

A Christ-Saturated Church

Colossians 3:15-17

¹⁵ *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.*

¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.* ¹⁷ *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

It's easy to spot people full of alcohol. They might show any number of signs. Their speech might be slurred. They might have trouble balancing. They might have dilated pupils. They might be unusually happy, or unusually hostile. They might be flushed or sweating. They might bump into things and even pass out. When someone has decided to fill himself with alcohol, and come under its influence entirely, we can tell.

What does it look like when someone comes under Christ's influence in such a powerful way? It's almost a cliché today to talk about how “radical” you are for Jesus. People wear John 3:16 T-shirts and bracelets with various acronyms or verses on them. They go to Gospel concerts, and tune into Christian radio. Are these the signs that someone is intoxicated with Christ?

How do we know when Christ is truly central and overflowing in a person's life, or in a church? The verses in Colossians tell us.

We are approaching the end of Colossians, and we need to ask if the message of Colossians has affected our lives.

Colossians is about Christ's sufficiency. We have seen that from the beginning. Christ is more than enough to meet every spiritual, emotional or other need in a human. We do not need Jesus-plus to fulfill our lives' purposes. Christ Himself is enough.

The result of the test of how sufficient we think Christ is, will be seen in how central He is. People take in alcohol because they think it is sufficient to fix their problems, make them feel better, help them to forget. When people believe Christ is sufficient, they take Him in, and the results are evident.

Three results are seen consecutively in these verses.

I. Christ's Peace Prevails.

When Christ is sufficient to you, and you are saturated with Him, His peace prevails in your heart.

What is this peace? It is more than one thing.

Firstly, it is peace *with* God (Romans 5:1). Before salvation we were enemies of God, warring against His right to rule, rebelling against Him. We were usurpers – taking God's throne. It meant we were at war with Him, whether or not we realised it. When we come to salvation, Christ reconciles us to God by taking away our sin, and its penalty, and there is peace with God.

Secondly, it is the peace *of* God. The peace of God is what God brings to the heart. Instead of restlessness, turmoil, inner conflict, anxiety, unhappiness – there is peace. There is contentment, acceptance, trust, quiet rest and calmness at being under the sovereign control of God, and believing His will to be best.

It is a subjective peace that we experience as we live in obedience to God. As we know and do His will, we experience the peace of God flooding our soul.

And if you have the peace of God in your own soul, it is to be expected that we have peace within the church. In fact, vv 12- 14 describe something of what that peace looks like.

But this is the interesting thing. The word for 'rule' is a word that means umpire. It was one who presided over the games, and would determine or decide the result. Paul says, *'let the peace of God be the umpire in your hearts'*.

What does that mean? As we live amongst one another, let the peace objectively and subjectively help determine how you should make decisions.

Objectively, I need to ask, 'will this action or attitude of mine disturb the peace of God's church? Will this help or harm the peace?' And the answer makes the decision for me. It is the umpire. If this will harm the peace we have been called into, I decide against it.

Now it doesn't mean, 'Will this always mean people will like me?' Sometimes, we are going to offend or disturb the complacency of a lukewarm Christian. That is not breaking the peace of God's body. A person who is lukewarm is already disturbing the peace. It means, 'Is it in harmony with Christ's will for the Body?'

Subjectively, is my sense of submission to God's will disturbed by this word, thought or deed? Do I lose my calmness and tranquility in dwelling in my Lord's will when I seek to do this? If so, let the peace of God be the umpire and rule against that action.

Now this doesn't mean that if you feel calm about something you must do it, or because you feel bothered by it, you shouldn't. Some people feel very calm about their selfishness, while others feel very nervous when they have to do something righteous for God's name.

What it does mean is 'Does this action disturb the communion between you and your Lord?' If you have been living away from conscious communion with Him, then don't answer the question, because you may have gotten used to it, and you need to come back to where you are resting in Christ, and you would feel it if you stepped out of that rest.

A Christ-saturated life feels the chilliness of stepping away from God's revealed will and loses the peace that passes all understanding. A Christ-saturated church feels the boat is rocking if the peace is disturbed.

For years I drove a VW Beetle. The suspension and shock absorbers of a VW Beetle are legendary. You may as well be driving on a thin piece of cardboard. You feel everything - pebbles, dips in the road, uneven surfaces. When you first drive a car with better shock absorbers, you feel like you are gliding. And if you hit a bump you really notice it, because you become used to the smoothness. When you drive a Beetle, you no longer notice the bumps so much; they are just part of your driving experience.

