

God-Glorifying Grace

Colossians 3:16–17

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 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.** 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.**

PRAY

The Apostles were gifted and assigned the incredible privilege of establishing the structure of the church of the Lord Jesus. The church is built on the revealed truth the Jesus Christ is Lord, and He is the head of the body, the church. The church, herself, was a mystery hidden from previous generations, but has now “been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs [with Jews], members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” (Ephesians 3:5b–6) There had been no category for this type of religious unity. There was no category for this kind of ethnic unity. There was no category this type of unity, period. The church is a unique body created in the redemptive plan of God to gain what God’s Kingdom was to be from the beginning. It doesn’t look like anything else, because there is nothing in the fallen rebellious world that has any concept of what the Kingdom of God looks like. It is unique. That is why I contemplated entitling this sermon, **Weirdos**, because that captures the way the watching world perceived followers of Christ in the 1st Century. If they do not perceive the 21st century

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church as weirdos, that is commentary on the 21st church. It doesn't suggest the world has come around to our way of thinking. Rather it suggests we have been conformed to the image of the world.

The put-offs and put-ons of the previous verses where our old nature of sexual corruption and self-advancing anger and pride ran counter to the culture then, and certainly run counter to the culture now. So we do well to note that the commands given in these verses are not just improvements on a worldly framework — as though moral improvement could be made apart from a heart that turns from sin to Christ... These commands call forth fruit of Christ-like character and counter-cultural obedience.

The instructions are life-giving graces that we exercise and experience in the context of the church — in the one another-ness of our lives put together by the Spirit of Christ as a local body of believers. These one-another graces are integral to Christian living, growth, godliness, Christlikeness, holiness... whatever maturity words you want to use. Apart from the one-another aspect of the gathered church, we cut off ourselves from the fullness of the common grace that God pours out to cause Christians to live, flourish, and grow in wisdom and knowledge of the Lord. Put another way, it is not possible for you to say you are fine on your own, reading your bible, and worshiping in your own way apart from the church or “organized religion,” whatever that means. Jesus organized his church to be together, to grow together, to worship together, to live missionally together, to serve and to love together. That's his design, and he didn't ask our approval, or give us authority to tweak it. When we don't follow his ways, we are less, we are spiritually impoverished, more vulnerable to deception and attack, and we are disobedient.

So let's see and savor the goodness and grace God has purposed for us in our lives together in this unique, other-worldly, counter-cultural body of his, and glorify God in our obedience to his instruction.

v. 16 — Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. The foundation of our lives together, the standard for our growth, the source of wisdom for our lives — that is, knowing how to live lives that honor God and reflect his character — the orientation for our affections is the word of Christ. It is what we are to proclaim — to *preach* — to teach, to read, to study, to memorize, to meditate on, and to obey. We are to do these things in a manner that is clear that it is God's word, not someone's opinion, or some suggestion. God's word is his revealed will that gives light to eyes — that is, it helps us to see, know, and understand truth — and it is life to our souls.

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Moses' final sermon — his final instructions for God's people as they about to enter the Promised Land is essentially the book of Deuteronomy. The climax of the sermon is in chapter 30, and guess what the focus and the pinnacle of all their instruction is? God's word! He describes God's word as commandments, "his ways," statutes, and rules. It is to govern our choices, our behavior, our worship, and our affections. To obey God's word is to choose life. To resist it is to choose cursing and death.

Deuteronomy 30:15–20a — ¹⁵“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore **choose life**, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life...

Jesus himself taught about the importance of God's word in **Matthew 4**: “Man shall not live by bread alone...” but by what? Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The word of Christ in **v. 16** includes not just his teachings and sermons, but the whole bible. All of his word is to dwell in us, remain in us, make its home in us. And it is to dwell in us **richly**. Extravagantly. [Illustration of Kevin's offer of steak to my plate of bacon and cheese cubes]

God's word is not to be an *also-ran* on a list of daily activities. It is to abide in us in such a way that it is the unmistakable object of our delight. A chapter of Proverbs a day is good, but that is not what is meant here. God's word is to find a wide place in our lives, and a deep place in our lives. It is to be the gravitational center of the how we think, live, love, and understand our God and our world.

