

Called to a life of worship

Colossians 3:15-17

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When people hear the word Christian, what do you think comes to mind? Is it positive or negative? Do they think of the Crusades, or maybe Mother Teresa? Or maybe a certain denomination, or political party? Or maybe they think of the good or bad example of the Christians that they have known. Our world today is ignorant of what Christ was really like, and that makes it even more difficult to point them towards Him. In these verses Paul is telling the Colossians to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, but first he must guide us through some verses that explain how it is even possible. Let's start first by looking back.

In the previous verses in Colossians 3, Paul had begun by reminding the believers in Colossae that they have been raised with Christ and have died to this world. Because of this they should turn their full attention and devotion to the things above, not on earthly things.

Paul then instructed them to put off the old self, including sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk and lying. In addition, they were to put on the new self, which included things such as compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. Paul ended by writing, ***“And above all of these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”***

At salvation the Holy Spirit had poured God's love into their hearts (Romans 5:5). Paul's words literally meant an outer robe that would bring together and protect all that had already been put on. This was not just love in the individual's life to hold together all the characteristics of Christ which they had “put on”. It was also love that they put on corporately over the congregation to unite them and bind them together as well. Without love, all of these good actions would be nothing more than an act, proper etiquette rooted in hypocrisy. It was only as these godly characteristics overflowed from hearts of love that they would truly be putting on Christ.

With this all now in place, Paul continued with these words:

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

For the Greeks, the word for peace meant a bond, an agreement, a peace treaty, an official way of being reconciled one to another. You might say that before we put our faith in Jesus Christ we were at war with God. Romans 5:10 even describes it in these words, ***“For if while we were enemies we***

were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." We now have peace with God because we have formed a spiritual peace treaty, a truce, through Jesus. Our debt has been paid. Our sin has been forgiven. We are no longer strangers, foreigners and adversaries of God. We now have peace with God through Christ.

For the Hebrews, the idea of peace centered more around an attitude of peace, of rest, of security, of *shalom*. A sense that things were as they were meant to be. Just as a child rests in a parent's arms, they found peace in God.

When we talk of peace, we often bring together both ideas. There is the truth of having been made right with God, and this reality stirs within us a sense of peace, security, confidence and rest in the presence of God.

We have received peace through Christ. In John 14:27 Jesus says, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*

Paul did not command them to create peace, but to yield to it. Christ is peace and He now dwelt within them. They were to stop resisting it. Stop fending for themselves. Stop worrying as if they had no God. Stop carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders as if they could truly manage it anyway. There was to be a peace within them which brought about a peace between them.

This peace of Christ was to rule their hearts. This word "rule" is an interesting word. It is the same word as umpire, referee, or *Árbitro*. As the peace of Christ governed their lives, it would guide them as they "chose between" what was right teaching and wrong teaching, right living and wrong living. They were to yield to peace and give it rule in their hearts. Scripture teaches that the heart is the center of who we are. Proverbs 4:23 tells us, *"Guard your hearts for it is the wellspring of life."* Everything that comes out of us, attitudes, desires, words, and thoughts, originate in our hearts.

The peace of Christ was to have final word on all of life that flowed from their hearts. Their decisions were now to be based on the fact that they were on the same side as Christ. They were to yield to the Spirit's leading and the peace that was present, as choices were being made. Their emotions, thoughts and desires were to be yielded to and hemmed in by the peace of God.

The peace of Christ was both a position and an experience, a state of being and a sense of the spirit, a fact and a feeling. There was an objectivity to making decisions as one who was now aligned with and at peace with Christ. There was also a subjectivity to it as one submitted to the will and the Word of Christ, as they made choices based on the peace they felt about it.

Philippians 4 talks of the peace of God that transcends all understanding as we present our requests to God in prayer. Galatians 5:22 talks of peace which is a fruit of walking with the Spirit. In Isaiah 26:3 we read that, *"You, (God) will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."* As they yielded to the peace of Christ that had been given to them, it would govern their hearts and lead them in the ways of Christ.

This peace of Christ within them would then bring peace amongst them. That was Paul's idea of the body, working together under the headship of Christ. As the same peace of Christ was active in each of their lives, they would be brought together to live at peace with Christ and each other. Regardless

of their differences and diversity, and even in the midst of their imperfections, they had been called to this peace of Christ.

