

The Telos of Church Life

An exposition of Colossians 3:16-17
at West Hills San Jose on March 14, 2021

PASTORAL PRAYER: God we thank you for the incredible privilege of being in union with Christ, to be joined to your eternal people, to be enfolded into your cosmic redemption, and to be reconciled and loved through the gospel. Help us to live from the reality of who we are in Christ, drawing upon the power of your divine life, made available to us through the knowledge of You and Your many precious promises to us.

We pray for all people who do not know you, especially for those in the 10/40 window. Who will be born, live their whole lives, and die without ever hearing the gospel message. We pray that you would raise up missionaries from among their own. We pray that you would reach them through impossible and unpredictable means. I pray that you would bring many to yourself, and that you would engage everyone in the whole church, in the priestly service of the gospel of God, to pray for the muslim nations which violently keep the gospel away. Come in power and save we ask Lord.

Father we remember our many missionaries, would you encourage their hearts in their labor and help them to live close to you. We pray especially for Nathan and Christiana Wells. I pray that you would bless their work as they continue working to translate helpful theological resources into Cambodian, to serve the church's and pastors in that county.

We pray for our country, and for those in authority over us. Grant them wisdom and righteousness to lead, and to enable us to live a quiet life, godly and dignified in everyday, working diligently with our hands that we might have something to share with those in need. We pray for Fatima and the Carew family as she grieves the death of her adoptive father. Would you comfort and console them with your gracious comfort. And now we lift up our own hearts to you. Help us to humble ourselves and listen to Your Word. Help us to consider how we might grow as we listen, and not how our neighbor might grow. Help us to focus on what you are saying to us, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God. In Christ's name, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Well grace and peace West Hills, it is a privilege and a joy to be with you again, gathered together, inside of our church building this morning. For those of you who are visiting, welcome, we are confident that there is a reason God brought you here this morning. **Today we are going to spend some time talking about the goal of church life for each of us as individuals and just as importantly the goal of church life for us as a community.**

In other words, what's the point of participating in the life of a local church? We have been reading Paul's letter to the Colossians where he has set out to articulate and defend the glories of the gospel of Jesus Christ, from those who were seeking to subvert his message. And he has made very clear to us, that what you believe about wisdom, about God, about how you deal with the problem of sin, have direct consequences on how you live. And so Paul has been doing his best to help us clarify our understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done in order to help live rightly. Paul has been helping us learn to fight sin and grow in righteousness. And today Paul is going to bring everything home to our minds and heart...why are we doing all these things? Fighting sin and living uprightly is hard. It takes a lot of effort. Being conformed to

the image of Christ, means changing who we are at some very deep levels, and that is uncomfortable. What will happen if we live rightly? What will happen if we focus as church on fighting sin and growing in holiness? What will happen if we take seriously and do what Paul has said? We will find ourselves getting closer and closer and closer to our TRUE goal in the Christian life. And what goal is that?

MAIN POINT: The goal of holiness is to have more of Christ, in all of life, so be stubbornly thankful

SETTING THE CONTEXT: Please open your bibles to Colossians chapter 3. Today we will be picking up where we left off last week in Paul's description of what church life should look like, given the reality of the gospel. We have been told that if we have been crucified with Christ, we should no longer look to the world for answers on how to grow in holiness and love for God. If we have been raised with Christ then we ought to set our mind on Him and look to Him as our source of true life. If we live with Him, we ought to put to death what is earthly in ourselves, and put on the new which is being renewed after the image of the God who made us. And among those who are focused on doing this, there is no longer any black or white or rich or poor or democrat or republican, because Christ is everything to us, and in all of us. You will become a compassionate, kind, humble, meek and patient community. Colossians 3 is like the picture inside of a cookbook.

