

Let the Word of God dwell richly in your lives

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[0 : 0 0] We're focusing on one verse in particular, but the reason for reading around that is because every verse has to be understood in its context. The verse that we're going to be focusing on in particular is verse 16, let the word of God dwell richly in you, or dwell in you richly. It is the temptation to think that we've got God's word and we must do something with it. Well, you must do something with it, but it's to let it dwell in you richly and let the word take it from there. So while we've read the surrounding verses, please, if you have your Bibles, turn again to them, and I'll just read these three verses together in particular, 15, 16, and 17, which says, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you are called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in a wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness to God, or sorry, thankfulness in your heart to God. 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. Well, as you can see, there's more here than just the word of God, but that is where I'd like us to dwell. What does it mean, or what does a life look like when the word of God is dwelling richly in it? I believe that there are predictable outcomes to absolutely everything, because if the Bible says that you are to do this and this will be the outcome of that, well, that in itself is a predictable outcome. But it's also predictable if God says, let's do this, and you don't do it, then the negative consequence is also a predictable outcome.

And so when you have a life that is filled or with the word of God, the word of God is dwelling richly, there are predictable outcomes. One of the outcomes is that you teach, you admonish, you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, they become predictable. But when that doesn't happen, it is also predictable that people don't do them. It's not magic, it's not a, you know, it's just quite plain and quite simple. Just before the death of Moses, Moses spoke a lot about words and how important words are, but not his own. It was the word of God. And he had this to say to his people, that when they heard God's words, not anybody's words, but when they heard God's words, they were to take that word into their hearts. That means it wasn't to be a word kept on paper or papyrus, or it wasn't to be a word kept on stone or chiseled in any, anything else, wood or timber.

It was a word that had to make it all the way into their heart. That means it had to get through their mind and all the way down into their heart. As Jesus says, whatever fills the heart controls the life.

Okay, whatever fills the heart controls the life. And that's just the standard biblical teaching.

It's a non-negotiable. What comes out of your life comes out of your heart. And so Moses is saying to God's people, when you hear God's word, you make sure you get it, take it deep down, deep into your heart.

And then he says that not only are you to do this to yourselves, but I want you to take your children and do exactly the same with them. I want you to encourage and imitate to them what it is to take God's word deep within your heart. Not only am I commanding them to you, but you are to command it to your own children. Now, this is where the difficulty is, eternalizing God's word. Okay, we are really good at keeping God's word on the surface. But when you keep God's word on the surface, it becomes ineffectual upon your own life. It's sort of batting away the thing that can make all the difference.

[4 : 1 0] And so God's word, in that sense, becomes ineffectual. You treat it as though you're on par with it, or you treat it as though it's a textbook, something to be debated and read and sort of challenged. But the real issue here, where it does good, is when you get it deep down in your heart. This is the challenge for every Sunday school teacher, for every parent, for anyone who deals with themselves and children. Get it in. Make sure they internalize the word. And then Moses had this to say, I'll read it again. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life. And by this word, you shall live. In other words, your word, or God's word, is life. Your word is life. And that means that God's

words are not empty. God's words are not idle. But it also means that God's words are words that cannot be ignored without consequences. That's the thing that Moses is trying to get across to God's people, that you can't ignore God's words without consequences. Now, you can ignore a lot of people's words without falling into any kind of negative consequence whatsoever, but you can't do that with God. These words are their life. And so the question this evening is, what does it look like when the word of God dwells richly in you? What would you expect to see? What would I expect to see in my own life and in the life of a congregation? What would we expect to see in one another's lives when the word of God is dwelling richly in us? So this isn't just applicable for me as your pastor, or the elders as elders, or you as an individual. It's applicable for every single one of us because it will affect the fellowship to a very large deal. The other thing that we must also recognize is that the word that we hear is exactly the same for every single one of us.

But we don't need to be sort of too discerning to be able to look around a congregation or to look around a fellowship and notice how the words don't seem to create the same motivations in everybody's life. It's the same word. Okay, we're all hearing the same words. So there's no disadvantage for any single one of us sat here this evening. We're all hearing and reading exactly the same thing. So why is it that one person benefits and another person doesn't benefit when they receive exactly the same thing? Well, it's for the same reason as for the person who's not here this evening doesn't benefit.