Sadly, many churches become like that. Because Christ is not central and occupying the lives of the people, there are continual conflicts, divisions, rivalries, gossips and back-biting. And it is not regarded as anything abnormal. Everyone is used to it. It's just like driving a Beetle – you don't notice the bumps any longer, they are always there.

A Christ-saturated church should be like driving that smooth car. Anything that disturbs the peace should bother us, and we should endeavour to correct it. If Christ is central, peace should prevail. If Christ is not central, peace disappears, and eventually you just get used to the bumps being there all the time.

The same is true of the individual person. It is not that Christians never experience any frustration, or find things that concern them. But a Christ-saturated Christian should have the peace of God as their experience. The loss of that peace should be an alarm bell. Too often, we get used to living

without that peace. That's a bit like getting used to an alarm which is always going off, till you have mentally tuned it out. It might be warning you about a real danger, but you ignore it. Getting used to living without peace as a Christian is dangerous, because that umpire is there to guide us.

The second characteristic of the Christ-Saturated church and believer is that

II. Christ's Word is Prominent

Colossians 3:16 - *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.*

The command here is – *let the word of Christ – which is His written Word – settle in your hearts.* Give it a permanent dwelling place in your hearts. The Word should not be a visitor, a backpacker, a sometime guest – the Word should have a front door key and have prime place.

Moreover, he adds the word '*richly*'. The Word is to have a luxurious accommodation in our hearts. Now Paul is using an image of the Word living, and living luxuriously, lavishly, in your heart. What does that mean, exactly? What would it look like in our church life? What would it look like in our individual lives?

Well, verse 16 actually helps us because we are told of the two ways that this is to happen. The one is *proclamation* and the other is *praise*.

We see proclamation in the words '*teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom*'.

The Word gets a lavish place in our church, when we give much space to proclaiming the Word in all wisdom. Proclaiming the Word has both positive and negative aspects – *teaching and admonishing*. Teaching is setting forth the truth, admonishing is the warnings and rebukes that must come as we apply the Word.

If we had 90 minutes to meet together, and we had to decide how to divide that time up, what would signify a rich, abundant, place for the Word in our meeting? Would it be a 10 minute object lesson; a 15 minute motivational talk; or a 5 minute devotional chat?

Sadly, we see this occurring today. The Word is shunted to the side. We even see it in the physical arrangement. The pulpit is a transparent, almost invisible thing, the preacher is almost to the side, if not the edge of the stage, and his sermon is really a 15 minute Powerpoint presentation, designed to keep the entertainment going.

If we are to be a church which shows forth the sufficiency of Christ, we must always give a rich and abundant place to His Word. The Word of Christ reveals Christ's will; it reveals Christ's Person; His nature. Everything must flow out of the Word of Christ. We can't worship, obey or serve someone we don't know.

Notice, this teaching or admonishing is not to happen in any old way, it is to be done in wisdom. It is to be done with the skill and tact, and balance and proportion, and guidance which God gives. If we lack wisdom, we must ask, and He will give it.

This teaching and admonishing does not only belong to the pastor-teachers. God has gifted others with teaching. On some levels, we are all to be teaching one another, discipling one another. What must we use as we do this? *Oprah? I'm OK You're OK? Cosmo-mag? Chicken Soup for the Soul?* No! We must use the ***Word of Christ***.

In fact, this provides us with a useful test to see if we are giving the Word a prominent place in our

lives. You are giving the Word a prominent place in your life, when you are able to teach and admonish other Christians.

That leads us to an individual application. How does the Word have a lavish place in your life as an individual? On one level, it means taking the Word in corporately, whenever you have the chance. But there is also a time for individual study and reading of the Scriptures. You know what your own habits are with the Word. You know how the Word compares to other pursuits like TV, Internet, social phone calls, doing extra work at home.

Is the Word prospering in your life?

The second way that the Word is to have a rich place in our church and our lives is through praise. We are to sing, with sincere gratitude in our hearts to the Lord, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Now, I don't know if there is a sharp distinction between those three - I think they overlap in many ways; but what is clear is that psalms come from the Word of Christ. Hymns come from truth from the Word of Christ, Spiritual songs sing of testimonies and experiences that emerge from the Word of Christ. When we sing, we are to sing the truth. We are not supposed to sing about ourselves (mainly) or about our spiritual aspirations (mainly). We are to sing of God and His glory, from the Word - His attributes, His works, our privileges in him, our gratitude, and our love for Him.

