

July 2, 2017  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Communion  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2017 David J. Whitcomb

**GOVERNED BY CHRIST'S WORD**  
**Colossians 3:16**

It is possible that you have shared the same kind of experience I have had in various small groups, ministry groups, Bible studies, or Sunday School classes around the country. Generally, I have found in these kinds of settings away from our assembly that the same discouraging environment is common. There is a leader of sorts – sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, sometimes both (as in a husband and wife team). There is generally a topic to be discussed that may or may not be rooted in the Bible. Ostensibly, the intent of these meetings is to edify believers through teaching the Bible.

I found myself in one such meeting one time that was thoroughly discouraging. The topic was supposed to be about establishing a plan to help know Christ better through His Word. The problem was that there was not a shred of Bible teaching. In fact, there were only a couple of passing references to Bible texts or Bible stories. The whole hour was taken up by men and women (mostly women) expressing their ideas, opinions, and lessons learned by past experience. I sat there quietly, uncomfortably quietly, continually thinking about Bible passages, particular verses and instruction that God has already given in His Word that teach unchanging, eternal truths about the very things these people were wondering about. I kept thinking, “You know, the Bible addresses that.” But obviously, the people were more satisfied with human opinion and experience. Or as Paul put it, *But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding (2 Corinthians 10:12).*

Again I say that I have found this kind of foolish, time-wasting talking to be the norm in many so-called Bible studies, classes, or

small groups. Why would people who claim to be followers of Christ be more interested in hearing about the experience of others as opposed to hearing what Christ teaches? It might be because people can easily identify with what other people have experienced. Plus, many times it is just plain difficult to understand what the Bible teaches. But maybe the most truthful reason people prefer human experience over Bible teaching is because the Bible is absolute, unwavering truth that often makes us squirm under its convicting light.

It seems that a fair assessment of the visible church today reveals the same overall character as our culture. The chief concern even in the church today is not to know the truth. Nor is the chief concern to do the truth. The chief concern today is to feel good about oneself. Because the religion of humanism has convinced nearly all people in America, even professing Christians, that man is the measure of all things – all things, including church practice, must result in helping people feel good about themselves.

The Word of Christ does not always make us feel good about ourselves. But the Word of Christ is always true regardless of how it makes us feel. Therefore, humanism actually teaches that it is more important to be positive than it is to be realistic. That is why the video screen consumes incomprehensible amounts of time. Much of what comes across the screen is not accurate, not truthful, and not real. But you can find plenty that would be considered “positive” to make you feel good – for a little while.

God's plan for real Christians is this: *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 (Colossians 3:16).*

**Let Christ's Word Dwell in You.**

God's plan for His people in His Church is that Christ's Word is the focus. What is that? How do we know what constitutes Christ's Word? Christ's Word is all the verses in the Bible in red letters. Some publishers of the Bible help us identify Christ's teaching by putting His words in red. For the most part it is accurate and it really is helpful for a cursory reading of the Bible.

But notice how many of Christ's words are quotations from or references to the Old Testament. One Bible has all of the New Testament references and quotations from the Old Testament in bold. There are a lot of them. Jesus quoted the Old Testament 228 times. So does that make the Old Testament part of Christ's Word also? In fact the entire Bible is the Word of Christ. He came to earth to teach the truth that is in heaven with God the Father. He is the living word of God. He promised that His Words give eternal life: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life*" (John 5:24). John agreed that Jesus' words give life. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life (1John 1:1).* The message about eternal life is found throughout the entire Bible.

Furthermore, God gave His Word (the Bible) through the Son just like He gave it through the prophets and apostles. *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (Hebrews 1:1-2).*

Therefore, it is right and fair for us to conclude that Christ's Word is the Bible. The Bible, the Bible, the Bible must be the focus of the Church. We cannot over emphasize how important the Bible is – especially for those who follow Christ, who need to be conformed to Christ. We must know the Bible and do the Bible. Simply using the Bible as a reference point for life, or a fire extinguisher in a time of trouble, or a manual to support our lifestyle is futile and will not accomplish what God wants to accomplish in our lives.

