

Rule and Dwell

Colossians 3:12-17

Introduction

We survived. The mad rush of Christmas is behind us. Traffic on Bechtle Avenue will soon return to normal. Now all that remains is to put away the decorations for another year, wait for the garbage man to haul away the extra trash generated, and eat the remaining Christmas fudge.

And then life goes back to the way it was before Christmas. Right?

Hear me clearly: I love Christmas. I love the preparations for it. I love the decorations. I love the food, the cookies and the fudge. I love to see the excitement in a child's eyes. I love the birth story of the Christ child, and all the carols and candlelight. But there is always a sense of "let down" or "exhaustion" when the Christmas Day passes. And there is a sense that things now will go back to the way they were.

But Jesus didn't come so that things could be the way they were before. He came so that all things would become new. He came to make a difference in our lives and in how we live our lives. So in a very real sense life after Christmas should never be like life before it.

When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Colossae, he emphasized that life in Christ was to result in a life that was full and complete. One of the commentaries on my bookshelf that focuses on Colossians is actually titled "Be Complete."

That theme is captured clearly in Colossians 2:9-10:

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. (Colossians 2:9-10)

Jesus Himself said:

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

The first part of chapter three outlines a number of ways that our lives ought to be different because of our faith in Christ, everything from:

- Getting rid of anger, malice and rage
- Eliminating lies
- Viewing everyone as being someone loved by God
- Being generous with our forgiveness, compassion and patience.

We can read those verses and think "I can't do all of that" or as some do, dismiss it as though it were "works righteousness." But the text doesn't let us get away with either of

those options; instead it shows us the secret to living a life that is complete and different because of that Baby born in Bethlehem.

SECRET #1: LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE

Look at verse 15:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ... (Colossians 3:15)

The word translated "rule" comes from the world of athletics. It means:

Rule: to preside at the games and distribute the prizes.

In the Greek games, there were judges (umpires) who rejected the contestants who were not qualified, and who disqualified those who broke the rules. The umpires controlled the games and made sure everything happened within the realm of the rules.

For the Christian, the text says, God's peace is our umpire. "Let the peace of God umpire your hearts." God's peace is to be in control everything that happens in our hearts and in our churches. It determines how you play the game.

- If you live inside the will of God, you will have His peace at work within you.
- If you live outside of His will (even unintentionally), you lose His peace.

When a Christian loses the peace of God, he begins to go off in directions that are out of the will of God.

- He begins to justify His behavior and his attitudes.
- He withdraws from the things of the church and faith because they only remind him of his lack of peace.
- He may indulge in the things of the world and the flesh to compensate for his lack of peace within.

He tries to escape, but he cannot escape. It is only when he confesses his sin, claims God's forgiveness, and does God's will that he experiences God's peace within.

Something else is involved: if we want to have God's peace as the umpire of our hearts, we have to be willing to be at peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:13-14)

We are called to one body, and our relationship in that body must be one of harmony and peace. So how can the world tell if the peace of Christ rules in your heart? By your willingness to forgive someone who has wronged you.

SECRET #2: LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL

Look at verse 16:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly ... (Colossians 3:16)

This means, of course, the Word of God (the Scriptures).

We know from our study of the Scriptures that Colossae was overrun with false teachers who were attempting to merge their man-made traditions, religious rules, and human philosophies with the teachings of the faith. It was true then and it continues to be true today that all such attempts to harmonize God's Word with other teachings waters down the Christian, and it will never succeed.

It is not the words of contemporary progressive teaching that brings about your salvation. It is only the Word of Christ that dwells in you richly. That Word alone transforms our lives and makes into the kind of people worthy to bear the name of Jesus.

That Word must "dwell" in us.

Dwell: to feel at home.

When the Word of Christ takes residence in our hearts its teachings feel "at home" to us. It becomes comfortable in a good sense. There is something that is just "right" about it. So not only does the peace of Christ need to rule in there, the Word of Christ needs to dwell in there as well. It cannot feel like a visitor.

Now remember, Paul was writing to a church, not just to individual believers. What was true on the individual level has to be true on the corporate level as well.

- The peace of Christ must rule in you (individually – singular) and in you (churchwide – plural)... AND
- The Word of Christ has to be at home in your heart (individually – singular) and in our life together as a congregation (you plural)

There is always a danger though, both now and in Paul's day, that local churches minimize the Word of God. That shows up in a lack of simple Bible teaching in Sunday School classes and pulpits. It is revealed in the number of people who open their Bibles during the week, who study the Scriptures, who apply its teachings, who commit its words to memory.

Paul goes on to indicate that there is a definite relationship between God's Word in our hearts and our expression of music in our worship. Look at verse 16 again:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (Colossians 3:16)

If God's Word is in our hearts, there is also a song there. That song ...

- Teaches people about the faith
- Admonishes those who are straying in their faith
- Takes on a variety of forms (psalms, hymns, songs)
- Is generated by the Holy Spirit
- Is always offered to an audience of One (God)
- Is an act of gratitude
- Can be public or private (it comes from the heart)

But if the Word of God is not in our hearts, we cannot sing from our hearts. This shows how important it is to know the Word of God, for it enriches our public and private worship of God. That song can't be there if God's Word doesn't dwell there.

So how can the world tell if the Word of Christ dwells in your heart? By whether there is a song of gratitude in your heart.

APPLICATION

Neither the song or the forgiveness are natural qualities. People who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ are not likely to have either of them.

That kind of transformation is precisely why Jesus came. It is why Christmas makes such an important difference for the one who is a disciple of Jesus.

Amen.