Okay, they don't benefit because they're not listening. They don't benefit because they're not here, but they don't benefit because they're not listening. And so you can bat away the advantages of God's word in your life this evening by not paying attention, by taking your mind this evening somewhere else.

But the trouble is, remember, you can't do that without negative consequences. You can't ignore without something happening. Okay, these words are your life. And so when we ask this question this evening of what does it look like for the word of God to dwell richly in us, we're not trying to come up with an answer. We're trying to come up with change. Okay, we're trying to get to the place where we are different. Now the main theme of Colossians is this, that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord. He's not your Lord. He's not my Lord. He's the Lord who just so happens to be my Lord. But sometimes we reduce the Lordship to Christ as, well, he's my Lord, but he may not be yours. It's a bit like when you're evangelizing and you talk in terms of my God. Well, this is a great danger. We should never speak in terms of my God. We should only ever speak in terms of God. And the reason for this is fairly simple, is because people don't have to take your God. Well, you can keep your God. Okay, but that's it. Okay, your God's your God. No, God is God. God is God over all. And Jesus is Lord over all. Everything and everyone. Some people recognize it. Some people submit to it.

[9 : 12] And many don't. But Jesus is Lord over everything. And if he's Lord over the world, then that means he's Lord of everything in the world. Okay? My life, my heart, my mind, my will, my actions. Everything falls under the Lordship of Jesus. There is a popular view, unfortunately, that you can receive Christ as Savior and not as Lord. This is a fallacious argument. It's dangerous to the church, even more dangerous to the individual Christian. Jesus is Lord. It's not subjective. It's objective.

He is the king. He is the ruler. And the benefit of this comes to all as we submit to it. And so, if you want to have the peace of God ruling in your life, remember Jesus is Lord. If you want the word of God to dwell richly in you, remember Jesus is Lord. If you want to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, well, you're already remembering that Jesus is Lord. Okay? Everything that you do, do it in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his name. So, here are a few things to notice. And I want to notice how these few verses just hang together. The main point is this, that everything that you are in Christ, think about that for a moment. Everything that you are in Jesus right here, right now, think it through. Stop, pause, think it through. Now, whatever list you come up with, the biblical list, now be that in life. Okay? Everything that you are in Jesus, now be in life. Everything that you are in Jesus, now be in this fellowship. Because that is where the tension lies. God sees us as equal. God sees us is the same.

God sees us as people that have the same blessings and the same amount of blessings as everybody else in Jesus. The trouble, however, is that though we're like this in Jesus, it's often the case that we're not like this in life. And this is where the tension lies. And this is the base of Paul's argument.

Be what you are in Jesus in life. Okay? Be what you are in Jesus in your daily living, at work, in your home, in your marriage. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, be like you are in Christ. And there are three ways of getting to do that. Verse 15, let the peace of God rule in your life. Verse 16, let the word of God dwell in your hearts. Verse 17, do everything in the name of Jesus. Now, Paul has to say this because the congregation just so happens to have a problem in the fellowship in that there are people in the fellowship teaching something quite different to what Paul is teaching. And the issue is never what people teach. The issue is also with the people who teach it. Okay? Because if you get rid of the people, you get rid of the teaching. But what happens when the people don't go? You have to counteract the teaching. So Paul does this by teaching that Jesus is Lord. There are some people here that don't want to believe that Jesus is Lord. And so, you know, let's look to other things and other means for a higher knowledge or a better way of doing life. Paul says there is no other way. Jesus is Lord.

And then the first thing he says to them is here's how you remember it. Let the peace of God, verse 15, rule in your heart. Let the peace of God rule in your heart. Now, you ought not to think that this is a feeling. You ought not to think that this is an experience. Don't think for a moment that Paul is asking you to experience something here or that he's asking you to have a certain kind of feeling. [13:32] He's not asking that of you for a moment. When Paul says to you, let the peace of God rule in your heart, he is referring to the peace of 2 Corinthians 5, that God who has made peace with you through the cross. This is the objective peace of the gospel. Let that peace, the reality of God who has made peace with you through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, let that peace, that ruling peace, rule in your heart.

In other words, surrender your heart to the rule of Jesus because Jesus is Lord. Stop trying to rule your own heart. Stop trying to run your own life. Let the peace of God rule in your heart. It's not something to be experienced. It's something to be surrendered to. That's what Paul is saying. Often we quote this verse, you know, when we send cards and we think that, well, we long for people to have this experience of God's peace. Well, there certainly is room for that in the Christian life, isn't there?

