

# Colossians 3:16-17

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-3/colossians-316-17/>

*Paul continues his description of the proper perspective for Christians and the associated behavioral choices.*

Paul began this chapter with a big picture view of the Christian mindset, telling the Colossian believers to “keep seeking the things above” (Colossians 3:1). He then zeroed in on particular behaviors, reminding the reader along the way of that big picture purpose. In these two verses, Paul zooms back out, seeking to remind us of the value and importance of setting our minds on the things above.

This begins with the instruction *to let the word of Christ richly dwell within you*. To *dwell* is to inhabit. This metaphor suggests that the *word of Christ* ought to become a tenant of our being. It should live within us. It is not enough for it to visit, to be pulled off a shelf in time of need, or to borrow it from a friend. It needs to live within us. To *dwell*.

The phrase *word of Christ* translates two Greek words “logos” and “christos.” Christos is Christ, which means “anointed.” It refers to Jesus as the promised Messiah, the seed of Abraham sent by God to fulfill His promise to redeem the world. The meaning of the Greek word “logos” depends on context, and can span a broad spectrum. On one end of the spectrum, it can mean a single word or saying, and on the other end it can mean knowledge and meaning itself.

John 1:1 translates “logos” as “word” and says,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”  
(John 1:1)

*The Word* is Jesus Himself. Jesus is meaning and all meaning stems from Him. This is consistent with Paul’s description of Jesus early in this letter:

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”  
(Colossians 1:16-17)

All existence is an extension of Jesus, and all meaning stems from Him. Language is a means of communication, to formulate and exchange meaning. Language is, therefore, evidence of God’s creative handiwork. Therefore, when speaking of the word of Christ, this likely spans the entire spectrum of meaning, from nature (including the presence of language) and scripture to Jesus Himself, in whom all things consist.

The written word is God's communication to us that serves to help us to gain understanding (2 Timothy 3:16). But God also designed creation to reflect Him, and all creation serves as a means for us to gain understanding (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20, 10:18).

Beyond this, scripture teaches that the very Person of Christ lives inside of each believer. Paul stated this overtly in the first chapter, using the phrase "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:27). Each believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, leading and guiding (when we allow). So each believer also has Christ within.

Paul chooses to add an adjective, *richly*, in the phrase *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you*. The term *richly* appears only four times in the Bible (Colossians 3:16, 1 Timothy 6:17, Titus 3:16, and 2 Peter 1:11). It is the Greek word "plousios" and it means "abundance." To *richly dwell*, then, means to have something live within you in abundance.

C.S. Lewis talks about the believer as a living house. When Christ comes in, He upsets the furniture and repairs the walls. He makes it His home. With Christ as the tenant, any home becomes a mansion. There is an abundance. However, this abundance is only manifest when we choose it. We are to *let the word richly dwell*. The words *let* and *dwell* are both translations of the same Greek verb. In each case, it is an active, present tense imperative verb. Paul here is commanding each believer to make a constant choice, in each moment, to allow all the richness and abundance of Christ to be a reality within them. The result will be that the things flowing out of them will correspond with life and peace, and the traits Paul exhorts believers to exhibit, starting in Colossians 3:12. This includes compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

To walk in the Spirit is to seek that which is above (which leads to the experience of life and peace). To walk in the flesh is to be mired in that which is below (which leads to the experience of death and division)—(see commentary on [Galatians 5:17-21](#) and [Galatians 5:22-26](#)) .

The context of this chapter would then lead us to conclude that in order to allow the *word of Christ to richly dwell within* us, we should take a number of actions that are all oriented toward the same result—experiencing life and peace.

- We would choose the mindset Paul advocates, focusing on the things that are above, having an eternal perspective.
- We would gain an eternal perspective through listening to and believing the written *word of Christ*, the scriptures (Romans 10:17).
- We would choose to walk in the ways Paul advocates, the "love the Lord" and "love your neighbor as yourself" kinds of behaviors, and in doing so allow the indwelling Spirit of Christ to rule in our hearts and dwell within (Colossians 3:16-17).

