

# Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

## Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 3:12-17

*The Christian's Experience – A Putting On – The Word of Christ (3:16)*

***Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.***

Henry Ford, the famed founder of Ford Motor Company once said, "A weakness of all human beings is trying to do too many things at once. That scatters effort and destroys direction. It makes for haste, and haste makes waste. So we do things all the wrong ways possible before we come to the right one. Then we think it is the best way because it works, and it was the only way left that we could see. Every now and then I wake up in the morning headed toward that finality, with a dozen things I want to do. I know I can't do them all at once." When asked what he did about that, Ford replied, "I go out and trot around the house. While I'm running off the excess energy that wants to do too much, my mind clears and I see what can be done and should be done first."

Doesn't this observation of Henry Ford often describe our own lives? We try to do too many things at once and rather than stop, pray and seek direction as to what can be done and what should be done first, we exhaust ourselves with the many things, most of which matter very little in the end.

Of course the question before us then is this, as believers, what can be done and what should be done first? As we have been looking at Colossians 3:12-17, our focus has been upon a process; really what is to be the focus of the Christians life; that focus is the pursuit of becoming more and more like Jesus in both character and conduct. We have a name for this process. It is called "sanctification" – the becoming more and more Christlike in word and deed, in attitude and action; and in character and conduct. To become like Christ is to be "holy" – set apart for God's special purpose. In verses 12-14, we noted eight qualities of Christ that we are to "put on" as our spiritual clothing. And then, beginning in verse 15 and running through verse 17, we are noting three provisions of Christ by which we can pursue this Christlikeness. These verses are given to help understand what we have to become more like Jesus. In verse 15, we have been granted the "peace of Christ to rule our hearts" – because of Christ's work on the cross we have peace, rest, well-being with God and this peace is to be the decision maker in our lives – what can we do because we are at peace with God.

The second of these provisions by which we are to be increasing sanctified, made more and more like Jesus Christ is found in verse 16 and it is called the "***word of Christ.***" This is so full a topic so I warn you ahead of time we are going to milk it thoroughly taking this verse in two parts; the first part being the regular input of the word of Christ. So let us make this our matter or inquiry answering the question, how can I become more and more like Christ? The answer, in part, is found in verse 16, "***Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you...***" And from this text we have two considerations; the first being; do you have the regular input of the word of Christ – this will be our consideration this morning; and then for next week we will consider the second question, do you have the right output because of the word of Christ? Do you have the regular in put of the word of Christ? (3:16a)

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## II. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...

Our text begins with an exhortation, a call or command; this is to be one of those first or most important things we do above and beyond all others, to **"let the word of Christ richly dwell within you..."** But we must begin by defining what the "word of Christ." is

### A. What is the Word of Christ?

The phrase **"word of Christ"** as offered in the Greek is a unique phrase in the New Testament. The Greek word for "word" is *"logos"*. You are familiar with this word as John 1:1 speaks of Jesus as being the Word or *"logos"* that was with God in the beginning and is in fact God Himself. The idea behind *"logos"* speaks about the idea, the principles and the very person of Christ. The **"word of Christ"** then is what Christ and Scriptures themselves communicate to us about who Jesus is and what Jesus is like. The word of Christ is in a special and limited sense the gospel itself, the message of Christ, what Jesus said to us about Himself and concerning Himself.

Now if Paul had said, *"Let the word of God richly dwell within you,"* then we would easily have grasped that he was speaking of the whole of Scripture. But Paul uses a different phrase in our text, calling for **"the word of Christ to richly dwell within you."** What is the difference between the Word of God and the Word of Christ? Fundamentally nothing as Paul is not speaking of a different truth from that recorded in all the Scriptures, but this does speak of the specific truths communicated to us by Jesus, as recorded in the Scriptures, and seen most vividly in the Gospels, and as experienced by faith.

By faith, we come to believe that all Jesus said concerning God, Himself, man, sin, and our need for a Savior to be true and to be found in Him. By faith we see that Christ has worked according to and through His word. By faith we believe that there is not a process of grace promised or completed apart from the gospel of Christ. Let us ponder some of these processes:

**First**, by the word of Christ, we have conviction of sin. The very first recorded words of Jesus' ministry were, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"** (Matthew 4:17). In other words, God has come among you and is revealing to you your sinfulness, your separation from the holy God who is life and health and peace; therefore turn away from your sin and see your need for the Savior so that you might have life and have it to its fullest. Back in Colossians 1:21-23 we see this awareness of sin and the turning away from it by faith.