Where we're struggling, we're doubting, we've got our fears, and we long for that stabilizing peace that only God the Holy Spirit can bring. And that, there's certainly a place for that, but it's not here. The peace here is not an experience. It's not a feeling. It's a reality. It's a gospel reality. Surrender your heart to Jesus who is Lord. Stop trying to run your own life. Stop trying to rule your own heart. Surrender it to Jesus. He is Lord. And the temptation is, of course, it is the very thing that we find hardest to do. Paul knows that the heart is full of hostile forces.

Okay, we have all met our heart lawyer, haven't we? We've all got our heart lawyers, the ones that bring a case against us when we've done something wrong. They bend us over a barrel, and their case is watertight. Well, there's only one way to kill those lawyers, and you have godly permission to do it, and it's with the gospel. Okay, you have been set free by Jesus who is Lord, but your heart is full of hostile forces. Now, imagine this for a moment. If my heart is full of these hostile forces, and I don't take care of them by surrendering to the peace of God, and I just let them run, I try and run my own life, but I end up having it run by these hostile forces. Imagine what that looks like, where you've got a fellowship doing that. Imagine what you can expect to happen when you've got hearts filled with hostile forces, then in fellowship with one another. What would you expect to happen? Well, you'd expect to happen the same thing to happen that you find on any battlefield. You go to war. You go to war. So this is crucial for fellowship. Remember, the issue here is that people are trying to teach the wrong things, and it's damaging the fellowship, and Paul is saying, well, here's how you take care of that.

[16:48] Take care of the hostile forces in your own heart by start trying to run your own life and surrender to Jesus who is Lord. Let the peace of God rule in your heart. Now, if you don't do that, the problem is predictable problems occur. Now, there are some of us here who never see any of the problems that are on the horizon. Other people can see them, and other people may graciously come along a side of you and say, well, you're heading down this road. Can you not see what's coming your way? And they're like, no, I just don't. No, there's nothing there. Problems are predictable.

They're on the horizon for many people to see, and this is why God calls us to look out for one another. It's not just your issue. It's the issue of the fellowship. It's not just you who can see it.

Everybody can see it who's discerning. Everyone can see these things because God's designed his church that we look out for one another. Problems are predictable. And so when Paul says here, let the peace of God rule in your heart, and you don't do it, problems are on the horizon.

When you say, well, I won't do it now, but I'll leave it to another day, problems are stirring on the horizon. Storm clouds are gathering. When you leave it to perhaps another week or another month, or you go and do something else, problems are on their way. But the issue when you say, well, I won't do it now, I'll do it another day, it's not that you've become distracted. See, we think as Christians, we suffer with distraction more than anybody else. See, the advertisers don't say anything about attention spans, okay? People who make four-hour documentaries don't complain about attention spans. People who make adverts and programs don't complain about attention spans.

But the moment you get into a church, people can't, people can't, have got no attention. Well, the issue is not distraction, okay? The issue is not distraction. You don't have trouble with distraction, according to the Bible. When you want to do the things that God wants you to do, like let the peace of God rule in your heart, and you don't do it, and you do something else, it's not because you've become distracted, it's because you've surrendered to sin.

[19 : 20] Okay? It is not because you've become distracted, it is because you've surrendered to sin. This is how Paul puts it in Romans 7, that when he knows what he ought to do, because God's told him, and he wants to do the things that God wants him to do, but then he ends up doing the very things that he doesn't want to do. It's not because he's been distracted. It's because he has surrendered to sin. Sin has won the battle, okay? The issue is not distraction. The issue isn't my mind's gone somewhere else. The issue is sin. The hostile force of sin is winning the battle because you're not letting the peace of God rule in your heart. You're not surrendering to Jesus as Lord. And so for those people who think that they've got an active mind that skips from here to there to everywhere and can actually maintain a thousand thoughts, think that they're clever. They're not clever. The issue is that that distraction or that ability just to fill your head with all kinds of stuff that makes no difference is just a result of the devil having a well of a time in your life, okay? We don't suffer with distraction.

We suffer with sin. Romans 7, that's the point. So let the peace of God rule in your life. Don't try and run your own life. Don't try and rule your own heart. Surrender to Jesus. The same also applies then in verse 16 to the word of God. And this is where we sort of are led into by the peace of God because the only way we can know about the peace and surrendering to that peace is actually through the word of God.

