

December 28, 2008

# THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

## *Let the Word of Christ Dwell in You*

### Colossians 3:16 – 25

The practical experience of the gospel is this: **a new life being lived where we are putting off the old self with all of its practices, and habits and ways of doing things – and putting on the new self which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.** We are renouncing all the old convictions, values, impulses, affections, passions and drives that governed our unregenerate minds – and embracing the truth that is now renewing our minds in Christ. We are putting off anger and wrath and malice and pride, and putting on compassion and kindness, humility and gentleness, bearing with and forgiving one another in the bond of love and letting the peace of God umpire in our hearts in all things. ***By the power of the Holy Spirit we are putting to death all that is earthly in us and letting heaven fill our thoughts.*** That is the gospel lived out. It is a life lived wholly in Christ – where Christ is the center and circumference of all we do, say or think. Where Christ is all and in all as Paul tells us in verse 11.

***And the key to putting off the old and putting on the new is our relationship with Christ in His word.*** Paul says: *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 The word of God is central to our lives as Christians. The boundaries of our world need to be circumscribed by the word of God. That is why this ministry makes the proclamation and study of the word of God the central thing. Everything is tied to the word – our worship, our prayer, our praise – our living – all of it must relate to the revealed word of God.

And Paul says, *'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...'* It means first of all that His word finds a home in our hearts – that's what it means to **dwell**. It means that His word lives in us. **It means that if someone could knock on the front door of our heart, the word of God would answer.** It means that our thinking is saturated with His word – and that doesn't happen by osmosis. It happens as we soak our minds in the word of God. Let it dwell in you **richly** – be wealthy in this – the living and abiding word of God. There are a lot of things to give your time and attention to in this world – give yourself to getting rich in the word. [Meditation - memorization]

Because as Christians, we are supposed to be *'...teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...'* If you do not know the word of God, if it does not live in your heart – how will you teach and admonish? As believers, our teaching and admonishing must be from the word. As we gain new insight from the word by being in it and we bring it to one another and share it – we are teaching one another. That ought to be happening all the time among us. Because our God is an infinite God – there is no way any one of us will have all the insight and all the knowledge about Him. **God intended that His people spend their time and energy and resources in finding out all about Him.** And as you share what you've discovered new about God it sparks something in me to find out more about Him in His word.

We are also to admonish one another from the word. **Admonish** here means to warn, to instruct, so as to redirect someone from wrong ways and correct their behavior. Don't get the idea that you are somehow to correct their behavior – it is admonishing one another from the word of God that is meant here. I know that it is tempting to play the Holy Spirit with one another because we see each other's imperfections all too clearly. But we are not the Holy Spirit and that is not our job. Our job is to bring one another to the word of God and let it work. *'For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.'* Hebrews 4:12 **Admonishing one another is lovingly confronting one another with the word of God and letting it do its work.**

Furthermore, our teaching and admonishing must be '*...in all wisdom...*' The Bible teaches us to get wisdom: *Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;* Proverbs 2:2 *How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding.* Proverbs 3:13 *Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.* Proverbs 4:5 Wisdom is more than just knowledge. Wisdom could be defined as knowledge with understanding. Job 11:6 tells us that wisdom has two sides. ***It is knowledge of the facts coupled with the sense or discernment to put it to use.***

When the Lord came to King Solomon and told him to ask Him for anything – he asked God for wisdom. He could have asked for a lot of things, but he realized that wisdom was what he needed most. And the Lord came back with this: *'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.'* 1 Kings 3:11-12 And then He said: *I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.* 1 Kings 3:13-14 In other words – ***God can entrust real wealth and honor to those who have first acquired wisdom*** – the wisdom to use both in service to the Lord.

Solomon got tested right away when two prostitutes arrive with one baby. Both had given birth, but one had rolled over on her baby and smothered it. She took the live baby from the other prostitute and left the dead baby with her. In the morning, the mother of the live baby discovered what had happened. Somehow they got an audience with the king and said: **You be the judge.** At this point, Solomon's probably thinking that this king business is not going to be a bed of roses. How in the world would he be able to tell who the child really belonged to? But he had prayed for divine wisdom. And in understanding coupled with discernment he said, *'Bring me a sword.'* So a sword was brought before the king. And the king said, *'Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.'* 1 Kings 3:24-26 But before it could happen, the true mother said, *'Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death.'* 1 Kings 3:26 Then Solomon said, *'Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother.'* 1 Kings 3:27 That's wisdom. Not earthly wisdom but godly wisdom. **There is no apparent solution that we can see. But God has one.**

James tells us that this is not just an Old Testament-King Solomon thing either. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* James 1:5 There are so many things of this life that we need wisdom about – and the Bible says specifically about this wisdom thing that if we ask – God will give. And He will give generously with ragging us for not having any wisdom in the first place. Wisdom is God's and it is His to give and He delights in giving His children wisdom about everything.