If gaming, social media, videos, entertainment, work, music, chores, books, conversations, or tidily winks occupy our lives such that we get to the end of the day and say, “I didn't have time to spend in God's word today, then what is dwelling in us richly is not the word of Christ, and we are hoping that those things will do what they cannot do: give life and blessing. What **will** give life and blessing is being omitted. Govern your life, control your schedule, subject the options you have to make the word of God a priority. His word is our life and it is to dwell in us richly, else we will not experience victory

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over the power of sin, growth in faith, full usefulness to the King, and a well-spent life that experiences reward and blessing forever in the New Creation. Don't be dulled by the stuff of the world.

And what is meant by "you?" Let the word of Christ dwell in *you*? Does he mean *you*, the individual, or does he mean *you*, the church? Yes! We can read it both ways! God's word is not only to dwell in my life individually, but it is to dwell in our one-another lives together as the church. It must be central in worship, in fellowship, in groups, in teaching, in singing... Let's be saturated with God's word together and apart. The context of God's word dwelling in us shapes the instructions that follow.

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...

There are 2 main participles, 2 verb commands that are to shape the way we live and serve together as the body of Christ. Before we get to the commands, let's notice how they are to be carried out. Who is doing these things? Not just the pastors and elders — though pastor/elders must be gifted as teachers. These commands are to be carried out by everyone in the body.

We all do these things to one another. So since we are to be doing these to one another, if we had no other command about being together to serve and love and worship and pray as God's people... If we didn't have the command to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together... Based on this one passage, is it possible to be in obedience to the word of God and not plunge in together with the people of God on a regular basis? No, of course not. The body of Christ is just that — one body. And his body loves and serves other members of the body in obedience to his word that dwells in us individually and corporately. Now, let's see what we are to do to one another.

1. We are to teach and admonish one another.

Because the word of Christ is dwelling in us, because we are all learning, and memorizing, and meditating and applying God's word, we are all gaining wisdom and insight into God's ways in our lives individually that we are to share to with others in the body of Christ. This forever undoes any notion that knowledge of the things of God is merely an intellectual pursuit that informs the mind but is exempt from practical expression in the body. We are to be learning — we are to love the Lord with all our minds — and God's word is to teach us as it dwells in us. But we are also to be teaching others. This is the essence of discipleship. Pastors are not the sole disciplers in the church. We are all

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disciples and disciplers, or disciple-makers. Realize this is not a new idea from Paul as he laying the foundations of the church. Where have we heard this before?

Matthew 28:19 — Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...

[is that a commission to pastors only? Who is under that commission?] [The nuts of bolts of making disciples is fleshed out:] ... 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.

Note that Jesus links teaching and discipleship, and it is a global context. Sometimes I think I miss some aspects of the Great Commission by thinking it is something we do “over there.” Are we to make disciples “over there?” Yes! But over here, too! In fact, the verb “go” could be translated as *you are going*. In other words, the day in, day out orientation of our lives is to be making disciples as we walk, as we talk, as we eat, when we get up and go... and we are to go, not just to our classes or jobs, but we are to orient our lives to also go to the nations. Jesus captures the global aspect of discipleship. Paul captures the essential first step, if you will: We are to be discipling one another day in, day out, as we go, so that we are grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God’s word and take it to the nations.

Next week we are beginning a ramped up emphasis on discipleship that we pray will form replicating model of teaching and admonishing one another for generations to come. Steve, Joe, Lois, Carol, and others, and I are going to be one-anothering in regular life-on-life meetings where we impart what we have learned as God’s word has shaped us. If you would like to be included in that but haven’t been contacted, let us know, and we will see if we can make the schedule work.

These one-on-one relationships are not the only way to put teaching and admonishing one another in place, but they are a good way to do it. Our community groups begin next week, and they should be rich, fertile ground for having the word of Christ dwell in us richly, and out of that to teach and admonish one another as we all move forward, make progress in holiness and mission, until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. In our conversations, our texting, our work together, let’s develop and embrace a habit of sharing scripture with each other. If you aren’t sure how to do that, simply share the week’s memory verse with someone and ask them how they are doing. That helps us dwell in the word of Christ, and shapes the way we think and talk. What kind of impact could be made on our city if the people of God in Wichita all had the word of God on their lips wherever they went? Conversations would change. Hearts may be pierced, God’s wisdom heard.

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And the glory of God would be declared throughout this City. Beloved, let's not let our hearts and minds wiggle out from under this first command: Clothed with love, having the word of Christ richly dwelling in us, let's obey the life-giving, grace-filled command to teach each other what we are learning of God's word and spur one another on to love and good deeds. And let's be teachable in the process.