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Once again, we see the word “let”. Paul is instructing them to yield to the word of Christ, to the truth of God in Christ. To yield to the word of Christ they must first expose themselves to it, but Paul is asking for even more. They were to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly. The word “dwell” here is translated “to feel at home”. They were to let the word of Christ dwell in them to such a degree that it felt at home to them, and they felt at home with it. They were to be a welcoming presence, a fertile soil, a hospitable host, to the word of Christ. Some reject the word of Christ. Others treat it as a temporary guest when it is desirable, but they were to take the word of Christ into their lives to permanently dwell with them. In this way the Word would not just be a source of verses to memorize, or advice when they had a problem, but the word of Christ would be an ongoing, daily source of life, and overflowing blessing for them.

As the word of Christ dwelt richly in them the Colossians were to teach and admonish one another. Teaching was the idea of not just passing on information, but “causing each other to learn and to know”. Their teaching was not completed until the others had learned and applied the word of Christ to their lives. We see a similar idea in the “Great Commission” passage in Matthew 28:19-20, where Jesus said:

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

They were to make disciples, ***“teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*** They were not to just teach in a way that resulted in greater knowledge. They were to teach in such a way that resulted in obedience. That is what Paul is urging the Colossians to in this passage. They were to teach the word of Christ to the point of life change.

They were also to admonish one another in all wisdom. Admonish was to warn of danger and consequences if the word of Christ was neglected or disregarded.

We must also note that the teaching and admonishing was to be done by and for ***“one another”***. Not just by the pastor or Bible study teacher or the ministry team leader. They all were to minister the Word of God to “one another”. As they shared life together, they were to share the truths of God with others in every situation. Whether in a hospital waiting room, at a picnic table in the park, a commute to work, or at lunch with a friend, they and we, are to be people who are knowledgeable of and comfortable enough with God’s Word that we can naturally speak it to others. The word of Christ is to be “at home” in us to the point that it will be on the tip of our tongues, ready to be used to teach and admonish one another.

This does not mean that we only talk about spiritual things. We can still freely converse about sports, the news, our children, or the many other topics that come up in normal conversation, but what we say, how we think, how we relate to others should definitely be seasoned by our love for Christ and

our understanding of the world through the lens of the word of Christ. If people are around us long enough, they should be able to tell that we are Christian.

As the word of Christ dwelt in the lives of the Colossians, it was to result in teaching and admonishing, but also in music. Music can encourage, convict, calm, teach, reveal and give voice to joy and adoration. In the words of Martin Luther:

“The gift of language combined with the gift of song was given to man that he should proclaim the Word of God through music.”

Just as teaching was to be used to minister God’s Word to one another, so was music.

In the *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary on the Whole Bible*, it tells how TERTULLIAN [*Apology*, 39], an early Christian author from Carthage in 190 A.D., “recorded that at the love-feasts (...) according as any had the power, whether by his remembrance of Scripture, or by his powers of composition, he used to be invited to sing praises to God for the common good.” This was not just singing from memory, but creating songs of worship in the moment.

Paul mentions here the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Psalms were the divinely inspired songs that we find in scriptures, especially in the book of Psalms. Hymns were songs that were written for the church to sing together in worship. Spiritual songs were a more general category that could even include individuals bursting out in song spontaneously, creating the spiritual song as it came to mind at the moment.

This list was not given to restrict us to three categories of music, but to communicate the overflow of worship through various types of song as the word of Christ dwells in us richly. As we read in Psalm 40:3, *“He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.”* It was a God-given desire to worship Christ through song. Ephesians 5:18 even describes this singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs as coming from one’s being filled with the Spirit.

God created music and man’s ability to express himself through it. There are many great musicians and styles of music in our world, but one of the great tragedies is those of great ability who sing the praises of that which does not matter.

As J.S. Bach wrote, “The final aim and reason of all music is nothing other than the glorification of God and the refreshment of the spirit.”

Through spiritual music the word of Christ comes to dwell more deeply in us. It is the natural overflow of the previous verses, the ongoing renewing of the mind, where we are drawn into a greater understanding of the indwelling of Christ, which results in songs of worship, an attitude of worship, and a life of worship.

¹⁷ 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.

