

Alive in Christ: Christ-Centered Community

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[0 : 00] has been describing is that for everybody who comes to Jesus, who confesses their sin, who asks forgiveness from God through Jesus, that they receive not only forgiveness but a new identity.

And that that new identity, when they put that identity on, like a set of clothing, that they begin to experience new freedom as a result. And so he's been encouraging them in the previous chapter, live as those free people, live out of this new identity.

So this brings us to Colossians 3. We looked at it last week, but what I wanted to do is just since we have less time this week, I wanted to come to the very end of this passage and focus on the last three verses.

Three very important exhortations that Paul gives. Verses 15, 16, and 17. And what Paul is doing here is he's answering this question. If you were to come to him and say, okay, new identity, how do I actually put that on?

What does that actually look like? What do I do? Paul would say, well, I'll summarize it by telling you to do these three things. And it has to do, conveniently, there are three. I love it when it works out that way.

[1 : 06] But he says it has to do with the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, and then ultimately, most importantly, the name of Christ. So even kids, you can remember this, peace, word, and name, right?

Let's do it together. Peace, word, and name. Okay, that's our outline. Let's pray together. Our Father, you've promised that you would be a God who is with your people, that you're not distant, far away, and that it's not, that we don't have to rely on esoteric practices to try to divine what you're saying.

We don't have to read the stars. We don't have to cast lots. That, Lord, you have spoken clearly to us. You've given us your word, and you've promised to illuminate it to those who come to you seeking understanding, that you would give us that understanding through your word.

So we pray that you would give us that understanding today, that you would reveal your living word to us, and that we would see him face to face. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. So peace, word, and name, three ways that we put on this new identity that then grants us the freedom that can only come through the gospel.

So verse 15, Paul says what? He says, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful.

[2 : 31] Now let's say something about this verse. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. You want to be free? Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. Now a lot of times people hear this verse, and they quote this verse, in reference to the way they go about discerning God's will, and making decisions, right?

I don't know if you've heard it, people talk about this verse in this way, but, you know, I'm trying to decide which college to go to. And I was, you know, and I just prayed about it, and I really felt peace about going to this university.

Or I was trying to figure out if I should take the job, and I really felt peace about making this decision. Or should I break up with this person, or should I stay with them? And I really felt peace about the decision that I made. And that's a way, a common language among Christians.

If you're not a Christian, Christians often talk about this. And the idea behind that is that, as I'm trying to discern God's will for my life, that my internal subjective sense of peace will guide me.

So if I'm making the right decision, and God's kind of giving me the thumbs up, I will feel that thumbs up as an internal peace. And that's how I know I'm on the right track. And I hate to break it

to you, but if you look at the context, that has nothing to do with what Paul is talking about.

[3 : 39] It just doesn't. Because the context is the context of a very mixed community that has come together as one body. And in fact, that whole way of discerning God's will, I don't know that that's anywhere in the Bible.

This is a different sermon, but I've never found that in the Bible. That way of discerning God's will. That internal subjective sense of peace. When Paul says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, he's talking about peace between people, right?

Right? Between people who normally wouldn't get along. So earlier in the passage, he's talked about this is a community of Jews and Greeks, of barbarians, of Scythians, of slaves, of free people, all different kinds of people.

And he says, you're no longer any of those things. Those things don't define you. You're now one body, and you're called to the peace of Christ. This is the peace to which you were called as one body. So that's the context.

And so as we look at that, and we understand what he's saying, what he's really saying is this. If you want to live as free people with this new identity, you need to let peace be the deciding factor in all of your relationships.

[4 : 46] And when he says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, rule is, think of, the word is from the word that we, that means umpire. So think about an umpire. You know, you need a ruling, there's a close, you know, and is he out or not?

And you go to the umpire, and the umpire makes the final call. So it's saying, let peace be the umpire in your relationships. Let peace be the final deciding factor. So when you're fighting, when you're arguing, you know, when people date in the church, and they break up, and then everybody has to decide whose friends are going to go with which person, and, you know, or when people let each other down, when you're disagree, when you're hurt, when we sin against each other.

He's saying, when all of those things happen, and when we are very tempted to split, and divide, and go our separate ways, and find a different church, find a different community, he says, let the peace of Christ rule in those moments.

Let that be your highest priority. And the more we do that, the more we let the peace of Christ rule, be the highest value, the more it sets us free.

Think about it. If you say, my highest priority right now is peace, what's that going to free you from? Well, it's going to free you from the need to always be right. Peace is more important than being right, than proving the other person wrong.

[6 : 03] Peace is more important. Peace rules. You know, peace is more important in this situation than defending myself. Maybe I just need to let my reputation take a few hits.