**21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, [so you know that this is the way you used to be – that is conviction of sin] 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — 23 if indeed [or since] you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel [the word of Christ] that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.**

Have you experienced conviction of sin that leads to repentance from sin? Can you say with Paul, **"For you have died with Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God"** (Colossians 3:3) and therefore I consider the members of my earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry (Colossians 3:5)? If you

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have, this then is the word of Christ dwelling within you. This is the hope of the gospel of Christ at work in you.

**Second**, by the word of Christ we have conversion to life; we are born again; we are made new; made alive. Jesus said in John 5:24, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word [my message, the gospel], and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”** <sup>[slide 07]</sup> This truth of the word of Christ bringing conversion from death to life is summarized by Paul in Ephesians 2 where we read in verse 1, **“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins...”** you did not believe, you did not obey, you were separated, lost and if left in this state, damned to eternal condemnation. But the story does not end there for we read beginning in verse 4, **“But God [He intervened, He acted, He moved], being rich in mercy [undeserved kindness; not getting what we deserved], because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...”**

Can you say that you are converted, that you have been made new; that you are becoming more like Christ? Can you say with Paul, **“For you have died with Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God”** (Colossians 3:3)? This is the word of Christ, the gospel.

**Third**, by the word of Christ we have commitment to the body of Christ; that is we are being built up or brought along in our knowledge of God and His will for us. What is eternal life? Better yet, how did Jesus define for us “eternal life?” A verse that you ought to have memorized or highlighted is John 17:3. You have heard it many times. Hear the word of Christ, **“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”** We are to know God and Christ and are to make God and Christ known by the word of Christ. This is the essence of the great commission given by Jesus to His disciples. We read in Matthew 28:19-20:

**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**

Is this not what Paul declares to be as the word of Christ as he prayed for the Colossians? Look with me at Colossians 1:9-10;

**9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**

Thomas Brooks, the puritan preacher once said, *“The assured Christian is more motion than notion, more work than word, more life than lip, more hand than tongue.”* This is the word of Christ, to grow in the knowledge of God’s will and to progress in a life separated from sin and lived in a manner worthy [honoring, consistent with] the Lord. This word of Christ leads to sanctification, to being set apart for the Lord’s use; to becoming more and more Christlike in character and conduct. Can you say with Paul, **“For you have died with Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God”** (Colossians 3:3)? This is the word of Christ, the gospel.

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There is much more that could be said concerning what is the word of Christ, but believing we have considered enough to answer that question for now, let us look at the next question, that question being, “*what are we to see the Word of Christ do according to our text?*”

### **What are we to see the Word of Christ to do?**

The answer to the question is simply stated, “**Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...**” Here is the command, the imperative; the action that we are called to pursue. The word of Christ is to “**dwell**” within us. The word “**dwell**” comes from the Greek word meaning “house”. The word of Christ, the essence and principles of His teaching are to take up residence in our hearts. *The gospel is to be at home and comfortable in our hearts.* Beloved, the Word of Christ is never to be a stranger, a visitor or a mere acquaintance with whom we are not especially intimate. The word of Christ is not to be as some friend seldom seen. The word of Christ is to be as a resident member of our family with whom we are in constant and loving communication. When I go to my mom’s house, I am at home there. If I want a drink, I go and get it. I am privy and able to go into any room in the house, because I am at home there. The gospel, the word of Christ is to have such intimacy within us.

