes through a short list of how believers, who know the peace of forgiveness, should act. He starts out with saying that we should have **compassionate hearts**. We should have compassion on those who are less fortunate. Next we should be **kind** toward others. Looking to their interests, not our own. Then that we should be **humble**. Not bragging about ourselves, or boasting about our accomplishments. Next **meekness** or gentleness. That is dealing with others in a way that will not offend them. Next comes **patience**. Being patient with those who don't do as you wish.

In verse 13 Paul tells us to **bear with one another**. That means to put up with one another. To not complain when someone does something you don't like. Or getting too upset with someone when they make a mistake. He also tells us to **forgive each other as the Lord has forgiven you**. When someone sins against us we are not to hold a grudge. We are not to try to get even. Rather we don't count their sins against them, like Christ does with us. **And above all these put on love**. Love covers all things. When we show love to someone we will be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, forgiving, and so on. When we show love to others we have the Spirit of Christmas.

This short list is pretty daunting, isn't? How can we be meek, humble, forgiving, kind, compassionate, loving, and so on? If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we fail to be one of these things all the time. Let alone keep all of them. We must admit that we fail miserably at living in the Spirit of Christmas all year long. We can try as hard as we want, but we will never be able to show love to others like we should

But we don't need to. We have Christ. He is the perfect fulfillment of all of these commands. The little child, born in Bethlehem is God. And as God, he kept all of God's will perfectly. He never once failed to show love. He was meek, humble, kind, and compassionate. He never once thought about himself over anyone else. He put up with the sins of others by forgiving them through his death on the cross. We don't have to keep these commands perfectly, because Christ has fulfilled them for us. He has kept the law for us so we don't have to.

But yet we still try to keep the Christmas Spirit all year long.

And why is that? Why do we have the Christmas Spirit all year long? Because Christ first loved us. Because he was born to save us from our sins. Because he died on the cross to keep his enemies from hell. He didn't have to do this, but he did anyway. It is because he chose us to believe in him. For the first miracle of Christmas is that God was born as a man. The second is that he chose his enemies to become his children. That he would chose us to believe in him, even though we are his enemies by nature. That he didn't count our sins against us, but counted them against his son, whom he sent for us

But he chose us not just to be his children. But he also chose us to be the bearers of his message. He chose us to make sure others know the peace of Christmas. And it is through our life that we can tell people about Christ. Our actions indicate to others how serious our faith is to us. We are witnesses for Christ by the way we treat others. By showing them love we are showing them to the love of Christ. So we are compassionate, not just during the Christmas season. We do nice things for others, not just because it's expected of us, but because Christ first loved us. We have the Spirit of Christmas so others may know the peace of forgiveness.

Being nice to others, loving, compassionate, and so on aren't the only ways we can show our Christmas Spirit year-round. We also do that by regularly attending worship. By being in the word whenever we can. And by encouraging others to do the same. Paul says in verse 16, **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.** "Let the word of the Lord dwell in you richly." This means that we are in the word whenever we can be. Not just when it is convenient for us. Not just when we can find the time, or when we have nothing else to do. To be richly in the word means to be in the word every week at worship, to grow in your knowledge of the gospel in Bible Class, and to read your Bible at home. It means to let the word be an instrumental part of your life, not just an aside.

We also join in singing the praises of God. We do this by using psalms, hymn, and other spiritual songs. These works of poetry set to music, lift up our souls and bring vivid pictures of God and his grace. And we sing this music not because our parents force us to. Or because that is the song the pastor picked for the day But rather we

sing praises to God and make music to him out of love and thanks.
We can't help but burst into song when we remember the love he has
for us. From deep down in our heart we give God songs of thanks.
We proclaim to everyone the reason for Christmas.

We go to church not just on Christmas and Easter, but all year long.
And when we do this we remind others that they should be doing the
same. We teach and admonish them at the same time. We teach our
children the way they should go about their lives. We admonish those
who skip. Every time we go to worship, or read the Bible, or attend a
Bible class, we are a silent witness to Christ. We are showing others
that Christ is important to us.

You are showing others that he is more important than going to church
more than once or twice a year. That you have the Spirit of
forgiveness not just in late December. But all year long. That you
treasure the forgiveness that he won for you. That you have peace
knowing that God was born to save you from your sins. And this will
remind others about the peace of Christmas. Seeing you in the Word
will remind them why the Word is so important. They will recall why
God was born in the first place and what that baby would go on to do.
And they too will have peace.

So everything we do, from going to church, to reading our Bible, to
being kind and considerate if for Christ. As Paul says in verse 17,
**whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of
the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** We
live for Christ because Christ was born for us. We strive to obey his
commands out of love and thanks for him. And when we do this we
not only give thanks to God, but we are serving as witnesses to his
love. We show love to others so that they may know Christ as well.

For us, Christmas has not ended. We live in the Spirit of Christmas all
year long. For God was born for us and God chose us to be his own
and to spread his word. So we strive to live in the Spirit of Christmas
by obeying God and when we fail we know that Christ didn't fail. His
life means that his birth is important all year long. And so we always
live in the Spirit of Christmas. Amen.