

## **The Word of Christ**

Colossians 3:16-17

Growing up in my Lutheran Church, I was given a strong foundation. Even before I understood the depth of my sin and my desperate need of Jesus Christ, through the means of Sunday School and Church I was being instructed in the Word of God. For two years, every Saturday morning, I studied the Catechism with a teacher and some other kids my age. For 15 minutes at the beginning of Sunday School, I distinctly remember gathering to sing in the basement of the Church. I loved going to VBS. And when I reached 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I went to Church Camp.

I am not sure that I have ever fully appreciated or adequately given thanks to the people who sacrificed to give me this foundation. Many have already gone on to be with the Lord. I trust that I will have opportunity to express my thanks to them in glory.

When I came to understand something of the depth of my sin at the age of 14, I feared greatly for my eternal soul. I knew that God would be just to send me to an eternal hell. I did not want to go to hell. But I knew that I deserved to be sent there.

In the midst of my despair, I never once considered looking anywhere else for help than to Jesus Christ. I questioned whether I could be forgiven.

I surely doubted whether I could ever again be clean, truly clean.

But I had no doubt that if such things were to be had, they could only be had in Jesus Christ.

Later on, as I faced the intellectual challenges to the faith, I would study other religions and what they offered. But I did not do this when I was despairing for my own soul.

I pleaded with Jesus to save me!

And after some time of pleading, I began to have some assurance that He had, and that He was, saving me.

I began to believe that His death was enough to forgive all my sin, and to cleanse me completely.

The love of Christ living in me took hold of me.

If God could love me at my worst, I was determined to learn all that I could about such a God.

I did many things during that time.

I hung out with friends who I knew wanted to know Jesus.

I went to Bible Studies.

I went to Christian concerts. Amy Grant and Leon Patillo were my first.

In addition to prayer, I took on two new habits that have remained with me throughout my entire life.

A friend of mine bought me my own Bible. And I began to read it every night before I went to bed, marking the pages with questions and comments.

And I took/stole a hymnal from Church and began to read/sing hymns alone on my bed each night. Some tunes I knew. Many I did not.

My newfound hunger to know the One who loved me needed some tangible expression.

And instinctively I knew that Word and Song were the activities that God had given for my continued growth.

I did not read the Bible for any academic interest. Any scholarly interest developed as I began to realize how many wrong ways the Bible could be understood. And I did not want to misunderstand the Bible.

I read the Bible because I wanted the “word of Christ” to dwell in me richly.

When I stole/borrowed that hymnal, it was not with an interest in developing my skill in singing. I wanted to learn more about Christ from those who wrote the hymns. And I wanted to use the poetical skill of others to give expression to the thoughts of my heart. As I began to read the hymns, I began to see how the thoughts and feelings of the writers were often much like my own. And I loved the way that they directed my heart and mind to Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:16-17 are the conclusion to verses 1-15, which we covered last week.

In those verses Paul gave the command to put off evil and to put on good.

Therefore, Christians must actively strive to conquer their sin, while simultaneously seeking to be like Christ.

But in those verses, Paul also intertwined our ongoing duty with rich theology explaining our union with Christ.

Our ability to put off and to put on, flows out of our being “in Christ”.

Apart from Christ, the Christian can do nothing.

In Christ, and through Christ, and to Christ are all things.

Because of this, we must be careful to keep Christ at the center of our Christianity.

In our struggle to defeat sin, our strategy must be to run to Christ.

In our struggle to be like Christ, our strategy must be to run to Christ.

The word “Christ” is the Greek translation for the Hebrew “Messiah”.

Throughout the OT, God had given promises of a Redeemer to come.

Israel repeatedly failed to be the people God had called them to be.

The Messiah was the One God would send to Redeem His people from all their sins, and to bring them to become a people for Himself – eager to do that which is good.

Jesus is that Messiah. Only He is not only the Redeemer of the Jews, but of the whole world.

When we say Jesus Christ, it is a shortened form of “Jesus is THE Christ.” The One on whom we pin all our hopes of being redeemed.

Read Colossians 3:16-17.

<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ  
dwell in you richly,

I encourage you to memorize this phrase. Meditate on its meaning.

Run it over and over again in your mind. It is the essence of Christianity.