Sadly, modern churches have separated the two from each other. The singing is tailored around pop songs, with vaguely spiritual lyrics, designed to give the placebo effect. Substantial praise is not going on, no substantial edification is going on, but the driving beat and the gushy words at least make us *feel* like it is. So you have this self-centred time of amusement, or even spiritual entertainment, and then, having done that, you now sit down to hear the Word. You hear people say things like, "That church has great praise and worship, but the Word isn't very strong." How can that be? If the Word is not strong, what are you singing about? *If the truth isn't properly proclaimed, then God will not be properly praised.*

Compare this Scripture to **Ephesians 5:18-19** ¹⁸ *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,* ¹⁹ *speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.* What this tells us is that being Spirit-filled is essentially the same thing as allowing the Word of Christ to dwell richly in our hearts. The Word is the handlebars the Spirit uses to guide us. The more the Word dwells richly, the more the Spirit controls us. And what this tells me is that Spirit-filled worship is Word-filled worship.

This is why the Lord called for worship in Spirit and in truth. The Spirit broods over and empowers the Word. Anytime you are in a place where the atmosphere might seem spiritually intense and filled with deep emotion, but the Word is not seen, preached or heard in the songs, be sure that those emotions are not Spirit-filled ones.

One of the spiritual thermometers to apply to your own heart is this: 'Has the Word of Christ erupted into song in my own heart?' The Word is not only to be known; it is to be enjoyed, rejoiced over, and celebrated. Christians dwelling in the Word should, of all people, be found whistling, humming, singing the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs that we know reflect the truth we love. When the songs of Zion are not on your heart, spend time going before God, pouring your heart out to Him.

We can never have too much of the Word, when the Spirit illuminates it to our hearts. We can never have too much Christ. The more of His Spirit-empowered Word we have, the more of **Him** we have. And the more concentrated our saturation with the Word, the sweeter and clearer and louder will be our songs.

III. Christ's Glory is Our Purpose

It is not very often that the Bible gives you such an all-encompassing command. *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

What does it mean to do something in Jesus' name? Well, if you had to say, "I do the following in Dave's name", everyone would know you were doing it on behalf of Dave. They would think you were doing it for Dave, or because of Him. The name of someone stands in for the person.

If you do something in Jesus' name, you are saying that you are doing this for Him, and you are doing it because of Him, and you are doing it by Him, of Him, through Him, to Him.

What is the scope of things we are supposed to do for Jesus, to Jesus, because of Jesus?

The answer is '*Whatever you do*'.

Now what is the one thing you cannot do in the name of Jesus? Sin.

Here's a simple test to apply to any word or deed – 'What I am about to say, can I say it in the name of Jesus? What I am about to do, can I do it in the name of Jesus?' If not, don't do it
This is an all-encompassing command -*live your entire life out of love for Jesus Christ.*

1 Corinthians 10:31 *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Shouldn't this be the natural result of Christ being central to us? If we want to walk in His will and not lose His peace; if we want to know His will by allowing it to have a rich place in our lives, the outworking must be that our entire lives are lived to Him and through Him and for Him.

Many years ago, Tozer wrote something called 'The Waning Authority of Jesus Christ in the Churches'. In it, he said that for many churches, Jesus was like a constitutional monarch. As examples, he asked:

'In the conduct of our public worship where is the authority of Christ to be found? The truth is that today the Lord rarely controls a service, and the influence He exerts is very small. We sing of Him and preach about Him, but He must not interfere; we worship our way, and it must be right because we have always done it that way, as have the other churches in our group.

What Christian when faced with a moral problem goes straight to the Sermon on the Mount or other New Testament Scripture for the authoritative answer? Who lets the words of Christ be final on giving, birth control, the bringing up of a family, personal habits, tithing, entertainment, buying, selling and other such important matters?

Is Christ truly controlling our actions, goals and plans as a church? In word and deed, is it all about Him, and for Him, and through Him?

As you apply this personally, ask yourself, "Is Christ my companion, for my actions during the day?" Can I really say that I do what I do for Christ?

Now none of us will be able to claim that we have universally consecrated every move we make to Christ. If we did that, we would be close to perfection. But is it not a worthy goal?

Brother Lawrence provides us with such an example here: He resolved to make the love of God the *end* of all his actions. He was pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts....

We should apply ourselves unceasingly to this one end, to rule all our actions that they become little acts of communion with God.

Now we have made it our goal as a church to know Christ and make Him known. In that sense, Colossians 3:17 could be our church's theme verse. The purpose of everything we do, is *to know Christ and to make Him known*.

There's a progression here. When I believe Christ is sufficient, I want to keep His will, and remain in the peace of abiding. But how do I know His will? By giving it a prominent place in my life, to where I could teach and admonish others. And when I give the Word that kind of place – I will be singing and rejoicing in song before God. That kind of attitude can help me focus every act of my life to the glory of Jesus Christ.