

Christian Living, from Colossians #6

Col. 3:16 – “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.”

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom”

What is meant by “the word of Christ “?

- Most specifically to the words that he spoke while here on earth, or in the Book of Revelation.
Mt. 7:24-27 – “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them ...” (Like those who build a house on rock or sand)
Jn. 14:23-24 – “If a man love me, he will keep my words: ... He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings ...”
Rev. 22:7 – “Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”
- Also to the places where he is quoted by NT writers, like 1 Cor. 11 or Ac. 20:35.
- But more generally to the whole Bible. Christ is the living Word, the revelation of God to the world, and we commonly refer to our Bible as the Word, because it is the written revelation of God to the world, “breathed out” by the Holy Spirit through the apostles and holy prophets.

How can the word of Christ be dwelling in us richly, if we do not take the trouble to read it? We should be saturating ourselves with God’s Word by reading and studying with prayer and meditation, and obedience.

Dt. 4:6, 9 (of the statutes and judgments he had taught them) – “Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations ... Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.”

Dt. 6:6-7 – “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

Ps. 119:9-11 – “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

Ps. 119:72 – “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”

Ps. 119:97-105 – “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. ... thy testimonies are my meditation. ... How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! ... Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

Ps. 119:130 – “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.”

“teaching and admonishing one another”

Teachers are “set in the church” like pastors (Eph. 4:11), and Paul reminds Timothy and Titus of the importance of teaching, including it as a qualification for bishops (pastors). But here in Col. 3:16 it is more broadly applied – it is not just pastors and teachers who have the responsibility of teaching, but all of us to some degree or another. Certainly it is the responsibility of parents to teach their children, and the more mature saints should teach those who are just new in the faith. We should all be living in such a way that we can hear when God speaks to us, and so be able to share that with others. This is not to say that everyone is to stand up and give prepared instruction, but that we can share privately, or in the Bible study, or in the church meeting, saying “This is what the Lord has been showing me about this verse ...” (or about some circumstance of life). It is simply sharing the insights and scriptures that have become meaningful to us, and which we think would be helpful to others.

What is “admonishment”? It is literally to “put in mind” (Thayer’s), but especially to admonish, warn, or exhort. Our English word “admonish” means to firmly warn or even reprimand someone, implying either some fault or an evil or dangerous inclination that should be avoided. To exhort is to give strong words either of warning or encouragement.

A good example is in Heb. 10:23-25 – “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

Another good admonishment or exhortation is to Timothy from Paul, as a father in the faith. 1 Tim. 4:12-16 – “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed to thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

What is interesting though, is what follows in Col. 3:16. He doesn't just say that we are to teach and admonish one another, but that we are to be “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”. Our songs are worship and praise to God, but towards one another can be for instruction and admonishment.

“in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”

An obvious question is, what is the difference between these terms? According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, the predominant meaning of a psalm is a song done with musical accompaniment, and a hymn is a song stressing praise to God. The Greek word for song is simply that, whether accompanied with instruments or not, and about any subject. So it is possible to sing something that is all three – a song, a hymn, and a psalm.

It is interesting that in one type of church I am aware of, they will only sing psalms (or at least they frown on any other types of songs), and yet does not allow instruments.

The point is that whatever songs we sing, especially in public worship, they should be spiritually true, instructive, and uplifting, they should bring praise to God, and that we should lean heavily on actual scripture for lyrics, especially the book of Psalms. Musical accompaniment is very good and proper as long as it isn't overwhelmingly loud, discordant, or tending more to entertainment than to worship. It should be an encouragement to real worship, not a distraction.

Examples:

- Psalms – 1, 100, 34, 92, 96, 105, 112, ...
 - Hymns – A Mighty Fortress is Our God, It is Well with My Soul, Rock of Ages, Be Thou My Vision, Blessed Assurance, Great is Thy Faithfulness, Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer, Amazing Grace, Holy, Holy, Holy, How Great Thou Art, Crown Him with Many Crowns, ...
 - Spiritual Songs – There is a Fountain, I Love You Lord, What a Friend We have in Jesus, ...
- Or 1 Cor. 14:26, which is itself a song – “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.”
- There can even be songs for young people that are suited to their ages and mental maturity – Jesus Loves Me This I Know, The B-I-B-L-E, I am a C, or songs that help them learn the books of the Bible in order.

We can't take time now to look up these hymn lyrics, but it would be good, on our own time. I think we would see why these are the songs that endure, as opposed to today's Christian “zomby music” (endless repetition of short phrases with little or no doctrinal content).

“singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”

It is only by grace that we can sing songs that are pleasing to God. The world has all kinds of songs, but they are not even pretending to be for God's glory. The “pretend” songs are reserved for religious people, or they have been coopted by those who sing them only because they appeal to their audience (e.g. Amazing Grace, I'll Fly Away, etc. Those songs can be popular with country or bluegrass groups and yet have no place in their hearts. When you hear someone play it that has experienced it, you can tell the difference, like Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver.

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