Because peace is more important. Right? It frees us from the need to win arguments. It frees us from all of these things that divide communities.

You know? It frees me from the need to protect my pride. My ego. Because that's not as important as peace. If peace is the deciding factor. He says, let peace rule. So that's what he's saying.

This is a part of what it means to put on this new identity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Be free from all of these things that would otherwise divide you. Live as one.

So as we are celebrating our independence in Christ, that's the first factor. Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts and in our relationships. That's part one.

[7 : 00] Part two, you can't have the peace of Christ without the word of Christ. Right? The peace comes through the word. So as we go on, we look at the next verse. Verse 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.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. What does that mean? Dwell in you richly. If you know anything about Ephesians and Colossians, a lot of commentators say that Ephesians and Colossians are sort of sister letters.

That Paul likely had a kind of common source text or source sermon that he drew from. And these letters have a lot of similarities. A lot of parallel passages.

You should sit them down side by side and compare them sometimes. It's really interesting. But there is a parallel to this verse in Ephesians. And it's Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18. So where in Colossians it says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

[8 : 06] In Ephesians it actually talks about the Holy Spirit. Be filled with the Spirit. And what you begin to realize when you look at all the times that Paul talks about the word.

And all the times he talks about the Spirit. That in Paul's mind they're one and the same. In other words they're sides of the same coin. You never see the Spirit apart from the word. They go together. The idea being that if you want to be filled with the Spirit of Christ.

That comes by filling yourself with the word. If you want to be filled with the word of Christ. We need to do it with an eye toward the Spirit. Because what happens is that when you focus on one to the exclusion of the other.

We become very unbalanced. So you have some communities over here that are very focused on the Holy Spirit. You want to be Spirit filled. You want to have emotional, charismatic, transcendent experiences.

But a lot of times if that's done in a way that sidelines the word. Where the word is not taught responsibly. What happens is it develops a culture of kind of emotionalism.

[9 : 15] Experientialism. There's a high focus on getting a spiritual high. Having an experience with God. But often it can become ungrounded and untethered.

And unhealthy. And some of you grew up in context. If you grew up with a church background. Some of you come from those backgrounds. High focus on the Spirit. But kind of ungrounded. From anything solid. On the other hand. A lot of us are familiar with churches that do the opposite. There's a high focus on teaching the word. Teaching it responsibly. Teaching it clearly. Having all of our doctrine. All of our theology. Having it all right. But really not much emphasis on the Spirit. And what happens there? Well we have all of the spreadsheets. And everything is laid out clearly.

And it all makes sense. And it's all systematic and logical. But it's dead. And it's kind of lifeless. And dusty. And crusty. And stale.

[10 : 10] Right? And so in Paul's theology. They go together. So he's saying. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. By doing a number of things. One. We need to teach. Responsibly.

That's what's happening right now. That's what happens in our classes. It needs to be taught well. He says also. We need to admonish one another. So everybody in the community. As we're reading the scripture. We are admonishing one another.

And by the way. Coming back to discerning God's will. I wouldn't necessarily recommend. The kind of personal subjective sense of peace. You know like a divining rod. Sort of trying to sense where God is leading you. I'm not sure it works that way.

You know how it works? The way I see it work best. At least in my own life. When I'm trying to make a decision. And I want to know what the Lord's will is. I deputize people in my life. Who I know. Love.

And study God's word. And I deputize them. And I say. I want you to speak God's word into my life. About this decision. Speak God's word into my life. Admonish me.

[11 : 05] If you see me doing something crazy or stupid. If I'm not saying things clearly. If I'm justifying myself. If I'm talking about all. You know. I have all this peace about making this horrible decision. You come in and you say.

You are wrong. You need to take another look. That's I think. One of the best ways to discern God's will. We need to be admonishing one another.

Right. Challenging one another. Exhorting one another. So on the one hand. He says. We need to be responsibly reading the word for understanding. And speaking it. And teaching it. And by the way.

I know that sometimes. We are in small groups. And things like that. And people say. Well. Who really knows what the Bible says. Who. I mean. Who really knows. None of it is really clear. And it could really mean anything.

And. That's a very common way of responding to the word. I will. I will say. I think certain. Certain passages are. Difficult. Absolutely. But many passages in scripture. Especially the most important ones.

[12 : 00] Are. Not that unclear. You know. It reminds me of. Mark Twain. Who famously said. He said. You know. A lot of people say. That what they find most troubling. Are all the passages in scripture.

That they can't understand. He says. For me. It's the opposite. What I find most troubling. Are all the passages in scripture. That I can understand. And I think that's a little closer to home. I think a lot of times.

