

Immersed in the Living Word (Colossians 3:16-17)

All Paul's letters follow the same pattern. They always begins with a discussion of doctrine. What is it that we should believe about the Gospel? About God? About Jesus? Why should we believe it? Colossians is typical. The first two chapters are completely doctrinal; Paul tells us who Jesus is and what He has accomplished on our behalf.

But then, with Chapter 3, he gets practical. What are the implications of these doctrinal truths for our lives? This, too, is typical of all the Pauline letters. And here in Colossians, he teaches us that we need to keep our minds focused on things above. We need to stop obsessing about the stuff and junk of this world, because this world is passing away. In salvation, you are raised with Christ. You are no longer a citizen of this world; you are a child of the King. And you have an inheritance in heaven. So we need to act accordingly. Put off the sinful attitudes and actions of this world and put on those characteristics that glorify Christ.

We continue with that discussion this morning. What does a life that is sanctified by Jesus Christ look like? More importantly, how do we get there? What can we do to repent of our natural, our fleshly, our sinful tendencies? How do we live a life that truly exalts our Lord and Savior?

This morning, we come to verse 16, and it is most certainly profound. We need to pay close attention. And my prayer is that for you, 2016 will be a year in which you wholeheartedly embrace these principles. I'm praying it will be true for me as well.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:16-17)

Let's take a closer look at the very first phrase, because I think it is absolutely key to the whole teaching.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you ... (Colossians 3:16a)

The word of Christ is the Gospel. It is the good news of Jesus Christ and it is codified for us in this Bible. We are to let the Word dwell in us.

Now there are many folks who let the word of God visit from time to time. Maybe you let it drop by for 30 to 40 minutes on Sunday morning, or you let it check in during your daily devotions. You say, "Hi, how are you; have a nice day." And then you go your own way. But honestly, allowing the Bible to visit like some inconvenient relative is not at all what we are commanded to do.

The Greek word translated "dwell" literally means to inhabit. It means to take up residence in a house and not just in a spare bedroom somewhere. We are to let the word of Christ move in and take over, give it the run of the place, rearrange the furniture, paint the walls. In other words, we need to allow the Word to saturate our lives.

The Word is to dwell in us *richly*. Copiously. Abundantly. To the greatest extent possible. In order to do that, you need to commit yourself to it. You need to take advantage of every opportunity to learn more about it. It needs to have the highest priority. Listening to the word preached on Sunday morning is a very good starting point.

*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased **God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.** (1 Corinthians 1:21)*

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

It is commendable that you are here this morning listening to me. My job is to ...

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:2)

And the methodology I use is given by scripture: I am to read distinctly from the word, give the sense, and to explain the meaning. (Nehemiah 8:8) I take this charge very seriously because I know that as a teacher, I will receive a stricter judgment. (James 3:1) But you also need to be diligent in checking me out. You need to be like the Bereans ...

... in that [you receive] the word with all readiness, and [search] the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things [are] so. (Acts 17:11)

- i. Don't be ... tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, (Ephesians 4:14)

At this time in history, God has blessed us with an unprecedented opportunity to learn what the Bible says and what it means. Yet, among professing Christians in the west, Biblical literacy is at an all-time low. Most Christians know far more about their favorite sports team. Or maybe their favorite reality show.

Coming to Sunday morning worship is a good start, but you need to be in your Bible every day. You need to get involved in a Bible study. And let me just say, you need to take advantage of the tremendous opportunity presented by the Contender's Discipleship Initiative. We'll be starting the New Testament Survey course in March, Lord willing. I'm praying for an overwhelming response from our congregation. Let us become a people who are absolutely saturated by the Word of Christ!

Let's finish this first phrase now.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly **in all wisdom,** (Colossians 3:16)*

Wisdom certainly is a valuable commodity. Wisdom is the consistent exercise of good judgment. Too often, we get good judgment from bad judgment, but we don't have to. This Book will lead us to Godly wisdom, not the wisdom of the world, which is antithetical to the wisdom of God.