Paul is asking the Colossians not just to allow *Christ to dwell* within as one of many, but to allow Him to do so in abundance—*richly*. Don't try to overcrowd the house with a bunch of different tenants. Allow Him to *dwell richly*. This is the path to life and peace. It is the path to our greatest self-interest.

When we decide to do this, Christ brings benefits with Him. Benefits that seep into our self and become a part of the way we act, think, and believe. Therefore, Christ's dwelling comes *with all wisdom*. Not just some *wisdom*. *All* of it. Another translation could be "every" *wisdom*. The value of *wisdom* is that it is a practical discernment. A knowledge of action. It helps you to decide how to perceive and, therefore, what to do. Wisdom is the knowledge of how to live effectively, and gain the greatest true and sustainable benefit for one's self and for others.

When we are able to engage with wisdom on an individual level, it invites us to engage with community more effectively, *teaching and admonishing one another*. *Teaching* is the art of sharing *wisdom* with others, passing unique manifestations of *wisdom* between persons.

The Greek word translated *admonishing* is "noutheteo." It literally means "to put in mind." We often think of it as warning or exhortation. But the heart of the word is a call to awareness. To remind one another (in this case, of the truth of the gospel and the reality of Christ). This means that seeking and living in the reality of eternal truth from above is a "team sport." We need one another to discover and live the truths that lead to wisdom on a daily basis, *admonishing one another* (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Paul then tells the Colossian believers how to accomplish the task of *admonishing one another*. It is done *with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs*. All three of these are musical terms. A psalm is a set piece of music or a sacred ode. To sing *hymns* is to sing songs of praise. The Greek word "hymnos" has a root that means "celebrate."

The word "hymnos" only appears twice in Scripture: here and in Ephesians when Paul is listing the same three musical terms to make a similar plea to the church in Ephesus. It is worth noting that in this passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that *psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs* are cited as a means of being filled with the Spirit, which is something that transpires as a part of gathering together:

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."  
(Ephesians 5:18-20)

A *spiritual song* is a pretty straightforward description. It is a combination of music and lyrics to express a supernatural truth.

Paul further instructs the Colossians to *sing with thankfulness in your hearts to God*. The word for *sing* actually appears most often in The Book of Revelation. There are a number of songs there that express truths from above and declare things that are true and real.

The scripture contains a number of songs. The book of Psalms is composed of 150 different songs that cover a number of topics and occasions. The Song of Solomon is a celebration of marriage and sexuality within biblical marriage. The Song of Moses in Exodus 15 remembers Israel's deliverance through the Sea.

Moses also wrote a song recorded in Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:43. This song is a reminder to Israel of their history, and the ongoing consequences of their choices, whether to be faithful in obedience (which leads to life) or unfaithful in disobedience (which will lead to exile and death).

The Song of Deborah recalls Israel's deliverance in a time when the leaders led, and the people volunteered, each exercising good stewardship, as God had directed (Judges 5:1-3).

Paul tells the Colossian believers to *sing with thankfulness*. The word translated *thankfulness* here is the Greek word "charis," which is most often translated as "grace." It generally means "favor." Various translations of verse 16 use "grace" and "gratefulness" in addition to "thankfulness" to translate "charis." To *sing with thankfulness* in this instance means singing with favor toward God.

"Charis" could also apply to singing with "favor" toward God for the others assembled. We often talk in our modern world about extending grace or giving grace to someone. This, in essence, is about casting favor on others by celebrating together with them.

Paul is asking the Colossians to sing with this kind of joy, with delight that transcends circumstances and acknowledges the infinite wonder that is the *wisdom* of *The Word of God*.

This *thankfulness*, or grace, is *in your hearts to God*. So, it comes from the core within you (in which Christ dwells) to the God of the Universe (who also exists outside of you, and everyone, and all of time itself). Paul is suggesting the Colossians join in the chorus, shouting praise from the Christ who dwells within us to the Christ who dwells everywhere all at once.