You and I are responsible regarding Christ's Word in that God's plan is for Christ's Word to dwell in us. Everyone in the Body of Christ is responsible to help Christ's Word be in us. The pronoun *you* in this verse is plural referring to everyone in the assemblies at Colossae and Laodicea. By application then, the pronoun applies to every Christian in every local expression of the Body of Christ. Therefore, this thing is supposed to be a characteristic of every "church." What thing?

Christ's Word is to be dwelling in us. The Greek word for dwell is literally to "*house in.*" This means that Christ's Word is supposed to have taken up residence in this assembly. It does not mean that we keep an open Bible on the communion table or keep an ancient copy in a special box somewhere. Rather, we the people are the Body of Christ and the Bible is supposed to be residing within each of us. In as much as the Bible dwells in us, when we gather together, the Bible is going to be central, obvious, and our means for focusing on God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We, individually and therefore corporately also, are responsible to see that Christ's Word dwells. A very literal translation of the one Greek word found here in the present tense is a command to *let house* the Word of Christ. It is not that we can passively allow the Bible to be part of our assembly. That doesn't work. To obey the command, we must actively cause the Bible to take up residence within us.

That is why we at Community put so much emphasis on knowing the Bible. As you know well from experience, we regularly encourage each other to read the Bible daily. We provide in-depth Bible studies in our educational classes from children's Sunday School through Adult Bible Fellowship. We provide other Bible studies for men and women throughout the week. You really cannot be part of this assembly without realizing how central the Bible is here. That is God's plan.

But furthermore, notice that we are to *let Christ's Word dwell richly*. What does "richly" look like? Richly means abundantly, exceedingly, largely. It speaks of something that is considered to be of great value. Human nature typically wants a lot of something "rich." A renewed spiritual nature wants a lot of Christ's Word. Our heart and soul longs for the richness of Christ's Word in abundance. An amazing trait about the Bible is that the more we learn about it, the more we want to learn. The Bible is like a gold mine that yields more and better treasures the deeper we dig.

That being true, we have cause to wonder about the person who claims to be a follower of Christ but has no appetite for the Bible. Maybe it is as the old saying states, "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible." Or maybe the problem is that letting Christ's Word dwell richly requires work. There is no question that reading the Bible, knowing the Bible, and learning the

Bible is a lot of work. People who are given over to the pursuit of ease and pleasure will find that knowing the Bible is a difficult nuisance.

To read and know Christ's Word requires sacrifice of time and energy. You must cut out time from your busy schedule. You must discipline your mind to keep distractions away (which might be the hardest part of the whole process). You must read and study with purpose, intentionally trying to gain greater truth. That is step one of God's plan for the Church. Step one (causing Christ's Word to dwell in us) is necessary before taking step two.

Step two is for us to interact according to Christ's Word. That includes teaching and admonishing one another. How do we teach each other? To teach is to give instruction either in a formal or an informal setting. It requires that the teacher have information to offer and that the listener is able to comprehend. That is why Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, gives spiritual capacities like pastor, teacher, prophet, evangelist and other speaking abilities to the Church. Therefore, teaching is an ongoing characteristic of the Body of Christ.

This step also includes the practice of admonishing each other. To admonish is to put someone in mind of something. It carries the idea of helping a person grasp, understand, apply the instruction being taught. Often it speaks of warning: "Don't do this or this will happen" or "Think this way in order to achieve this goal." Admonition is not only an authority applying truth to a student but each of us applying truth to our peers. Each of us helping each other understand how God's truth applies is easily done through testimony.

But the big questions on this matter are, "How and when?" Teaching and admonishing is the precise goal of our church in venues like small groups or smaller Bible studies. Those settings are perfect for testimonies that help others grasp Bible truth. It is also the goal in all of our meetings as we teach the Bible. We should also buy up opportunities one-on-one to talk about these things.

But one great danger in such settings is the human tendency to place experience and feeling above the teaching of the Bible. That is why God's plan specifically states that we are to teach and admonish with wisdom. In that is a not so obvious warning because there is such a thing as human wisdom. Human wisdom is narrowly focused on benefit gained by the individual and only has to do with that which

is passing. Human wisdom does not focus on the eternal because we do not experience eternity in this life because of our human limitations.