Strangely enough, Paul modifies letting the word of Christ dwell in us with '*...singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*' I think he did that for two reasons. The first is that one of the best ways to let the word of Christ dwell in us is by singing back to the Lord the Scriptures He's given us. All of the best worship songs are either right from the biblical text or closely following a particular thought or doctrine taught by the Scriptures. There are still Scriptures emblazoned on my heart from the songs I learned as a child. The second reason I think that he modifies letting the word of Christ dwell in us through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness is that this is a heart response to the truth and beauty and fullness of the gospel we find in God's word. **It is a spontaneous reaction of a heart filled with gratitude for His marvelous grace.**

And we ought not to get hung up on whether what we are singing falls into the category of a psalm, or hymn or spiritual song. I don't think Paul's intention here was to limit the type of song with which we show forth a grateful heart. I think he intentionally piles on the terms to highlight the wide range of musical expression that grateful and heartfelt praise to God calls forth from those who are redeemed. The moment we limit with man-made restrictions the kind of songs we will sing to worship God – we limit our own experience of Christ and risk falling into mere religious form and deadness, and lose the freshness and spontaneity that is a hallmark of the new life in Christ. We may even grieve the Holy Spirit by our insistence on our own preferred way to sing praises to God. I believe that is why Paul adds that last category – spiritual songs. Psalms we know – they are in the Bible – hymn are for the most part, doctrinal statements set to music. But spiritual songs covers a whole range of expression in song that seems to be limitless in its range. **That may be because the God we worship is limitless and infinite.**

To emphasize this thought, Paul says: *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.* Colossians 3:17 It is as though he is saying, 'However you sing to the Lord – whatever you do to worship Him – make sure that it springs from a heart that is grateful to the Father for what His Son has done in you.' It might be worship with a country twang – it might be hip-hop or rap – it might be worship with a driving rock beat – it might be a pipe organ and 100 voice choir – it might be acappella harmony or any of a hundred thousand ways of expressing your love and thankfulness to God. **Whatever it is – do it in the name of the Lord Jesus and let Him be glorified – not your particular expression.**

And because all of life is meant to be an expression of worship to God, flowing out of our immersion in the word of Christ, Paul gets right into our business where we live – wives, husbands, fathers, children, slaves: *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.* Colossians 3:18 I will say right at the outset that my wife is more qualified to speak on this than I am. After all, it is addressed to her. Husbands like to point this verse out to their wives, but that is not why Paul put it in. He is speaking to the wives – not telling the husbands what to read to their wives. So right now, husbands, hold your hands over your ears – this is not for you.

There is probably no more despised word among women in the evangelical community than this one – submit. I think that is mainly because this word implies a loss of personal control. The thought here is **'Wives, arrange yourself under the authority of your husband because this is the right thing to do in the Lord'**. Not because your husband is the sharpest knife in the drawer – not because he does everything right – not because he's better than you or superior to you – but because this is fitting behavior, becoming behavior for a godly wife. Peter says it like this: *'...let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.'* 1Peter 3:4-6 Notice that holy women hope in God – not their husbands – and their submission to their husbands and to the word of Christ becomes their adornment, their visible beauty. Wives, do you want to be beautiful? **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly and arrange yourself under your husband's authority.**

Okay, now for the husbands – and wives, don't be tempted to put this on a plaque and hang it in a prominent place in your house: *Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.* Colossians 3:19 It is a simple positive command with one admonition. Love your wives and don't be harsh in loving them. The word actually means – **'Don't be embittered against them'**. The temptation for husbands is to become bitter toward their wives when they do not arrange themselves under our authority and as a result treat them harshly. But the Bible doesn't say – love your wives and treat them kindly – *if* they submit. Husbands, the command is clear – **love your wives and treat them kindly – whether they submit or not.** The remarkable thing about the word of God is that we don't have to worry about whether the other person is obeying – just whether we are. And husbands, if you will love your wives – as Christ loved the church – unconditionally, sacrificially, kindly – you won't have to worry about the submission thing.