Have any of you ever used a cookbook by a gifted and well known chef? You open the cookbook to a complicated recipe and next to pages and pages of numerous directions and complicated techniques their stands a beautiful glossy photo of what the dish is supposed to look like. And they put the photo their to show you, that if you can apply yourselves to these instructions and give yourself to mastering these techniques, this is what the dish can look like. Something beautiful, perfectly balanced, with a harmony of flavors that are extremely desirable. Colossians 3 is a word picture, not of food, but of a community of people, crucified and risen with the Lord of glory. This is a picture of a community that is happy in God, healing their brokenness, becoming increasingly established in the love of God and the acceptance we have in the gospel. There are many beautiful snapshots of what an apostolic church is meant to look like, and this is one of the really beautiful ones. What is the goal, what are we striving for? Let's humble our minds and open our hearts for the reading of God's Word, Col 3 starting in v. 12:

READING: [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. (Col 3:12-17)

PRAYER: Help us to hear and obey Spirit of God, we will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge our hearts. Amen.

ROAD MAP: 1.) The fuel of holiness, 2.) the rhythms of a holy community, 3) the trajectory of a holy life.

FUEL OF HOLINESS

[16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you (present active imperative plural verb) richly, (abundantly)

1. Our text begins in verse 16 when we are told to let the Word of Messiah or Christ dwell in us plural richly. So first question, what is the word of the Messiah?
 1. Well for starters, we are reminded by the Word Messiah that we are talking about the King whom God sent to deliver His people from their sins and to establish His kingdom upon the earth in righteousness.
 2. And the Word or Message concerning the Messiah is probably NOT referring to the new testament as the NT is in the process of being written as Paul writes these words.
 3. What Paul is probably referring to is the good news about God's King, that was being proclaimed everywhere. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that in the early church, what was circulating and being taught, what the message of Messiah would be a reference to, was the sayings and stories of Jesus, and then the preaching of the clear implications for all the world.
 4. So that included preaching like the preaching in Acts, where the burden is to show to the Israelites that Christ had come in fulfillment of the Scriptures. In places outside of Israel, like here in Colossians, the message about Christ probably focused more on the content we find in chapter 1:15-20. IN THAT TEXT, Christ is presented as the true image of God, the true heir of heaven and earth, the One who made us, and the One we were made for. It's the life changing announcement of what God has done in the coming of the King, with all of his sayings and his doings, and the implications that seem to follow from them.
 5. What Paul is saying then is let the truth about who Christ is, what He has done, and what that means FOR YOU AND FOR ALL CREATION...let those things into your life and mind and heart. Which of course brings us to the next question.
2. What does it mean to let the word dwell in you
 1. The first thing to notice is that the idea of the word DWELLING IN US...is a verb to all of us, not just each of us. Paul says let it dwell in YOU plural, that is you as a church, Colossians. You as an individual Christian? Of course. But it is to dwell in YOU AS A COMMUNITY, as a congregation. So whatever is meant by the verb is for us as a group, not just you as an individual.
 2. So Paul says let the word dwell in you, which makes it sound like this is something that is going to passively happen to us. But it's not a passive verb in greek, it's an Active imperative...this isn't something you allow to happen to you, it is something you actively do. Dwellify the Word of Christ...that's not a real word.