Jesus said effectively that whatever fills our hearts, our life is going to follow. Our lives are directed by what fills our heart. And Jesus makes the point that what happens on the inside is then experienced on the outside. Paul is saying exactly the same thing here, that the way the word of God works is from the inside out, okay? The way the word of God works is from the inside out. Remember what Moses said to the people of God. Take this word to your heart. Eternalize it. Commit yourself to them. Take it in. I'm going to try and illustrate this in a couple of different ways. So here's one. There are two ways of handling the word of God. There's the outside in approach and there's the inside out approach. The difference is life changing between the two. Paul says here that we are to let the word of God dwell richly in us. We are not to handle the word of God like you would a rule book or a law keeping book. Now let me put it like this that we can all understand.

[22 : 20] Most churches since the day that they were started, we would assume, have Sunday services and have midweek services. And then somebody came up with a bright idea to define this thing called membership, which very rarely has anything to do with the way the Bible defines membership, but we give it a go.

Membership is important, biblically understood, but it has to be biblically understood. And in our membership, in our constitution, we have these type of things. Number one, when you become a member, you are expected to attend Sunday services, the midweek prayer and the Bible study, because this is their way of looking after your spiritual help. And so you sign up to your membership commitments that says, yeah, you'll attend the prayer. Yeah, you'll attend the Bible study. Yeah, you'll come on Sundays.

Yeah, you'll serve. You'll do all these things. And yet churches are full of people who don't do any of that. Churches are full of members who don't fulfill any of those membership obligations.

And what is interesting, we didn't stop and think, it didn't seem to have occurred to us, that if people break God's laws, are they not going to break ours? Okay, if people break God's expectations, are they not going to break man-made expectations? But of course they are. And so these people who don't come don't keep the rules. But on the flip side of that, those who do come, don't come on Sundays, mornings and serve, and don't come on Sunday evenings and pray and worship, and don't come in the midweek, those who attend regularly throughout the year, they don't come because they're keeping a law. They don't come because they're keeping a rule. They come because they're worshipping God. And the difference between the two is the outside-in approach and the inside-out.

Those who worship, those who pray, those who study their Bible, don't need rules to tell them. Those who love God and serve others and study God's Word and pray with one another, don't need a rule book to tell them what to do. They do it because the Word of God is dwelling richly in them. And then they are motivated to do the very things that God wants them to do.

[24 : 49] And so when you come across a person who says, well, I was down at the park this morning and so I better put in a show this evening, what are they doing? Well, they're just keeping a rule, their own rule.

It's the outside-in approach. Those who haven't attended for a while and decide that they're going to attend for a little bit, what are they doing? They're rule-keeping. They're law-keeping. It's not God's law, but it's their own. They're putting in a show. They're doing the basic minimum to get by.

But that is not how the Christian is to be motivated. The genuine believer is motivated by the inside out. Jesus said, if you want to change spiritually, if you want real spiritual change in your life, it won't happen by rule-keeping. If you want to deal with the hostile forces in your heart, it won't happen by rule-keeping. First, he said, clean the inside of the cup and then the outside will be clean also. But churches are full of people who seem to have forgotten that Jesus said that. And we do the basic minimum on the outside because we fear, we constantly fear of what people think about us. And yet we never stop to ask ourselves, and what does God think? And what does God think? Well, God loves you, and God cares for you, and God wants his word to dwell richly in your heart. First, clean the inside. First, make the spiritual progress on the inside. This is where change happens. Another way of looking at this, and this is another illustration, would be the difference between reading Moby Dick and the Bible. Now, I don't know if you've ever read Moby Dick. I haven't, but sometimes I've put a bookmark in, you know, to wind some of my friends up. I just move it every time they come. Well, you're making great progress. It's amazing what you can get away with, but I, you know, you know, the honesty in me comes that says, well, I'm just teasing you. But the difference between Moby Dick and the Bible is that you can safely ignore any work of fiction. You can pick it up, you can put it down, okay? Doesn't matter if they're a brilliant writer, you can pick it up and put it down, and if you don't read it, nothing will happen. Nothing bad is going to happen to you if you don't pick up and read Moby Dick, if you don't pick up and read a history book, if you don't pick up and read any other type of fictional work. There is no consequence whatsoever for ignoring fictional writers or any other type of writers for that matter. You don't have to pay attention. You can even change the meaning, if you like. My eyes were opened once when I realized that The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is not actually a lovely story written for children, but actually a political satire. That's the real meaning of the story. That I found much more interesting because you get to the end of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and where is he? It's a surprise, right? I was shocked, upset.