The Greek reads “The word of Christ... may it dwell in you richly.”

“Ho Logos tou Christou”

This is the only time Paul uses this phrase in Scripture.

Romans 10:17 comes close except there Paul uses a different Greek word than “logos” – “rhema”.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Although rhema and logos may have distinct meaning depending upon the context, they may also carry the same essential meaning, as is the case here.

The word of Christ can be understood narrowly as the core truths of the Gospel message.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Colossians 1:5** because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

Forgiveness, cleansing, and eternal life are freely given to all who turn from their sin and trust in Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection. We are united to Christ in His death and resurrection through faith alone and all of the promises of God are “yes” and “amen” in Him.

But it is also correct to see the word of Christ more broadly to include all of Scripture.

ESV **Colossians 1:25** of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

**Acts 20:26-27** <sup>26</sup> Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, <sup>27</sup> for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

The narrow and broad senses are not separate from one another. Every passage of Scripture, in one way or another, was designed by God to lead us to Jesus as the Christ.

**Luke 24:25-27** <sup>25</sup> And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

The word of Christ is the entirety of the Scriptures. Interpreted correctly, they all lead us to Christ.

Every passage in some way works to expand our knowledge of Jesus as the Christ.

Every passage brings Jesus into clearer focus.

We should strive to avoid two extremes.

1. We should avoid turning every passage into a narrow gospel message.

This flattens out the Scriptures, preventing us from seeing all the wonderful nuances of our Savior.

2. We should avoid contenting ourselves with exegeting a passage without any attempt to see how it relates to Jesus as the Christ.

To understand a passage of Scripture apart from its fulfillment in Christ misses the whole point.

The word of Christ is found in every passage of Scripture – NT and OT.

If you want the whole of Christ, you must strive to know the whole of the Bible.

If you are learning the Scriptures without seeing Christ, you are missing the whole point.

What is more, learning “about” Christ in the Scriptures is not enough either.

Paul’s exhortation is for the “word of Christ” to “dwell in you richly”.



The first step is always to learn the truth about Christ.

But the reflexive response must then be to embrace that truth for yourself through faith.

If you learn that Jesus is the sacrificial lamb, you must take that truth into your own heart and relying upon His death for your own redemption.

If you learn that Jesus is the Great High Priest, you must approach God through Him and receive God's blessing through Him.

If you learn that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, you must bow your heart to Him in all things as your Master. And you must look to Him to conquer all your enemies, those who attack you from without and the old sinful nature that attacks you from within.

If you learn that Jesus is the Prophet, then you must look to Him to teach you truth and to correct you when you are wrong.

Christ does you no good if He remains outside you. You must receive Him by faith. And this is not something that you do only at the beginning of your spiritual journey. Christianity is lived entirely by faith, from beginning to end.

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon: Christ's Indwelling Word says it well:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you;" that is, let it be your most familiar friend. We know the people who live in our home, but we do not really know other people. When someone asked Mr. Whitefield, "What do you think of Mr. So-and-so's character?" He answered, "I cannot say, for I never lived with him." Ah! that is the true test; it is living with people that lets you know what they are. In like manner, if you will live with "the word of Christ," especially if you will let it dwell in you, and abide with you as a constant friend, you will get to know it better; and the better you know it, the more you will love it."

The word of Christ is not something that you can take for yourself. It is freely given and received by faith.

"Let... the word of Christ... dwell in you richly.

This is a passive imperative.

You do not control the word of Christ.

The word of Christ is given to you by God, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

But you are to come to God with your hands open.

You are a beggar in need of nourishment. Christ alone is bread of life.

Go to the Scripture with outstretched hands pleading for mercy to be fed.

And do not be satisfied with the crumbs.

It is okay to want to feast on Jesus.

God may ask you to wait, sometimes for long seasons. But trust in the fact that He commands you to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

He does not give commands without also giving promises. And God always keeps His promises.

In your struggle to defeat sin and to be like Christ, actively study the Scriptures. Do not do this to impress God with your devotion. Live in them asking that God would use them to fill you with faith in Christ. And through that faith Christ that would dwell in you richly, abundantly, lavishly.

“The word of Christ... may it dwell in you richly.”