Or at least some of the time. When people say. Who really knows what the Bible means. It's kind of a cop out. If we could just be totally honest. It's kind of a way of saying. If I don't understand it. That I don't have to deal with the implications.

Right. The central core passages in scripture. Are pretty clear. And so I would encourage you. Read for understanding. Seek to put your life under the word of God.

Right. That's the first part of this. But then the other part is equally important. We need to. Sing scripture. We need to sing songs. And hymns.

[12:55] And spiritual songs. We need to let it enter us. And sweep us off our feet. And carry us up. Out of ourselves. And until we become blessedly. Self forgetful. Until we need to.

We need to sing it. So that when we're waiting in line at the store. We find ourselves unconsciously. Tapping our leg. And singing a song. That we sang a few days ago. Together in worship. That it needs to dwell in us.

So that it just sort of trickles. And bubbles. And spills out of us. When we're not even aware of it. And that's equally important. Music is so central to that. So we need to sing it. We need to pray it into ourselves.

Until it just emanates from us. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. If you want to experience the freedom of this new identity. You have to do that. Now how does that bring us freedom?

Well the word of Christ frees us how? Well it frees us from confusion. It frees us from darkness. It frees us from uncertainty. It frees us from ignorance.

[13:56] It lays out the essential most important things we need to know in this life. Who is God? Who are we? How do we come to know God? What does it mean to follow God? Where is all this going?

What does it mean to be a human being? Why are we here? All of those things. It orients us. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Be liberated by it. So those are the first two things.

Putting on Christ. Let the peace of Christ rule. Let the word of Christ dwell. What's the third thing? We said peace, word, name.

Name of Christ. This kind of draws it all together. Verse 17. 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.

So what does it mean to do something in the name of Jesus? This is one of those Christian phrases that you can spend 30 years repeating and just stop one day and say, yeah, I have no idea what that actually means.

[14:57] What does that mean? Well, think about other ways that we use this phrase in everyday life. If I see something bad happening and I run up and I say, stop in the name of the law, which we do all the time around here.

Stop in the name of the law. Then what am I actually saying? I'm not saying stop in the name of Tommy Henson. I'm saying stop in the name of the law. In other words, it's about authority.

Stop. Because of the authority of the law, based on that authority, I'm asking you to stop. Right? If Dan gives me a present and says, hey, I can't make it in today, but I want you to give this present to Deborah on my behalf.

And I take the present and I go and I give it to Deborah and I say, here, Deborah, I was just thinking about you. Here you go. I'm kind of a jerk, right? Why? Because the present is meant to be delivered in Dan's name.

In other words, Dan is supposed to be the one to receive the credit. So that's about credit. Right? It's from Dan. I'm just the delivery guy. Right? So that's another way we use it. What if I deed my house over to Deborah and I say, from now on, you and Luke, this is your house.

[16:07] If I deed that over and I put it in their name, then that's about belonging. It's about possession. Right? The house is no longer mine. It's in their name. It's deeded in their name. So authority, credit, possession, all of these are ways to think about what it means to do something in Jesus' name.

To do something in Jesus' name is to be his agent, to stand in his stead, to do it for his benefit.

To be his agent, in his stead, to his credit, for his benefit. And Paul is saying, do everything that way. In other words, do everything in a way that says, that magnifies the greatness of Jesus.

That magnifies the authority of Jesus. That reflects the glory and the beauty of Jesus. And he's saying, do everything in your life. You know? Pull weeds in your garden. Wash your dishes. Parent your kids. Love your spouse. Date. Hang out with your friends. Spend your money. Use your body. Think about your job.

[17 : 14] In all that we do, he says, do all of that in ways that magnify Christ. And believe it or not, that sets us free.

What does that set us free from? The constant, incessant drive to promote ourselves. Which I think we all struggle with. You know, to constantly try to convince people how great we are.

Paul says, be free from that. Make your life about promoting the greatness and the authority of Jesus Christ and not yourself. And by the way, it's a lot easier to promote his greatness than it is ours.

Frankly, because in his case it's actually true. So it's a much easier sell. I think most people can see the truth about us. So this is how we put on the new identity that we have in Christ.

Paul's wanting to make it very clear here as he begins to transition into how this affects our relationships in general. He's laying down this principle. So as we celebrate independence, as we celebrate the 4th of July this weekend, I encourage you to celebrate a deeper, truer independence that we have.

[18 : 22] And a deeper, truer identity that we have. To put on Christ. By letting his peace rule in our relationships. By the way, that's how Jesus said that people would know that he's the genuine deal.

In John 17 he says, when they see all of these different people and peace is ruling that community and they're all one, then they'll believe that I came from the Father.

Not apologetics. Unity. So let the peace of Christ rule. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your hearts. And ultimately let us do everything in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Let's pray.