But I can change the meaning of the story. I don't even have to pay attention and nothing bad is going to happen to me. I'm not going to suffer any kind of negative implications from this.

[28 : 18] But what would happen if you treat the Bible as a work of fiction? Even though you know it's not a work of fiction, but you pick it up and you put it down and you safely, you think, you safely ignore its imperatives and its commands. And you think you've got away with it.

But storm clouds are gathering on the horizon because his word is life. His word, we can't do that with God's word. We have to take it deep within our heart. And when we do, or if we don't, we won't be able to admonish one another. We won't be able to do it in all wisdom.

And we certainly won't be turning up to church singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs from the inside out. We might be doing it from the outside in, but that's not worship. That is the very thing that Jesus criticized the Pharisees for. So what we do matters, not to other people.

And what the appearance looks like matters, not to other people, but to God. The outside in is not God honoring, only the inside out. And why does this matter? Why does this matter? You go off and

go from the very youngest in this church to the very oldest. And you have a wander into Sunday school and ask yourself, am I really responsible for the lives of these children in this church? And God will say with an echoing yes. And how am I supposed to look after these? Well, I have to make sure that they know that these words are life. But the same also applies for the oldest person here in this fellowship. The person who just might be struggling and doubting to live a faithful life, or might just be worried about whether or not they truly belong in the kingdom. These words are the only words that can do anybody any good. Your word is life. And so for those who go out, go at it from an outside in approach, will not be around for long. But those who go at it from an inside out approach, where they're not just a blessing to themselves, but they're a blessing to lots of people. So rather than coming up with a list of do's and don'ts, of what you will attend and what you will not attend, rather than sort of deciding, here I'll do this and I won't do that, and coming up with a list of do's and don'ts, rather let the word of God dwell in you, and then let the word of God do the work. Let God do his work in you. And so what does it look like as we wrap up to let the word of God dwell richly in us? Well, when we don't do it, remember, it's not that we're distracted. It's just that we have become surrendered to sin. When we think that we can leave it to another day or another night, that is dangerous ground. We have got further and further away from the need to do it. But when we do do it, when we do eternalize it and do take it in, this is when a person doesn't need a rule to sing a hymn. This is when a person doesn't need a diary to know when to do their Bible study. This is when a person who knows that they don't need a sort of nudge or a wake up to be able to come to God in prayer. Why? Because it's already in them. They don't need external external things to prompt them, a diary entry, a notice on the board. Make sure you read your Bible today at least once. You've not read it for five weeks. Please do it now. Those things might be helpful. But the issue here is that external things don't change anything. Get it in you and let God do the work. Get the word of God in you and then God will take care of the rest. And then from this, he says, comes gratitude. Comes a heart full of thankfulness and a heart where whatever you do, you will do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, this does need a little bit of explanation, which we haven't got too much time for, other than to say this. This doesn't mean that everything that you do, you are to do in the name of Jesus. It means rather that what you do do, what you ought to be doing, do it in the name of Jesus. In other words, when you sin, okay, don't do it in the name of Jesus. But then if what you are doing by the peace of God ruling in your life and the word of God dwelling in you, then everything that you do out of that, do it in the name of Jesus. And so when these two things line up perfectly, where your heart is surrendered to Jesus and the word of God dwells in you, then everything that you do will be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's when you can do it in his name. So remember, all of these blessings of singing, of reading, of looking out for one another, of admonishing one another, of teaching one another, whether it be to the youngest or to the oldest, is a byproduct of the word of God dwelling richly in you. It's a byproduct of God's word in your life. And so this is the call. Let the peace of God rule your heart.

[34 : 03] Stop trying to run your own life. Stop trying to rule your own heart. Surrender to the peace of God, the God of peace, the gospel, so that we may be united, taught, admonished, and worship. And one final thought, something to remember and never to forget. When people are not satisfied in Jesus, it is often the case that they will not be satisfied with those who are satisfied in Jesus.

When people who are not satisfied in Jesus, it's often the case that they will not be satisfied with others who are satisfied in Jesus. And so let the word of God dwell richly in you, and let God do the rest. Amen.