3. The verb is something we do, but it's also something the Word is doing. The idea of dwell is to live and move and have your being somewhere. In other parts of the NT, this same word describes God dwelling among His people. Living and working, and protecting and delivering His people. In other words... YOU BRING THE WORD INTO YOUR LIFE, AND THEN the Word of Christ lives and works and makes YOU its habitation. Both things seem to be going on in this text.
3. Many of you know that a few years ago I was able to take a trip to Uganda in Africa to go do some ministry there and see what New Testament Christianity looks like in other parts of the world. And we stayed in the capital city of Kampala which was a large metropolitan area, filled with many similar modern conveniences of American life.
 1. But to get to the bible college where we had been invited to teach and preach, we had to cross lake Victoria away from the city and go into the jungle. And when we got to the jungle, it really dawned on me, that the jungle is not a forest. You can't look through the jungle and see things a hundred yards away. It is a massive overgrown thicket full of all kinds of animals and creatures. And we got into some cars and started driving into the jungle, and after a few miles, as we approached the bible school and in the middle of this massive thick jungle there was a clearing. Where the trees and bushes had been beaten back, and buildings had been erected, and the ground had been cultivated, and wells had been dug, and the monkeys had been chased away.
 2. IN the middle of the jungle wilderness there dwelled a community of people, and the result of their dwelling there was obvious. There was dangerous overgrown jungle full of wild animals...and then a dwelling place for creatures of an entirely different kind.
 3. There was a really clear difference between where people dwelled, and where people didn't dwell.
 4. In the same way it is really obvious when the Word of Christ is dwelling in a soul. The effects are as apparent as when you are driving through the jungle and you arrive at a clearing and a community. Where the reality of the living Christ has made a persons heart his home, you hear humility and repentance. You hear poverty of spirit and hungering and thirsting after righteousness. When the message of Christ is dwelling, you hear frustration with self, and hope in God. You hear faith and love and forgiveness, right next to sin and contrition, and confession. Where the word of the King lives, you find the jungle of sin being daily beaten back, and the soil of hearts being cultivated and sown with gospel seeds. This isn't just you the individual, this is talking about us as a church.
 5. And the goal isn't to have a little bit of the word of Christ dwelling in us.
4. We are looking for the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly OR IN ABUNDANCE?
 1. Paul is commanding us to bring the Message of the Messiah, who He is, what He's done and what that means, into our lives in great quantity. It's not our occasional concern it's a primary concern. It's not one of the things we do, it's a central part of life as a church.
 2. Where the message of Christ is not at home in a community, you do not have an apostolic church. You might have some christians there, but that is not a church. The church community is the home of Christ and His word.
5. This is how God creates dwelling places in the midst of the jungle of this world, by the power of His Word in Christ Jesus. So the life giving Word concerning Christ is one of the

power sources of transformation, it's a fuel for holiness, let's now transition to the rhythms of a holy community. If the word is the power source... the rhythms are the practices that the word empowers.

Rhythms of a holy community

Looking back to verse 16 “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

1. There is a long discussion in the commentaries about how these clauses all relate to each other, and for those who are interested feel free to reach out and I can send you some reading material on the syntax of these sentences. But for the purpose of this morning and our worship, I'm just going to give you my conclusion of how these clauses interrelate.
 1. What I think is going on here is that there are many ways that the Word of Messiah begins to take root and dwell in us richly, and one of the important instruments that God uses to do that is through the mutual teaching and admonishing of one another in the body in wisdom.
 2. Another is singing together, but I will get to that in a moment. Teaching is laying out the positive case for what the message of Messiah means for us and for the world. And admonishing has more of a corrective, guiding, warning, challenging, rebuking shade to it. And wisdom means doing it in ways that will be helpful and effective. And there are two things that are kind of incredible about this.
 3. The first is that these are the same three words that Paul uses to describe his own ministry. He says in Col 1:28 Him CHRIST we proclaim warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we might present everyone mature in Christ. So clearly some of us are called ESPECIALLY to do this. This is what Paul did among the church's. He went out to do evangelism, and then he came home to teach and admonish in wisdom.
 4. And the second incredible thing...is that even though some of us are called especially to do this, ALL OF US, ALL OF YOU are called to do this in general.
2. Or to say that another way, WE ALL HAVE A ROLE IN HELPING THIS BODY GROW. We all should be striving to grow in our ability to teach and admonish in wisdom. And it's probably good to emphasize that last word, in wisdom. We need wisdom to know when a person who is struggling needs teaching, and when they need admonishment.
 1. We need wisdom to know how to say things. Wisdom teaches us that a soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger Prov 15:1. Wisdom usually communicates gently. Wise words make knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools pours forth folly Prov 15:2. Wisdom calls us to communicate in ways that will best help the other person understand. Not just satisfy our own need to convey the truth. It's aimed at helping.
 2. Wise words fit the occasion, are good for building up, and give grace to those who hear Eph 4:29. Wisdom cares about the effect your words seem to have on other people.
 3. Finally “Wisdom from heaven is at first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:17-18. Wisdom is peace seeking.