Paul is not content to simply say, “*Let the word of Christ dwell*” just anywhere, but more specifically, “**within you**” – in effect saying, “let it abide deep within you.” We are never to be content with the gospel of Christ merely being around us. We have our plaques on the wall with Scripture verses; we have our multiple Bibles, one in house, one in the car, one at work, one for the coffee table. We even have applications for our phones and special emails that can be sent so that we are surrounded by the word of Christ. But the call is not to let the word of Christ surround us, but rather to dwell within us. Our passion must be to have it in our hearts, to see it invading our very souls so as to direct and to control all our life and conduct. More than a favorite verse or a decoration on the wall, can you say with the Psalmist, “**Your word I have treasured [buried deep] in my heart, that I might not sin against You**” (Psalm 119:11)? Is it true? Have you and are you so treasuring the word of Christ within you, in your heart? Proverbs 4:23 exhorts us, “**Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.**”

Is Christ precious to you? I have come to realize that I can hardly make it through the day without talking to my wife. I love to call her and usually “preach” at her; meaning I love to run things by her that I am working through. I want to hear what she thinks, what she’s learning, what she knows. Her words and voice are precious to me and I long to hear them. How much more ought Christ be to me? May I make this observation; no one’s word will be precious to you unless that person is first precious to you. If you dislike someone, you will generally reject with much contempt whatever it is they have to say to you.

Beloved, we will miss much of the Word of Christ if we do not first find the person of Christ precious to us. The preciousness of word of Christ, as well as of Christ Himself, is essential to its dwelling in you. When Christ is precious to you, His word will be precious. When I get a letter from a good friend, I regard the contents of that letter as precious even before I open it. And then, as I read it, it becomes even more precious. Is this the way we come to word of Christ, the words of our dearest friend sent to us. And then as we read these words to find them as precious in bringing encouragement, comfort, challenge and even conviction where it is needed. Beloved, if we want to know Christ, then we must know Him through His word. We must seek out Christ through His word. The way of finding Christ in the Word is not merely by getting it to speak of Christ, but to plead with Christ to speak to us through it.

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We are called to let the word of Christ dwell within us; to make our hearts a repository of Christ wisdom upon which the Holy Spirit can draw us as He guides us through the circumstances of our lives. Remember what Paul has already communicated to his readers back in 2:3; that in Christ ***"are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."***

Now as some you have noticed, I have left out a modifier; specifically and adverb that tells us how we are to let the Word of Christ dwell within us. That word is ***"richly"*** or abundantly. To have the word of Christ dwell in you richly means that it is to dwell plentifully, profoundly and in fullest measure. Paul uses this same word in Titus 3:6 in speaking of God's giving us of His Holy Spirit; not in some scanty measure, but ***"whom He poured out upon us richly [thoroughly, completely, to the uttermost] through Jesus Christ our Savior."***

In the movie *Jurassic Park*, the benefactor of this high-tech and elaborate zoo for dinosaurs that had been brought back into existence through genetic engineering is heard repeatedly as saying, "We spared no expense." Beloved, never forget that God spared no expense, but gave us all of His Holy Spirit to save us; and here in our text concerning the word of Christ, we are to spare no expense in striving to see it fully take up residence within us. The word "richly" speaks not of some scanty stream, but of a mighty torrent of a river. We must never be content with partial views of God's truth. We must never be miserly in our desire to drown in the sea of God's truth. To combat stingy, measly and otherwise meager efforts in seeing the word of Christ take up firm residence within us, we must be engaged in prayerful searching, and seeking to do much more than what so many of us are guilty of doing, simply reading a passage or chapter in haste in the morning or at night and expecting from that some kind of meaningful connection to Christ. Beloved, may be not be guilty of searching after things of this world with more passion than we do Him who is to come to have first place in everything. Worse than the citizen of a free society who does not vote is the Christian who does not let the word of Christ richly dwell within him; who sees such a privilege as a pain; or who perceives such a divine delight as nothing but a dreadful duty.

Do you want to be like Jesus? Do you believe that God saved you to bring you into conformity; into the likeness of His Son? Then you must pray for and pursue an ever-increasing and intimate knowledge of the gospel of Christ. And by way of application then; how can we get the word of Christ to richly dwell within us? I wish I could dress this all up to make it seem more glamorous, but in all reality it is rather simple. How do we get the word of Christ into our hearts where it belongs? How do we get that regular input of the word of Christ? Let me give you some already known suggestions and exhortations.