In First Corinthians, Paul writes the following:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

God's wisdom is Spiritually discerned. The truth of God's word is spiritually discerned. James tells us what we need to do:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)

Paul advises us to let the word dwell richly within us. James advises us to pray. The two go together to produce godly wisdom..

Every time you open this Book, you need to ask God to guide you. You need to pray that the Holy Spirit would guide you into all truth. You need to ask Him to illuminate God's word for you. He wants to do it. God will give liberally and without reproach. But you need to trust Him. You need to believe He will do what He said He will do.

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8)

Oh, and by the way, it's okay to pray for the faith to believe too! Are you having trouble trusting the promises of God? Pray for more faith.

Okay, I've spent over half my time expositing less than half the first verse. But this is key: You need to pray, because that is how you communicate with God. Then you need to study the Bible because that is His primary means of communicating with you. Do not expect God to speak with you if you are unwilling to read His book!

And when you are saturated by the word of Christ, let it come out. In fact if you are saturated with the Word of Christ, you won't be able to keep it in. It's way too wonderful to keep it bottled up. When you experience the fullness of Christ's glory, you will explode if you don't let it out.

And so, you teach and admonish one another ...

... in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)

Paul is certainly talking about corporate worship but I believe this goes even beyond corporate worship. If the word of Christ is dwelling within you, it will dominate everything in your life. It will become your lifestyle. In a real and profound way, your life will be a song of praise to the Lamb of God!

Paul mentions psalms. We have a book of Psalms in our Bible. These are ancient songs of Praise – 150 of them. They were used and sung in worship. Many were written by David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. And let me just speak as a musician here: I'll bet he was a MONSTER on the lyre!

Some of the psalms are pretty long; Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the whole Bible. But others are really short ... like 117:

Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD! (Psalms 117:1-2)

These are songs that glorify God! The word Psalm actually means "praise".

Paul also mentions Hymns. Hymns are also songs of praise to God. Unlike psalms, though, they are not necessarily written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They are not part of Scripture, although they often include passages of scripture. At their best they are doctrinally rich and convey God's truth in a powerful way. Throughout the centuries, these hymns have been incredibly useful in teaching, as so many people were not able to read on their own. They have been part of Church worship from the very beginning; Jesus and His

disciples sang a hymn before they departed for Gethsemane after the last supper. (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26)

A Spiritual song could refer to any song with a spiritual content. A lot of our modern praise choruses probably fit into this category. But anybody can make up and sing a spiritual song. I've written a few. None of them will be chart-busting hits but a lot of them are very meaningful to me. They are songs I sing to my God.

You are my Lord and You're my God
You are my Strength and You're my King
You are my Rock and you're my Shield
You are my Hope my Everything

It's certainly okay to sing these songs to God privately. But we are also supposed to speak to one another. When we sing as a congregation, you have no idea how uplifting it can be to a brother or a sister who happens to be struggling spiritually. They might be in a dark, dark place. They might not even want to worship. They might not even want to be here. But God brought them here and when songs of praise are lifted up by the saints of God, their spirits are lifted along with them.

So I don't care how poorly you think you sing. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord and let Him turn it into heavenly music!

Sing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)

Finally, we come to verse 17:

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

If you allow the word of Christ to dwell richly inside you, everything you do, everything you say will be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. Everything will be done for Him. I'm convinced this is exactly what Paul means when he writes to the Romans:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

Your spiritual worship. Your life, your whole life, needs to be lived as an act of worship because ...

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12)

Jesus deserves it! Jesus deserves your worship! You were without hope in this world, a cosmic traitor heading for an eternity of torment in Hell. But Jesus took the hit for you. He died on that cross so you can live. He was raised from the dead so you can have a forever relationship with Him and all He asks of you is that you just believe, that you believe He is your Lord, that He was raised from the dead. That's all it takes to be saved.

Since Jesus has done so much for us, don't you think we should say thank you once in a while?

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)