*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.* Colossians 3:20 Wives submit – husbands love – and children obey your parents. Children, your obedience is not ultimately about whether your parents are right or wrong – but about whether you please God or not. Obedience to authority pleases the God who made you – and if there is one thing I pray over and over for my children, it is that their lives would in the final analysis, be pleasing to the Lord. I don't really care what they do – **only that what they do and how they do it pleases God in all respects.** If that is your goal, then you will never waste your life with any unworthy pursuits.

*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.* Colossians 3:21 I find it convicting that the parent to whom Paul seems to delegate the responsibility of child care in this passage is the father. There are far too many dads who have checked out when it comes to raising their children. Fathers, it is not good enough to be the provider for the family and a kind and loving husband to your wife. In the scheme of families, fathers have a huge impact on the well-being of their children. A cover article in the 1995 February issue of U. S. News & World Report concluded that dad is destiny. More than any other factor, a father's presence in the family will determine a child's success and happiness. Even the world understands that dad's influence in the family for good or bad, is huge. Research has revealed that if a child is the first person in a household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5 percent probability that everyone else in the household will become Christians. Not very high at all. If mom is the first one to accept Christ, the percent goes up to 17 percent. **But if dad is first, there is a 93 percent probability that everyone else in the household will follow.** Fathers, the impact of your life on your wife and your children is massive.

**The goal of a good father is to raise children who are hopeful, not discouraged.** The word translated **discouraged** means to lose heart, become listless, moody, sullen or dispirited. And Paul is highlighting a positive command by stating it negatively: Don't cause your children to lose heart by your parenting. Instead intentionally raise your children to be hopeful, joyful, confident and courageous. That is the opposite of discouraged. **Paul is not just saying to avoid one kind of fatherhood – but rather to pursue another – one that encourages hope – one that inspires joy and confidence – one that provokes courage in the face of crisis.**

How do we do that? We do that by **letting the word of Christ dwell in us** and praying for wisdom in dealing with our children. We do that by **building their hope, not in things but in God.** We point them to the word of Christ and train them to seek wisdom and insight from it. We **live lives that are pleasing to God** so that they will see and want the same. We **live lives that are joyful and hopeful in God** and that will draw them to the God we love and serve. It has often been said that children often do not mind what their parents say, but nearly always do what they see their parents doing. Dads, are you soaking yourself in God's word? Are you loving your wife and treating her kindly? Are you joyful and hopeful in God? Don't be surprised if you're not – they're not.

*Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.* Colossians 3:22 Again, the emphasis is on how the Lord see us, not primarily on how others view us. Slaves, those who labor for another – obey those over you because you fear the Lord. Not because you fear to be fired – or because you love your paycheck.

*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,* Colossians 3:23 You are working for the Lord – not for men, not for yourself – but for Him. If we had that realization – what would change about how we did our job? When you are working for the King of the Universe – how does that change what you do? Because ultimately you are not working for a paycheck – you are not building your retirement plan – you are not working to pad your nest – you are working for the Lord. You are looking out for His best interests – you are advancing His kingdom – you have an eye toward His glory. *knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.* Colossians 3:24 *For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.* Colossians 3:25 In other words, failure to take the commands of Scripture to heart will have consequences. What you sow will be what you reap.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Let it saturate your mind and emotions and will. Let it be the center and circumference of your meditation and prayer. Let it circumscribe your life and permeate your being. Let it work in your heart to give you wisdom – and hope – and courage – and joy. To help us get into the word this coming year, we are going to be starting a new home fellowship series called **10 Keys for Unlocking the Bible** put together by the senior pastor at Arlington Heights Evangelical Free Church in Illinois, Colin Smith. This study is designed to give you the big picture of the one story that begins in a garden and ends in a city, and all the way through points to Jesus Christ. So I want to invite you all to join us on this word of God adventure that begins in January. If you do not belong to a small group fellowship currently, I want to encourage you to find one – call the office, talk to one of the elders or leaders of a small group and get connected.

*Our gracious God and heavenly Father,*

*Grant it Lord that we would love Your word and treasure it beyond all other things. Let it pierce hearts that are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and blinded by the glitter of temporary delights. Let it break our slavery to sin and enthrall our souls to Your faithful loving kindness and everlasting joy. Incline our hearts to seek and savor the goodness of God in this word. Let us see the wonder and beauty of Your saving grace in every line. Grant that we would allow Your word to be the center and circumference of our lives so that we who have been made glad in God would live to make others glad in You we pray, in the precious, life-giving name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.*

**May the Lord bless you and keep you  
and make His face shine upon you.  
May the Lord be gracious unto you;  
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you  
and give you peace.**