This must be our passion.

As individuals... and corporately as a church.

Every other phrase in vv. 16-17 further explain what it means to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

We do this by...

teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,

When these two words are placed together, they work as bookends describing both the positive instruction of biblical doctrine and the corrective instruction against false doctrine.

Both are necessary to our Christian faith.

Although we must not take pleasure in controversy, there is a place for correction.

Paul has corrected false thinking in the book of Colossians already.

He has exposed the deceitfulness of severity to the body as a means of putting sin to death for one.

But Paul has also positively taught the glory of Christ in Colossians. All things in the creation and in the Church are “in Him, and through Him, and to Him.”

Yourselves

One another

Paul very much believes in authoritative teaching and preaching. He is giving authoritative teaching and admonishment in this letter.

But Paul also expects the Colossian believers to teach and admonish one another.

The members of the body are to build one another up in the faith.

One way in which Paul envisions this happening is through singing.

The singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are the means by which the Church is to teach and admonish one another so that the word of Christ would dwell richly in them.

Literally, “teaching and admonishing one another in... psalms, in hymns, in spiritual songs.”

But what does Paul have in mind when he uses these three terms?

Many assume:

in psalms = OT book of Psalms

in hymns = Other songs of praise

in spiritual odes (spiritual songs) = Modern praise and worship songs.

But it is better to understand all three of these words as referring to the 150 songs of the book of Psalms.

67 of the titles of the psalms use the word “psalm.”

6 of the titles use the word “hymn.”

35 use the word “song.”

And Psalm 76 uses all three words in its title.

This is not entirely clear in the English:

ESV **Psalm 76:1** TO THE CHOIRMASTER: WITH STRINGED INSTRUMENTS. A PSALM OF ASAPH. A SONG. In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel.

But in the Greek LXX all three words are clearly used:  
“in hymns... a psalm... a song.”

The early Church used the LXX regularly. So, it makes good sense that Paul would have used these words to refer to the OT book of psalms.

When I first came to understand that all three terms referred to the OT Psalter, it was rather shocking.

Until this time, I really had not given much thought to singing the Psalms.

Occasionally, song writers would include a portion of a psalm. But making a sincere effort to teach and admonish one another singing the Psalms, that was another matter altogether.

My whole thinking on singing was shaken.

I have never become convinced that we should only sing Psalms.

The Bible itself contains other songs that are not part of the Psalter.

The Song of Moses.

Mary's Song.

Philippians 2.

And Revelation 4 and 5 come to mind.

But this verse, along with Ephesians 5:19, make it explicit that goes against Scripture to neglect singing the Psalms.

“Verse 16 places squarely on the shoulders of each Christian the responsibility to “teach and admonish one another” through psalm-based material and to sing psalm-like hymns to God.” Beale 307.

I had known that it was beneficial to sing.

But I had no idea that God really wanted me to learn and sing the Psalms.

And He wanted me to do this as a means of Christ dwelling in me richly.

“The OT psalms are now viewed to be the very word of Christ! The psalms should now be understood fully through the lens of Christ.” Beale 306.

Until this time, I had no idea how helpful the Psalms were in helping me to understand Jesus.

I knew that there were a few “Messianic Psalms” that were full of prophecies that were fulfilled by Christ. Not until I had two professors start their classes with a short devotional from the Psalter did I begin to realize what a rich treasure about Christ was contained in the Psalms.

They would begin class by having us open up our Psalter. They would very briefly give us some context so we could better understand the Psalm. And they would show how it in some way related to Christ. And then we would sing the Psalm right there in class.

Since that time, my OT professor: Dr. Belcher, has written a book entitled “Christ of the Psalms”.

It is an excellent help in explaining how to better understand all the Psalms Christologically.

If you are interested, come see me.

At the same time that I was learning the tremendous potential of the Psalms, I was also beginning to see the great difficulty of making the Psalms a significant portion of our Congregational Singing.

The Psalms were written in Hebrew.

Translating the Psalms such that they have a distinct meter is challenging.

Many of the Psalms are much longer than we are used to singing.

They contain a lot of history that as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians we are unfamiliar.

It takes time and effort to understand the original context of the Psalm and then more time and effort to see correctly how that Psalm relates to Christ, and then to the NT believer.