**First**, take time to **hear** it. In a similar statement, Paul tells the believers at Rome, ***"so faith comes through hearing and hearing by the word [the preached word] of Christ"*** (Romans 10:17). Let us never grow weary in hearing the Sunday morning Scripture reading – we need to hear God's Word. Read the word aloud to one another, to your children, to your spouse, to your friend so that it can be heard. Don Whitney noted, *"Because if we don't discipline ourselves to hear God's Word regularly, we may only hear it accidentally, just when we feel like it, or we may never hear it at all."* Of that we would not be accidental hearers of God's Word. Remember what Paul exhorted young Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13 saying,

***Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.***

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A church service ought to include the public reading of Scripture as well as preaching and teaching. Let us not miss this spiritual discipline. Hearing the word of Christ is not to merely be passive but a discipline and action that we cultivate in order to be more like Christ.

**Second**, we must **read** it. In quoting from the Old Testament, it is Jesus who said, **"It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Matthew 4:4).** And it is Jesus who assumes that the word of God is to be read as He asked people on at least four occasions, **"Have you not read...?"** (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:21). Beloved, there is no spiritual discipline more important than the intake of God's Word. And we need to understand it is a discipline, it is an effort, and it will take time and energy. But oh how we need it. As one preacher has exhorted:

*Surely we only have to be realistic and honest with ourselves to know how regularly we need to turn to the Bible. How often do we face problems, temptation and pressure? Every day! Then how often do we need instruction, guidance and greater encouragement? Every day! To catch all these felt needs up into an even greater issue, how often do we need to see God's face, hear his voice, feel his touch, know his power? The answer to all these questions is the same: every day! As the American evangelist D.L. Moody put it, "A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week. We must draw upon God's boundless store of grace from day to day as we need it."<sup>1</sup>*

**Third**, in addition to hearing and reading it, we also must **memorize** it. Let me ask you this question; what was the last verse you memorized? Can you remember? Has it been so long since you have memorized any Scripture that you can't remember the last verse or passage you treasured in your heart? What does this tell you about how much you truly treasure Christ and His word right now? I know I have already referred to it, but what does Psalm 119:11 say? **"Your word I have treasured [buried deep] in my heart, that I might not sin against You."** If you are not burying the word of Christ deep within you, then you are setting yourself up to be sinning against God. In John Bunyan's Bible (the author of Pilgrim's Progress) it was written, **"This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."** Are you memorizing God's word?

**Fourth**, we must **meditate** upon it daily. Beloved, we think about what we delight in. Just as a couple finds romantic delight in one another and so think about one another constantly, we are to delight and therefore think about or mediate upon the word of Christ. Do you want to grow in Christlikeness? Then pray that the Lord grant you a greater delight in His Word so that you may mediate on it day and night. Psalm 1:2 says, that the believer's **"delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law he meditates day and night?"** Are you a delighting believer? Do you take some moments to take a portion, a small passage, or verse or even a phrase of God's word and go over and over it in your mind? May our testimony be that of Asaph, the Psalmist who wrote in Psalm 77:12, **"I will meditate on all Your work and muse on Your deeds."** Where the word of Christ dwells richly, there the works of God are pondered with awe.

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<sup>1</sup> Blanchard, John "How to Enjoy Your Bible"

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**Fifth**, we must study the word of Christ, using every resource available to us. It has been said that "reading gives us breadth, but study gives us depth."<sup>2</sup> It is amazing to me that we live in an age where more good Biblical resources are available to us than at any other time in history; yet how little do we avail ourselves to it. May we be like Timothy heeding the exhortation, "**Be diligent [study] to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth**" (2 Timothy 2:15).

**Sixth**, we must communicate the word of Christ. Beloved, if the word of Christ indeed richly dwells in us then will it not become that which we quote and that which we talk about with others. Is the word of Christ a part of your regular conversations and dealings with others? Wasn't this the expectation of God upon His people Israel? We read in Deuteronomy 6:5-9

**5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

Should we, as the Church, be content with any less of a diligence or witness? Consider this truth as it is communicated by Paul to the congregation at Philippi:

**8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).**

So, to answer the question, what should we see the word of Christ do? It should richly dwell within us by hearing it, reading it, memorization it, meditating on it, studying it and having it be a part of our conversation. What areas do you need to prayerfully strengthen? Like Henry Ford, what excess energy do you need to run off to clear your mind and to see what can be done and should be done first? May you begin with the right intake of the word of Christ and may you begin to see as you practice these things your life becoming more and more like Christ in character and conduct and all to the glory of God.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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<sup>2</sup> Bridges, Jerry