To that end, there always seems to be a prophet who teaches that positive human experience is the right focus in life because human wisdom is limited to human experience. In the 1950s–1960s one of the major humanist prophets was Norman Vincent Peale. His book, "The Power of Positive Thinking" stayed on the New York Times best seller list for 186 consecutive weeks and sold over 5 million copies. His plan was simple: Collect various teachings from other religions such as Christian Scientism and put a gloss of Christian teaching on them and sell them as a new product. The essence of his teaching was, "If you can think it, you can have it." Some say this preacher and this book shaped much of the character of President Trump. But the democrats really don't think Trump is very positive.

In the 1970s–1990s the prophet was Robert Schuller. Schuller picked up Peale's teaching of the power of positive thinking and ran with it. He, more than any other heretic, was responsible for marrying New Age philosophy with Christian teachings. He taught that the negative things of life are illusory, and we must overcome them by embracing love and avoiding fear. Well, some of that is true. It is good to embrace love and avoid fear unless we are loving sin and trying to deny God's promised judgment against sin.

Today the prophet of human wisdom is Joel Osteen. His book "Your Best Life Now" has sold over 4 million copies. But his ministry is just more of the same power of positive thinking. In fact, if you deny the truth of the Bible, this is your best life because your next life is going to be unbelievably bad. Maybe his heresy was best expressed by his wife to their following of some 25,000 a couple of years ago. She said, "So, I want you to know this morning – just do good for your own self. Do good because God wants you to be happy. . . . When you come to church, when you worship him, you're not doing it for God really. You're doing it for yourself, because that's what makes God happy. Amen?"

That is about the best human wisdom can come up with. Therefore, it is wonderful to see in this text that in contrast to human wisdom, Christ's Word instills Godly wisdom. This is true wisdom.

It begins with a right view and understanding of God. Solomon taught, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Proverbs 9:10)*. The Psalmist concluded, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!*” (*Psalms 111:10*). Solomon also taught his son, “*My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding*” (*Proverbs 2:1-6*). And he [God] said to man, “*Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding*” (*Job 28:28*).

“Oh wow!” human wisdom retorts, “Fear is not positive thinking at all.” That is true. But fear will be the universal characteristic of all people who God pummels with judgment against sin in the Tribulation. John saw, *Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”* (*Revelation 6:15-16*). According to Christ’s Word, it is better to learn to fear God now.

Fear begins with the kind of understanding God revealed to His frightened people at Mt. Sinai. *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die”* (*Exodus 20:18-29*).

Of course human wisdom concludes that this is a horrible condition a situation to be avoided at all costs. But coming to fear God’s mighty power is not all bad really. Right fear grows to awesome respect for God. It knows that He is powerful enough to destroy us, but also knows He loves us so much He won’t. That is why in response to the people’s fear, *Moses said to the people, “Do*

*not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin”* (*Exodus 20:20*).

We cannot know or appreciate God’s grace until we learn to fear God’s response to our breaking His law. This wisdom is generally rejected by humanism. Humanism teaches that fear is bad because it is definitely not positive! As a friend once said to me, “If you tell a sinner he needs to fear God, he will never get saved!” Actually the Word of Christ says that if the sinner DOES NOT come to fear God, he will never get saved.

The true wisdom that Christ’s Word reveals is that we are all sinners by nature from birth. Our sinful condition and our sins highly offend our Creator. Our Creator will punish all sinners in hell for eternity. Our Creator loves us so much that He provided the means for our sins to be forgiven through faith in Christ’s finished work. Redeemed sinners are God’s chosen, special people who will enjoy His love for eternity.

We are to teach and admonish that kind of wisdom through music. This means that we will sing various kinds of music in our meetings. Paul’s mention of *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* refers to different genres of music employed to teach each other the Words of Christ. The Psalms are just as they say, the Psalms of the Bible that were originally put to music. We put them to different music since we do not have the original tunes nor would we like them. Hymns are songs of praise to God, His work, and His character. Spiritual songs are songs of testimony, what God has done for me or us. Our singing should teach and admonish, which is not the same thing as only make us feel good.