3. Sometimes you and I need to be admonished. Sometimes you and I need to be taught. And You know what else...sometimes you are the one that needs to teach, sometimes you are the one that needs to admonish, and you need to be a student of Scripture and student of people to grow in wisdom in how to do that.
 1. And teach and admonish are probably scary words to think about doing, except if you step back in the context of the early Colossians church, he is probably talking to people who have been Christian for like three or four years. It's hard to know that conclusively but these are people who have walked with Christ for years, probably not decades. He is not saying you need to give a classroom lecture on justification or something like that. You need to internalize the Word of Christ and be able to share what you have learned with others. Both to inform and to exhort.
 2. Do you know God? Then you have something to share. Have you tried to walk according to His commands, however imperfectly? Then you have something to share. Have you ever repented of a sin and come to the cross and found mercy for your sin? Then you have something to share. Have you ever been forced to hope in God's promises through something difficult? Then you have something to share. Internalizing all that the gospel means and implies and then living it out is a vast and complex thing. And there are probably ways, that YOU are better at it than me. We as Christians are called to help one another see the glory of God, and live faithfully in light of what we understand.
 3. Tim Challies a popular Christian blogger, had a really wonderful reflection and illustration of this reality last week, that I think is helpful here. There was once an old man who was getting ready to die. And one of his great regrets was never having visited the vast and majestic rocky mountains. Being to sick to travel, he enlisted the help of 4 artists to go to the rockies and bring back a representation of what they had seen. What do the Rockies look like? One of the artists went up to the Canadian rockies in the winter, another guy went to the towering peaks in Colorado in the spring. Another went visited the southern rockies at night and another went another place. When all four artists returned to the man, they had four very different but faithful representations of the splendor of the rocky mountains. No one had seen it correctly, they had all seen and represented different elements of the vast majesty they had seen. If this can be true of a mountain range on one tiny planet in one tiny galaxy...how much more would this be the case for God.
 4. One of the rhythms of a holy community is that we actively seek to teach and admonish one another in wisdom, bearing faithful witness to what we have seen and learned from God. But not only, that, a holy community SINGS with a thankful heart.
4. How does singing relate to teaching? It's possible that singing is a vehicle for teaching in Paul's mind, but it seems more likely to me, that Paul is simply sitting these things side by side as mutual habits within the early church. We learn through songs, but I think Paul is saying that we need to teach and admonish, as we sing and give thanks from our hearts.
 1. We are a people who do the difficult and sometimes relationally challenging practice of teaching and admonishing one another, while simultaneously making it a priority to celebrate what God has done together with songs of thankfulness.

2. I think it's really interesting, that Paul used three different words to describe the kinds of songs the early church sang when they gathered. Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs or songs from the Holy Spirit. **The apostle could have just said singing songs with thankfulness.** But instead he opted for three DIFFERENT words instead of just one word for music. And nobody knows for sure what each of these words refers to exactly...but I'm more interested in the fact that Paul seems to go out of his way to mention variety.
3. Now why would he do that? Is it possible that people back in the early church, were exactly like people today, some preferring psalms from the Jewish psalter while others preferred the new songs that someone in the church wrote as a response of prayer and worship?
4. I think it's likely. How should the Colossians church, and my implications WE think about that? Now I'm turning 35 in a couple of weeks. And I'm not sure how or when it happened, but somehow I'm already at the age where I hear the new music that kids listen to now and it sounds bizarre and ridiculous to me. And I'm already trying to actively prepare my soul for the day when all the new worship music begins to change into something foreign and uncomfortable for me.
5. Because the question at the end of the day, is not about form. What makes something true worship is not whether it's a psalm or a hymn or a spiritual song. True worship is a response to truth about God with thanksgiving from our heart. If it's a response of truth to truth, than my heart should find a way to use it as an instrument of thanks.
5. Form is about our preferences. Worship is about spirit and truth. And a holy healthy community will not only give and receive teaching and admonishment in wisdom, but we also celebrate together in song, of which there will be a rich and diverse variety. These are the habits of a holy community. Let's now close with thinking about the trajectory of a holy life, and I'm only going to start unpacking this today. I will unpack it even further next week.