So the first participle is teaching and admonishing. The cerebral among us are happy with that. But the Gospel grasps, speaks to, and unifies the whole person using all aspects of God's gifts.

The second participle commands the use of not just words, but the gift of music. **Sing to one another.**

Three quick observations about the command to sing to one another:

1. Music is not limited to worship. We may tend to think of music for its excellent vertical use, if you will — directed up toward God, declaring his praise, singing of his glory. And God's gift of music does this very well. But it is not the only way music is to be used. There is a value in music for the horizontal — in our one-another-ness — that helps us to grow in knowledge and wisdom. Music uses a different part of the brain that helps us learn and recall. For instance, finish this children's hymn: Je-sus [loves me]. Music is a gift that we are to embrace and use with one another.

2. He lists 3 broad categories: Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. This is not a definitive list of all types of songs, nor is it regulative in the sense that only these types can be used. But it provides a starting place of what we are to use for worship and one-another discipling and encouraging.

- Psalms are the word of God, obviously, and, coming under fresh instruction from this passage, we are going to be expanding our repertoire of Psalms set to music in the days ahead. So be prepared as Joe teaches us some new Psalms in the days immediately ahead.
- Hymns, to the first century church, were probably quotes or near quotes from the teachings of Jesus or the Apostles. Our memory work in Colossians 1 may have served as a hymn of the early church. We are reasonably sure that Philippians 2:5–11 was one of the earliest hymns.
- Spiritual Songs — While Psalms are the word of God, spiritual songs are expressions of people responding to their God. In the 80's we had the rise of "choruses" that were often short-form pieces that expressed worship or truth. "I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice..."

So there is a wide variety of music that is to be used, and the 3rd observation saves us from thinking our favored cultural expression is the only right way to do music.

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3. Paul's focus is on the content of the words, not the style of music. We have little idea of what music sounded like in 1st century Colossae. Paul doesn't comment on it. But he does give direction about the truths that are to form the content of songs. I'm grateful for Joe's care in putting words on our lips that capture the Gospel in what we sing.

We have some growing in Psalms and hymns to do. Let's rejoice that we are bringing ourselves under the authority of Scripture as we reform in this area. Silvia did something like this with Steve's community group last winter as we were all memorizing Psalm 96. She wrote music to the Psalm, and it helped them learn, memorize, and dwell on the word of Christ. Let's endeavor to do more one-another singing in our groups. No one cares what your voice sounds like. Well, almost no one. The point is not your voice. The point is to utilize the resource God has graciously given us for our good.

Giving thanks — The thread that is to run through our lives, the harmonic foundation of teaching, admonishing, and singing, the recurring refrain of our lips is to be thanksgiving. In 3 verses — vvs. 15, 16, and 17, how many times are we instructed to be thankful? 3 times in 3 verses. You have your Thanksgiving journal. Let's fill them up by Thanksgiving, and so also rejoice in placing ourselves joyfully and thankfully under this command to give thanks. It will transform the way we live, and it will transform the way we talk. And thanksgiving can become a vehicles through which we declare God's glory among the nations.

Finally — 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.**

Whatever you do... The transformation of Christ is whole life. We cannot put aspects of our lives in different boxes — this part is God's. That part is mine. This money is God's. That money is mine. This time is God's. That time is mine...

Whatever you do... That's another way of saying in everything you do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. That means to do it for his glory, for the advancement of his Kingdom, and to do it in a way that reflects his holy character.

The Gospel is thoroughly transforming. There is no allowance for marginal Christians, or half-committed Christians. The only Christian the New Testament knows is the Christian who is actively orienting his heartbeats and breaths, and thoughts and desires, and time and money, and relationships

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and gifts to glorify God. How are you doing with that list? And how are you doing with that list in the corporate context of the body of Christ, because Paul is writing this to us as one another.

What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Closing: No fringe saints. Let's submit ourselves to the authority of God's word and be the body of Christ in a one another way. God's grace is here. If we are not obediently living in the one-another aspect of teaching, admonishing, loving, serving, singing of this passage, week in, week out, we are removing ourselves from the place of blessing and grace God has designed the church to be. When we remove ourselves from the place of blessing, that never works out well. I don't know about you, but I need all the grace I can get. Let's take another step forward in usefulness and Christlikeness as we enter year 3 in just a few weeks. For the glory of the Savior.