

Three Rules For Life

Colosians 3:15-17

Pastor John Miller

I want you to follow with me as I read Colossians 3:15-17.

Paul says, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 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. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Someone once said, "The surest way to know you're carrying a full bucket is wet feet." I love that. If your life is full of Jesus, it overflows. The surest way to know that you are filled with the Spirit, that Christ's Word and Christ's Spirit is in your life, is that your life will overflow and you'll begin to drench others and affect others who are around you.

In Colossians 3, Paul had been telling us to take off the old life. He says in verses 8-14 that you "are to put off...anger wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language....Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

Whenever you interpret a text, it's always important to back up and read what comes before. And if need be, read what goes after the text.

So Paul is telling us to take off the grave clothes of the old life, and put on the grace clothes of the new life. That is, put on Christ. In this text we're going to look at, Paul gives us three imperatives or three commandments on how to put on the new life, to put on the grace clothes, so that our lives will overflow with the love of Jesus Christ.

There are three things I want to look at. First, "Let the peace of God rule," verse 15; secondly, that "the Word of Christ dwell in you," verse 16; and thirdly, let the name of Christ be glorified, verse 17.

The first way to govern the spiritual life and have a life that overflows with the love of God is to let the peace of God rule in your heart. Verse 15 says, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body..."—that's the body of Christ; the church—"...and be thankful."

I want you to notice in this passage four qualities or characteristics of this peace that is to rule. Number one, it's a divine peace. Verse 15 says it is "the peace of God." Literally in the Greek, it is "the peace of Christ." Most of the older manuscripts translate it that way. Some of you have more modern translations that use that rendering: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." There's really no conflict there; we have one God, right? God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Three persons, one divine being. What he's actually saying there is, "Let the peace of Christ rule....Let the word of Christ dwell" and that the name of Christ be glorified or magnified.

What does Paul mean there by "the peace of God"? The peace of God starts when you are born again. When you are saved, the Bible says in Romans 5:1 that "We have peace with God." But then after you walk with God, you trust God and you learn to live by faith, you have the peace of God.

D. L. Moody said, "A little faith will take your soul to heaven, but a lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul." I like that. It doesn't take a lot of faith to go to heaven; you just need to trust Jesus Christ. But when you're living this life, in order to experience the peace of God in your heart and in your mind, you need to trust Him and live by faith.

So there are two kinds of peace: First, peace with God—that's salvation. You're no longer at war. You're no longer fighting. You're no longer at war with God. The little white flag goes up in your heart; you surrender. If you want peace, you have to surrender. Say, "I surrender, God. Forgive my sins and come into my heart." You might be fighting Him. You might be running from Him. You might be rebelling against Him. You might be hardening your heart right now. What you need to do is say, "God, I surrender. Take my life. Have your way in me." Then you have that peace with God. Second, as you trust Him and walk with Him, you have the peace of God.

In Philippians 4, Paul says to let the peace of God protect or guard or garrison your mind. So where Satan tries to attack our minds, God's peace forms a garrison or protection.

Jesus promised in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." It is the peace which "passes all understanding." That's why as Christians, even at the hectic time of Christmas, we can have the peace of God, because we have peace with God. If you're not a believer, it starts with that surrender and trust in Christ and then living by faith and trusting Him with the affairs of your life.

Notice secondly that it's a ruling peace, verse 15. "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts." The word "rule" here is an athletic term meaning "to act as an empire." It means God's peace should arbitrate all our activities and our decisions. You don't want to make a decision based on anger. You don't want to make a decision based on your passions. You want to make a decision based on God's peace.

There are actually three things you look for in guidance: God's peace, God's Word and God's

hand or His providence. Number one, God's peace: is there peace about what I'm doing? Do I feel the peace of God? That which comes from above is first of all peaceable. God's peace will never contradict God's Word. God's peace will never lead you to do something contrary to God's Word.

If you say, "I have a peace about robbing a bank right now. I prayed about it and I really believe it's God's will. I'm going to give Him ten percent. So God, I pray right now as we rob this bank that everything goes smoothly and we won't get caught." I've had people say, "I have a peace about getting a divorce. I've found someone who I like better." Or "I've found someone there's more of a connection with. I have a peace about it." No, you do not have a peace about it. That's a lie from hell. God's peace will never contradict God's Word. So you may have a peace, but you need to open your Bible and ask, "God, what do you say about this?" "Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." So God wants to guide us by His Word.

You look for God's providence, God's hand. Is God in the situation? Is God opening doors? Is God shutting doors? But you can't really go by doors, because sometimes God will shut a door and He'll open a door. But we trust Him to work in the providential care of His love for us. So God's peace will guide us and lead us.