The trajectory of a holy life

[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.

1. Well gosh, how do we do that? And the answer is really simple. With a lot of deliberate, intentional thought. This sentence could really be it's own sermon.
2. When Paul says "Whatever you do" it is actually two phrases mashed together in greek, in everything and in all things. Do all in Christ's name. In other words, there is no domain in your life over which Christ is not Lord.
 1. There is no act of will you perform, there is no word you say that should not come from a desire to honor the Lord Jesus.
3. In every single thing you do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus.
 1. What does that mean. That in itself is a rich and profitable study. The name of the Lord in the OT always refers to Yahweh, and here Paul wants to identify Christ with the name Yahweh. Do it all in the name of the LORD...Jesus. The underlying and unifying focus of God's NAME always seem to come back to the nature and character of God Himself.

2. So to do things in the name of Jesus is to act in a way that is consistent with God's character. To conduct yourself according to the pattern of his life and attitudes.
3. To act in Christ's name is ALSO to act under his authority, and on his behalf.
4. Do everything in a way that follows the patterns of Jesus' heart and life, do everything as a representative of Him. Do everything as one living out your service to Your King, live as one under Jesus' authority who only always ever acts for His sake. Wow Josh...that sounds like an impossibly comprehensive claim...yeah I know...but that is for sure what it says.
 1. We are supposed to do EVERYTHING and ALL THINGS whether speaking or acting...I mean Paul is really doing his best to extend the scope of what he means to every domain of life. We do everything to glorify Christ, we do everything as one who wants to walk in His ways as His representative on the earth.
 2. When you wake up in the morning and pour yourself a cup of coffee...you say I am going to drink this to the glory of God. How do you do that? There is a wonderful article online, entitled how to drink Orange juice to the glory of God by John Piper that may help you. You can take that morning coffee and appreciate and praise God for all of the people and technology that was used to bring that coffee into your hand. You can praise Him for the gift of smell and taste and color. You can praise Him for the gift of plant life and rain fall and every other good gift.
 3. And then you can seek to share it in love with the other people you live with.
5. And I want to think like this while I'm at church, and while I'm drinking my morning coffee and while I'm doing LITERALLY everything else.
6. And that's a big task, where do you start? You start by recognizing that this is the goal of holiness...to have more of Christ in all of your life. And by committing yourself to a stubborn thankfulness toward Him.
 1. I'm trying to collect expression that I think accurately reflect what the Scripture teaches about the Christian life. You've probably heard me use the phrase "durable joy", which is the joy of knowing God despite the up and downs of earthly circumstances. Another one I want to introduce is a stubborn thankfulness.
7. If you step back and look at the larger unit of text here, Paul really hammers on thankfulness being one of the significant sources of power for doing all of these things.
8. Verse 15, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...and be thankful. Verse 16 Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Verse 17 Whatever you do...do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through Him. We are called to be thankful when we are striving to be ruled by the Peace of Jesus, we are called to be thankful when we are being stretched and changed by the Word of Christ, and we are called to be thankful as we seek to live our whole lives in the name of Christ.
9. Be thankful, be thankful, be thankful. Thankful for what? Thankful for HIM. Be thankful He has given us fuel for holiness, be thankful he has left us with rhythms for holiness, be thankful for his example of holiness, be thankful that fellowship with Him and with God the Father is the end of our holiness. This is the trajectory of a holy life. We are striving to bring our hearts and our minds into alignment with the reality...that even if God took my ministry, and my family, and my possessions and my health, and I was left with nothing but a blind,

deaf, and dying body...my heart would still give thanks because God is enough. That is the kind of people we are called to be. How do we get there? Word, worship, thankfulness.
10. The goal of holiness is to have more of Christ, in all of life, so be stubbornly thankful

Call and Response

Why should we give thanks?

“Because we are a family, beloved by the Lord.” (2 Thess 2:13a)

Why are we God’s family?

“Because God chose us as the first fruits to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.” (2 Thess 2:13b)

And to what future have we been called through the gospel?

“To obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thess 2:14).