Is it not just easier for everyone to sing the multitude of hymns that we have in our hymn books and that are constantly being written today?

Maybe, but if we want to submit our hearts to the clear command of Scripture, we must be willing to make some effort to sing psalms.

It is possible that some of you immediately have appreciated that we sing from our Psalter. But for most of you it is a challenge.

Trust me, we are not trying to torture you.

But we are purposely, patiently, persistently, trying to establish a new habit in you.

The Book of Psalms is itself a hymnbook.

They are a collection of hymns written over many years.

Not only are they inspired by God as the writers poured out their souls to Him. But they were also collected into a songbook so that saints for generations could benefit from them.

But what always helps me is to think that Jesus sang from the psalms.

I believe that in the course of His life that He sang from every one of the 150 psalms.

I cannot prove that. But I can prove that Jesus did regularly sing from the Psalms.

Jesus regularly kept the Passover during His life.  
And it was custom for the Jews of His day to sing what are called “The Hallel Psalms” (Psalms 113-118)

On the night of His betrayal, Matthew tells us explicitly that Jesus sang at least one of these hymns.

ESV **Matthew 26:30** And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

We ought to be singing the Psalms that Jesus himself sung. People often ask me if I have ever been to Israel. They want me to walk where Jesus walked.

As a history buff and a lover of Scripture, I am certain I would enjoy such a trip.

But I have the same sort of experience every time I sing a Psalm.

I think to myself, “Jesus sang this very Psalm when He walked the earth.”

I often think, “What was Jesus thinking as He sang this song? How was He applying this Psalm to Himself?”

Even the Psalms that confess sin, I believe Jesus sang knowing that He would bear our sin on the cross.

The psalms are perfectly suited to help us as NT believers to be a bridge into the OT.

It is awesome to see how it takes OT events and turns them into songs so that those events can more easily be remembered by future generations.

It is my appreciation of the Psalter that has helped me to better appreciate the Old Hymns handed down to us throughout the history of the Church.

I love to see how previous generations of Christians expressed their faith in Christ.

The early Church was struggling to better understand the Trinity. Many of the early hymns help me to appreciate the Trinity as well.

The hymns of the Reformation gave greater attention to our Justification by faith alone. I have been taught much through singing these hymns.

The point is not to say that we can only sing what is old.

But by commanding us to sing the Psalter, Paul is emphatically saying that we should make the effort to learn to appreciate the old.

The Church is not simply a 21<sup>st</sup> Century phenomenon. We exist in communion with the saints who have gone before us. We can express our unity with Christians of old through our singing what they sang before us.

And, when we write new hymns, we would be wise not only to make sure that they are biblical in content and glorifying to

Christ and the redemption he brings, but also that they are in some sense following the pattern laid down in the Psalms.

If you have not realized it yet, I like to preach through books of the Bible. My hope is to preach or teach through every book of the Bible before I die. Some books I will go through multiple times. But I hope to go through every book at least once before God takes me.

When I finish Colossians, I will have completed the NT.

But there are still 10 or 15 books of the OT that I have not completed.

The Psalms are one of them. I have preached through a good number – 30-35 of them.

I do not plan to preach a 3 year study through the Psalms.

But do not be surprised when I take a chunk here and there between other books.

And, we will continue to sing from the Psalter. Please do not fight this in your heart.

Do not be the child who stubbornly resists eating their vegetables.

Develop a habit of singing Psalms.

Ask God to show you more of Jesus as you sing the Psalms.

If you want help in this, take some time to look through your hymnal for those hymns written by Isaac Watts. He was very controversial in his day. But from my perspective, he has left us

a rich treasure. His hymns are based upon OT psalms, only he makes an attempt to explicitly Christianize the Psalm.

Many in his day hated him for this. They thought that people would no longer sing the Psalms. Maybe they were right. But I do not fault him. I fault the teachers of the Church for not making it clear that we are commanded to sing Psalms. Anyway, read through the hymns written by Isaac Watts. And then read the OT Psalm on which the hymn is based.

In addition to singing the Psalms directly, they should also be used as a pattern for us in writing new songs for the Church.

Let me give you one example.