This is reinforced in verse 17, the crescendo of all that Paul has been talking about thus far in Chapter 3,

*Whatever you do in word or deed...*

The singular word *whatever* is actually two Greek words—"hos" ("what" or "which") and "pas" ("all"). So, literally "all which" *you do in word or deed*. *Word* here is a translation of the Greek word "logos." In the previous verse, believers were admonished to let the word ("logos") of Christ richly dwell within them. Now, it is acknowledged that we use words ("logos") to communicate, as a significant part of all we do.

A *deed* is an action we take. *Deed* is a translation of the Greek word "ergon," from which we get the English word "ergonomic." It is most often translated as a form of "work." It applies to what we do in employment, the labor of our hands, what we create, or any engagement of effort with, for, or against another person. It is anything we do that takes effort.

Anything we do, whether *word or deed*, should be consistent. Both (*all*) should be done *in the name of the Lord Jesus*.

This is Paul's emphatic wrap up to this section of his letter to the Colossians. He has given some examples of what to do (forgive, sing, etc.). The real key, however, is not the checklist of doing

all the right actions. These are just some examples, ways in which the dwelling of Christ manifests itself in our daily living. The key is to adopt this perspective, this mindset, this posture: to do everything *in the name of Jesus*.

To do something *in the name of* something (or someone) is to behave in alignment with their essence. If someone acts in their own name, they are acting in the way that is in alignment with what they think or want. To act in the name of progress is to take on the very nature of pushing forward (innovation). To act *in the name of Jesus* is to act in a manner of living with the priorities assigned by Jesus, which has its apex in serving one another in love.

Earlier, Paul admonished the Colossians to “put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (Colossians 3:14). This is consistent with the admonition to do everything we do in the name of Jesus, because Jesus’s commandment to believers is for them to love one another (John 13:34). Just as God is existence (I AM) and knowledge (“logos”), God is also love (“agape”). To “put on love” is also to do all things *in the name of Jesus*.

Paul tells the Colossian believers to act in alignment with *the name of the Lord Jesus*. The word *Lord* is the Greek word “kyrios.” It means “he to whom a thing belongs.” Since all things belong to The Lord Jesus, it only makes sense that what is in the best interest of any person is to act in accordance with the creator, master, and possessor of reality. To do all things consistent with *the name of the Lord* is to live in harmony with the reality of the existence God created. In doing so, we will be doing that for which we were created, and therefore seeking our greatest possible fulfillment.

Paul ends this thought by adding that the Colossian believers should *include giving thanks through Him [Jesus] to God the Father*. The word for *giving thanks* here in verse 17 is different than from the previous verse, verse 16, albeit slightly. Here it is “eucharisteo,” “extending grace/favor.” So, thanksgiving is the act of extending appreciation to God. We do this through *Christ*, our emissary. Since Christ taught His disciples to pray directly to the Father (Matthew 6:9-13) it does not seem Paul here is suddenly saying we cannot.

Because *God the Father* and *the Lord Jesus* are not two separate entities, but two personages of the same entity (the Holy Spirit is the third, making what is commonly called The Trinity), what Paul is essentially talking about is allowing us to participate intimately with God, going to His inner workings. God communicates within Himself (Genesis 1:26, 3:22; John 17:1). The Spirit prays for us in ways we cannot understand (Romans 8:26).

For believers in Jesus, God is within us and beyond us. Notwithstanding, we are invited to participate intimately with Him, in one of the great privileges and mysteries of the universe. What is happening, in essence, is that God dwells within us, and when we allow Him to rule in our hearts, and influence our behavior, we are empowered (and not encumbered) to make choices that are consistent with *the name of the Lord Jesus*. When the Lord Jesus followed in obedience to His Father, His Father was well-pleased (Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Philippians 2:8-9; Matthew 28:18; Revelation 3:21). When believers do *whatever they do in word or deed* consistent with *the name of the Lord Jesus*, we are *giving thanks through Him to God the Father*. To live in obedience to Jesus is to live in *thanks* to God the Father, who gave Jesus to redeem us from sin.

## **Biblical Text**

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