Our songs address others and point to Christ. Paul taught this same truth in a bit different context to the Ephesian church. *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart* (*Ephesians 5:18-19*). Have you ever wondered about the connection of apparently two separate ideas here?

This is one sentence for a reason. The statement is a contrast between a person controlled by the Holy Spirit versus a person controlled by something else. Flesh under the control of an intoxicating beverage is debauchery, which simply means it is not

good by any measure. A debauched person is incorrigible, cannot be reasoned with, reckless and obviously foolish. Most people know the effect alcohol has on people, as it removes the drinker from reality — which is just the point or reason many people drink it.

A husband and wife were struggling, going through a difficult time in their relationship. So in an effort to patch things up, they went out for dinner. At dinner they each ordered a glass of wine. As they were waiting for their meal to be served, the wife looking down at her glass said, “You are so warm and comforting. You always make me feel better about myself. You make me forget about my problems.” Her husband spoke up, “Oh come on. That’s just the wine talking.” The wife said, “No, that’s me talking to the wine.” Hence the problem. A controlling substance removes people from reality. Being removed from reality is not at all an acceptable form of worshiping the true and mighty God.

But now consider the connection. It is also possible to have a similar reaction when the flesh is under the control of emotional stimuli. A generally ignored characteristic of music is its ability to control or stimulate emotions. Some music is soothing and controls the agitated spirit as was demonstrated by David who played soothing music to calm Saul. Much modern music is intended to stir up or heighten emotions to the point that emotions are in control, not the Holy Spirit. A pretty clear sign that the emotions are in control is when the worshiper attempts to attract attention to self thus robbing God of His glory.

The response often looks almost as bad as drunkenness. Coming down from an emotional high is very similar to sobering up from being drunk. Ancient cultic meetings involved playing repetitious music as the people danced harder and harder working themselves into an emotional frenzy which led to all kinds of fleshly debauchery. At some point the victims have to return to reality. I have literally watched videos of people who were supposedly worshiping God by raising their hands and virtually dancing to the stimulating music, lights, and smoke, sit down after the music entertainment and go sound asleep while the preacher spoke about the Bible. That wasn’t worship. It was being drunk on emotions.

In many ministries where feelings have replaced truth, the manipulation of emotions is almost an art form. The other day I read

a post on twitter that said “You’ll have all the ‘feels’ after reading this.” What are “all the feels”? Apparently there are certain feelings people are expected to experience if they want the full experience of life.

God’s plan is for His people to be controlled by the Holy Spirit in our worship services not to be controlled by manipulated emotions. People controlled by the Holy Spirit speak to each other challenging, encouraging, teaching the truth of Christ’s Word. People controlled by the Holy Spirit also speak to the Lord. What do we say to Him? We rehearse His mighty deeds just like the Psalmists did. We rehearse His wonderful promises to us. We plead for His help. We promise our love and devotion.

### **Be Thankful.**

The third step in God’s plan for the assembly of the Church involves thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is not a normal human trait. Sinful human nature is insatiable. Solomon said that *the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing (Ecclesiastes 1:8b)*. If we always have an eye for more stuff, more experiences, more fun, more relationships, we will never be thankful. It is very common for us to be so attracted to the gifts that God gives us that we forget God who gave us the gifts. Because it is not natural for us, Christ’s Word commands thankfulness. Thankfulness is not an option. It is God’s requirement. Pray that He will teach you how to be thankful.

It seems likely that the more we are governed by Christ’s Word, the more thankful we will be. To be governed by Christ’s Word is to know the Bible and do what we know. That is what Jesus meant when He taught, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15)*. Being governed by Christ’s Word leads to thanksgiving. Letting the word of Christ dwell in us makes us thankful. It does not make life grievous as the deceitful flesh would have us believe.

If we do “Church” according to God’s plan, we will be focused on the Bible, and through it and by it we will teach each other and encourage each other even in our singing which also points to God’s glory.