In verses 1-4, Paul reminded the Colossians of their new life in Christ and their need to set their minds on the things above. Because of this, Paul instructed them, in verses 5-14, to put off the old self with its practices and to put on their new self, which is Christ. In verses 15-16, Paul has called

them to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts and the word of Christ dwell in their hearts. With all of this in mind his listeners are now prepared to take hold of this verse, verse 17.

This is a call to a life of worship. Not worship just through listening to a teaching or singing a song, but through the way that we live. Worship is a lifestyle. It is the everyday God-ward direction of our lives.

Paul calls us to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. In the Bible times, “name” was synonymous with one’s identity and character. It was more than just how someone was called or what they wrote on their name tag. We see it in the Old Testament, when Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, which meant father; or in the New Testament, when Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter, which meant rock. We see it in the many names that are ascribed to God and Jesus Christ throughout scripture. Your name is who you are.

In Philippians 2 we read:

“⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

We are to live in a way that is in agreement with the name and the character of Christ, giving his name glory by the way that we live, as we wear His name as Christians.

As one father once said as he was leaving his son to attend university in a distant city: “Don’t take our family name any place that I would not take it. Do not do with our family name anything I would not do with it. Do not use our family name in any way that I would not use it.” That is Paul’s idea. We are to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Here Paul does not separate secular and sacred, as if worship is a compartment of our lives. Worship encompasses all of our lives. *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.”* Whether we are at work, at play or at home, we are to do everything in the name of the Lord.

In that way, our lives give testimony to Christ as we live as an example of Him.

In each of these verses we see a similar phrase. In verse 15 it says, *“And be thankful.”* In verse 16 it says, *“with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”* In verse 17 it says, *“giving thanks to the God the Father through Him.”* Woven all the way through this passage is the idea of thankfulness.

Now we know that Paul was a man of suffering. He had experienced many challenges and trials in his life, yet he still urged the Colossians to be thankful. So, what was Paul’s secret? The gospel. Paul had been an enemy of God, even to the point of persecuting Christ’s followers. If Paul had continued on this path, his penalty would have been eternal death, separated from God forever. Paul had been a chief of sinners, yet Jesus called to Paul, forgave him, and gave him eternal life.

Romans 6:23 helps us understand the idea better: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* In this one verse we find a summary of the entire gospel. We all have sinned against a holy God (Romans 3:23). Because of this, His wrath was upon us and we were supposed to be separated from God forever, an eternal death in hell. *“But God shows his love*

for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Christ took upon Himself our sins, dying in our place. The penalty for sin has been paid. Because of this, all who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ will be saved.

As children of God we should live in this position of spiritual humility and indebtedness for God’s grace for the rest of our lives. We should also have a sense of gratitude that is untouchable. A sense of gratitude that permeates every area of our lives.

When we forget the gospel we are likely to lose our sense of continuous gratitude. We will complain about our immediate difficulties and forget the ongoing, eternal umbrella of blessing under which we live. We will be drawn back to the old self instead of putting on the new self. As we remember the gospel on a daily basis, we will be convinced again of the goodness of God, the purposes of God and the love of God.

Today, we are joining with the believers around the world and throughout the centuries who continue to remember the gospel through the observance of the Lord’s Supper. It is a tangible way to remember all that Christ has done for us. As we take the bread and drink the juice, may gratitude take root in our hearts as we face life one day at a time. May the gift of salvation dwarf our other unmet desires and drive us towards an ongoing contentment, knowing that even if we have been treated badly, or if our bank account is low, or if we are sick, or if life is not yet what we have planned, that there is a peace and a gratitude in our hearts because of the ongoing, eternal, undeserved blessing that we have found in Jesus.

Discussion questions:

1. What was most interesting to you in this sermon?
2. In what kind of life situations do people most often seem to lose the “peace” of God?
3. As Christians what can we do to help the peace of Christ “rule” in our hearts?
4. What might be happening if a Christian knows a lot about God’s Word, but does not obey it? How might we avoid that?
5. What could a Christian do to make the word of Christ “feel more at home” in their life?
6. We are to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. What might that look like this week?
7. How can reviewing the gospel, daily, help us be thankful in all things?
8. What do you think God wants you to remember from this sermon? What does He want you to do about it?
9. How can we help you with that?