

Colossians 3:15-17
(Matthew 5:13-16)
“In the Name of Jesus”

Introduction

We have, in the opening verses of Colossians chapter three, one of Paul’s most compelling and instructive descriptions of a Christian’s identity as a man or woman in Christ, and the implications of that identity, how it affects our understanding of what the Christian life is meant to be. What he writes is remarkable and completely counter-cultural:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God ... Put to death therefore what is earthly in you ... and put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

But where does one begin? If I am in Christ and Christ is in me, how do I begin to experience the reality of that new life transforming me from the inside out? In these three verses, Paul gives us a memorable challenge that not only instructs a new Christian in where to begin, but that also reminds a mature Christian who has lost his way of the path that leads to life.

Body

1. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, and give thanks (3:15).

The peace that Jesus promised to his disciples (“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” John 14:27) should rule all of our relationships. For Christians to be separated from one another, embittered and at war, is a defeat of the gospel. For families to be torn apart, husbands and wives who once vowed to love one another for life now being at enmity with one another is a tragic denial of the gospel. For parents and children to be at war with one another is a denial of the gospel of peace. For former friends and neighbors to be alienated from one another is a denial of the gospel of Christ.

Paul says, “Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts.” The word translated “rule” is taken from sports: it was used in the ancient world to describe an umpire who settled disagreements between opponents. Paul is saying that, in every potential disagreement, the umpire is to be peace. The rule to which

we appeal is the same peace that Christ has made with us, who have sinned against him, offended him, even crucified him.

2. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, and give thanks (3:16).

We cannot know the peace of Christ, the love of Christ, or the power of the Holy Spirit, unless the word of Christ dwells in us richly. We need to read the Scriptures daily, to meditate on them, to memorize them, to be increasingly filled with the word of Christ until it shapes our thoughts, attitudes and desires, until it becomes the vocabulary of our hearts and increasingly of our lips. When the word dwells in us in this way, our time together becomes startlingly different from what it too ordinarily is: it changes the way we talk and even the way we sing.

3. Let the name of Christ direct all you do, and give thanks (3:17).

The key to everything is to recognize that our lives our now “hidden with Christ in God.” In other words, we are now in Christ as members of his body, and Christ is now in us by his indwelling Spirit. We are caught up in Christ and have become a part of the very life of God. We Christians do not take seriously enough our union with Christ. This is no metaphor: if we have been born anew, we have been born of God’s own Spirit and joined in union with Christ. “Old things have passed away, and all things have become new.” Anything less than this is not salvation as understood by the Scriptures. And so, obviously, everything must begin to change.

I am simply not my own. My body belongs to Jesus, my time, my money, my home, my stuff: it is no longer simply mine, because I am now his, and so all I have is his. We are to say to our Lord what husband and wife say to each other when they exchange rings: “With my body I honor you; all that I am I give you; all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.” Have you ever said that to the Lord? Does your life express your loving desire to keep that pledge?

Conclusion

Did you notice that each of these three sections ended with a call to thanksgiving? All this we have been looking at is not law, but grace. God does not save us because we have walked in his ways: rather, we walk in his ways because he has first loved us and made us his own. So the authentic Christian life is a glad and grateful response to the love and mercy of God, who reaches out to us in Jesus Christ and sets us free from brokenness and shame. He gives us the power of his own Spirit, if only we will lay hold of the gift in submissive trust, take him at his word, and begin to live as members of the body of Christ, guided by his peace, his word and his name.

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