

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. (NIV84)

Theme: Live under the influence

1. Of the peace of Christ.
2. Of the Word of Christ.

Living under the influence isn't typically a good thing. Usually this means someone was driving while drunk or was high on one drug or another. But it's not just drugs or alcohol that influence people. People influence people. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, **Bad company corrupts good character.** There have been countless times when a seemingly good teenager started hanging out with the wrong crowd and he began to do things he wouldn't have otherwise.

But this isn't just a problem with teenagers. It is a problem with each and every one of us. We live in a sinful world. We live among sinners. Sin is all around us. We read magazines, watch tv and movies, and look at the internet. **Bad company corrupts good character.**

But the opposite is also true. Good influences bad. God's Word influences us sinners to live as Christians. So today we are encouraged to live under the influence of the peace of Christ and the Word of Christ.

At the beginning of our text Paul calls upon us to live as Christians, **As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with**

compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Here Paul lists seven virtues. Seven characteristics or qualities of a Christian. These are characteristics that should describe every Christian. Paul tells us to clothe ourselves with these virtues. Put them on; let people see them as they can see your clothes. At all time and all places, wear these virtues. The first is compassion—A compassionate feeling toward those in need. Not being cold hearted but sympathizing and empathizing with others. Kindness comes next. The word really means uprightness—doing what is right in your relationships to others. Treating someone as you want to be treated.

The third is humility. Not gloating or bragging about yourself. But lift others up. Gentleness is the fourth. Not dealing harshly with others. Next comes patience. Instead of becoming upset and yelling at others when they don't do what we want them to do, we stay calm and encourage them. Bear with each other. This means to put up with others—not getting upset or frustrated at their mistakes or personalities. The seventh characteristic of a Christian is forgiveness. Forgiving others when they sin against you. Not holding them to their sin, no matter what they did.

Paul continues, **over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.** Love covers over all of these virtues. It is the greatest virtue one could have. If we love everyone then we'd always be kind, compassionate, forgiving, and so on. We talked about love last week. As Christians we don't pick and choose who we love. Rather we love all people everywhere. We even love those who don't love us, and may even mistreat us.

Do you display these seven virtues at all times? Do love everyone at all times? Sadly, the answer is often, "no." Instead of acting like part of the elect we act like the world around us. **Bad company corrupts good character.** Now, first things first, we are bad by nature. We are horrible miserable sinners who often sin against God—we can and do corrupt ourselves without any pushing from the world. But our New man fights against the sinful nature—striving to obey God's Word. And even though we are Christians, we are often influenced by the world.

Sin is all around us. We hang out with, work with, communicate with sinners every day. Sin is what we see everyday at work, on tv, the internet, books and magazines, and so on. We become numb to sin. And soon we join in that sin. So Christian virtues such as compassion, gentleness, and patience are gone. They are replaced by irritation, intolerance, and impenitence. We hang out with the world and we are influenced by the world so we often behave like the world. Our excuse is often the same as the kid who gets caught cheating on a test or the teenager who gets caught drinking, “it’s no big deal, everyone’s doing it.”

But Christians aren’t everyone else. We don’t act like unbelievers. We know the love of Christ. And the peace that his love brings. The love of Christ is what led him to come down to this earth. To live among sinners in a sin-filled world. It led him to give up his life on the cross. To take our sins upon himself. And give us his perfect life. It was his love that led him to rise from the dead three days later. And to send his Holy Spirit to work faith into our hearts so that we may receive everything he has won for us.

Because of the love of Christ, we now have peace. We have the peace of forgiveness. We don’t have to worry about our sins. They will never return to us to haunt us. They can never condemn us. We have peace because we have been set free from our sins. We have peace of mind because we will live even though we die. Unbelievers don’t know that peace. And so they don’t live in peace, but hostility. Let that peace of Christ dwell in you richly. As you deal with others, let that peace shine.

But we don’t just live under the influence of the peace of Christ, but also the Word of Christ.

That’s what Paul tells us to do. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.** There are many ways to let Christ’s Word dwell in us richly. It starts with worshiping him. On a regular basis. We let God’s Word dwell in us richly. Richly doesn’t mean showing up when we’ve got nothing else to do on a Sunday morning. Richly doesn’t mean to come at your leisure, to come only when you want to. Richly also means more than going to church once a week. It means studying God’s word, making use of the means of grace, attending Bible class, and so

on. Richly means God’s Word dwells completely and fully in us. It means that our whole lives—everything we do is focused on God and his Word.

In our gospel for today Jesus taught Martha about the one thing needed. The one thing we need in this life is the gospel. To sit at Jesus feet and listen to his Word is all we need. It’s more important than anything else. Martha was preparing her house and a meal for the Lord. It was a great and noble task. Yet it wasn’t needed. It wasn’t as important as listening to the Word of God.

But often we act as if isn’t not needed. At least not as much as other things. It’s not needed as much as sleep. Or relaxation. It’s not needed as much as friends and family. Or your favorite hobby. Too often making more money so that we can buy more things is more needed than God’s Word. At other times, nothing else is needed—we just don’t need God’s Word. As a result we don’t worship regularly. We only come when it fits into our schedule—when we’ve got nothing else to do. It seems that’s it’s rare that we will open up the Bible or a devotional book and read from it every day. You just don’t have the time because other things are needed, such as watching your favorite tv show, checking facebook, or texting with your friends.

There are things we want—such as cars, phones, internet, tv, and so on. Those things are not needed. Then there are things we need to live, like food, water, shelter, and clothes. We do need just a small amount of these things to live. Yet these things aren’t needed for eternal life. The Word is the only thing we need for that.

God also gives us his sacraments. Today Bailey was welcomed into God’s family through the waters of baptism. Her sins were washed away and she was clothed with the righteousness of Christ. The Holy Spirit also worked faith into her heart. But her baptism will do no good if she is not connected to the Word on a regular basis. The faith just given to her would be lost. In the Lord’s Supper Jesus gives us the forgiveness of sins. He also strengthens our faith as we receive his true body and blood. But what would it be without the Word which teaches us what the Lord’s Supper is and does? Without the Word the Lord’s Supper and baptism are nothing—just wine and bread and just plain water. But their power comes in their connection to God’s power and promises. So the Word is the one thing needed.

The Word is the one thing needful because it gives and maintains faith. It alone tells us about Christ and his love. Through it we have the peace of forgiveness that only Christ can give. And then we show this peace to others. So being in this Word leads us to show love to others—just as God showed love to us. The more we are in the Word the more act like Christians. The more we are in the Word the more we display those seven Christian virtues. It improves our lives of sanctification. That is a side effect of faith. It's just one of the many reasons to get in the Word as often as you can.

So, **Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.** Start by worshiping regularly. As Paul continues, **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.** We teach and admonish other Christians using God's Word—the law and the gospel. Our worship services do just that. Through the hymns we sing, the psalm of the day, and other spiritual songs of the liturgy we teach and admonish each other. And when we teach and admonish one another, that means that not only are we attending worship regularly and richly, but others are doing the same. Let the Word of Christ dwell richly not just in you, but also in others. Lead and encourage others to join you in the worship and praise of our Lord. After all, it is the one thing needed.

Bad company corrupts good character. So put off the bad and be influenced by the good. Don't be influenced by the world and live a life of hostility and irritation. Live your life under the influence of the peace of forgiveness and the Word of God. Let the Word dwell in you richly—weekly, daily, and every hour. And as the Word dwells in you so will the peace of forgiveness. Amen.