Many modern worship songs are too repetitive for my liking. It would be to my personal taste if they used less repetition.

But my understanding of the Psalms prevents me from being overly critical of repetition.

How so?

Psalm 136 uses the same phrase some 26 times – The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.

If the Bible does it, then we can do it.

At the same time, the Psalter gives us balance. While the Psalter does use repetition, we can also ask, “How often does it make use of repetition?”

The answer is that only one in 150 Psalms uses this much repetition. And even this Psalm is full of rich theology.

This is just one of many ways in which the Psalms can guide us as the Church continues to write new hymns.

Let me say just a word about tunes.

There is no question that the Psalms were sung to tunes.

And in God's providence, He did not preserve those tunes for us.

This means that there are no "inspired tunes" for all people of all ages throughout all the Church.

Many of the tunes of our favorite hymns were not the original tune used at the time the hymn was written.

We should all recognize that different tunes will resonate with different people.

This is not a bad thing.

It is an opportunity to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

It is not uncommon for people to speak to me about the songs.

Most of the time, they want me to use hymns of which they are familiar.

What they don't realize is that the very tune that is a challenge for them is a treasure to someone else.

Using a melody, any melody, enables us to sing together. All our voices are lifted up together.

God cares about how we vocally sound.

But as in everything, God does not care as much about the outward sound as He does about the inner heart.

God loves to hear His people sing.

By the way, Satan hates to hear God's people sing.

For those of you who struggle to love singing, just remember that it is a good way to infuriate Satan.

I am thankful for those who have composed tunes in the past.  
I am thankful for those who continue to compose tunes today.

We happen to sing primarily from the tunes of the Trinity Psalter and Hymnal.

But we are not theologically opposed to new tunes as a Church. And as some of you come with your musical gifts, I suspect that we will introduce new tunes.

But if we are going to be united as a congregation, we must all learn to sing some tunes that do not personally resonate with our preferences.

And we must always remember that our singing must enable us to "teach and admonish one another."

Paul finishes verse 16 that we are to sing with an attitude of thankfulness.

with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

If you read the Psalms, you understand that God does not command that we always be happy.

One of the blessings of the Psalms is that they speak to a variety of our emotions and a variety of experiences.

But there is only one Psalm, Psalm 88 that ends in darkness.

It is a pattern of many of the Psalms to begin with our struggles and to finish with praise and thanksgiving.

This being said, I believe that New Testament Christians have even a stronger reason to sing with thanksgiving. The OT saints had the promise of a Messiah. We live after the Messiah has come to us.

Even when our personal circumstances are full of trials, we can always be thankful that our heavenly Father has given to us Jesus Christ.

Thankfulness should permeate our singing.

Verse 17 should be seen in light of all that we have said so far.

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.



Paul has focused on our singing.  
But in truth, every aspect of our lives should be centered in Christ.

Our singing...  
Our conversations...  
Our actions...

We end our prayers “in Jesus Name”.  
Let this be a reminder to you to live every moment under the “name of Christ”.

Do whatever you can to remember your “union with Christ.”

I often write my name in a funky way Xmikep.  
The X and the P are the first two letters in Greek for the name of Christ.  
But use whatever means you want. Only make it your ambition to remember Christ, and your union with Him, throughout your day... in all you do.

If it is really true that all things are “in Him and through Him and to Him”, then Christ should permeate every aspect of our lives.

Our singing should reveal Christ to our hearts.  
Our words to one another should build us up in Christ.

Our actions should be consciously performed by a faith in our union with Christ.

May it be our constant prayer that the word of Christ would dwell in us richly.

As with every sermon that challenges us to alter our behavior, it is good to finish with Christ.

I often confess to God that my worship of Him is pitiful.

I regularly go long stretches of time with little thought of Christ.

I can sing whole lines of a hymn and immediately forget what I just sang.

None of us lives up to the standard.

We all fall short in many ways.

Rest in the fact that God receives your worship, however imperfect, only through the perfection of Christ.

Rest in Him.

In all your thoughts, finish with Christ.

And be thankful, that Christ makes all your worship pleasing to the Father.

And be thankful that one day, we will all worship perfectly in eternity.

Amen! Come Lord Jesus!