Then thirdly, notice in verse 15 it's a peace of unity. He adds this statement, "...to which also you were called in one body." That is the church, the body of Christ. It's the imagery of the church being a body and Christ being the head. It's a peace with others in the church. It's a peace in your marriage. It's a peace on your job. When you get right with God, then you're right with your spouse and you can be right with your kids and you can be right with others. You can be right with people in the church, in the body of Christ.

Notice, fourthly, in verse 15, it's a peace that brings a thankful heart. He says, "...and be thankful." "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body..."—get along with other people—"...and be thankful." Literally it means "and thankful continually be." In the Greek, it's in the present tense. So Christians should be thankful always.

That's a battle for me. I have a tendency to look on the negative. It can be a beautiful day, but I see one cloud and say, "Oh, it's a cloudy day." The glass is always half empty. I have to force myself to think about the goodness of God. I have to think about what God has done and count my blessings and remember the goodness of God. When I do, it creates a thankful heart. We need to be thankful that God's grace brought me salvation, that God's grace brings me peace, that God's grace brings me a thankful heart.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." This is one of the classic verses of the Bible that actually tells us God's will for your life.

You say, "Pastor Miller, I don't know what God's will is for my life."

"I do; I know it. I know God's will: be thankful."

“Ah, I don’t want that. I want to know who to marry, what car to buy, where I should live and whether I should buy this house.”

“Be thankful; that’s the will of God.” And we’re thankful in everything, not for everything, knowing that God is working “all things...according to His purpose.”

So ask yourselves, is my life overflowing with God’s peace? Are my feet wet with the peace of God? Do I have an overflowing thankfulness in my life? Is my bucket full?

The second command and life’s rule is in verse 16: we’re to let the Word of Christ dwell in us. “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.”

What does Paul mean by “the Word of Christ”? First of all, it would include the very words that Jesus spoke. I’m not a red-letter Bible guy. I’m kind of “old school”; I like black-letter Bibles. I don’t need red letters to tell me when Jesus is talking. I remember years ago when I was a baby Christian when my grandmother, a truly Godly, saintly woman in the Lord, was still alive that I had just gotten saved. I was with my grandmother, Aida, and I opened my Bible and said, “Look, grandma’, red letters! We know when Jesus is speaking!”

She said, “Johnny, Paul...”—that’s what she called me—“...I don’t need red letters to know when Jesus is talking.” I never forgot that.

But you shouldn’t get away from the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Always be marinating your mind and your heart. Yes, by all means read the whole Bible; it’s all the Word of God—from Genesis to Revelation. But spend time sitting at the feet of Jesus.

I believe that it’s also—and more likely—what Paul had in mind when he said “the Word of Christ”: it’s a synonym for the Scriptures. This is the Word of God, the Bible. That’s what he is referring to. He’s not talking about just the red words in the Bible; he’s talking about all of the Bible. It’s God’s holy Word.

Notice that God’s Word is to “dwell in you richly.” The word “dwell” literally means “to be at home.” It’s more than just reading the Word; it’s letting the Word have access to every part of your life. It’s making my heart Christ’s home.

Have you ever noticed that when people come over you say to them, “Make yourself at home”? We don’t really mean that.

“You want me to make myself at home? You want me to drink milk right out of the carton now?”

I’m kidding, by the way; I don’t actually do that. At least when my wife’s home, I don’t do that. I only do it when she’s not home. I think I did it once in the last six years. And I immediately prayed and asked God to forgive me. She’s probably watching online right now.

But we don't want them to take their shoes off and throw their socks on the floor. We don't want them to spit on the mirror when they brush their teeth. We really don't want them to be at home. What that phrase means is, "Sit there and don't move. You see that door down the hallway that is shut? It means don't go through that door, because that's where we put all the junk, knowing you were going to come over right now. That's the junk room."

But what this verse means is to make Christ at home in your heart. It means that you throw open every door and every drawer, and you let Christ come in and have His way. He can remodel the room, He can paint the room, He can recarpet, He can bring in new furniture. He wants to take out the old and bring in the new. It means to open your heart, open your life and let God's Word have access. When you read the Bible, you need to ask, "Is there a promise here for me to claim? Is there a sin for me to avoid? Is there something that I need to put into practice in my life?" You read the Word with an obedient heart in faith. So it's talking about the whole Word dwelling in every area of your life.

Notice that God's Word should not only dwell in us and be at home in our heart, but it should "dwell...richly in all wisdom." That means we must highly prize and appreciate the Bible. We read it, we believe it by faith and obey it. In the book of James it says, "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." If anyone just hears the Word and doesn't "do" the Word, it is like looking in a mirror, seeing your appearance but doing nothing to improve it. Then you go away and forget what you look like. So in our lives, in our home and in our church, we need to be doers and obedient to God's Word.

When the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, what happens is that it teaches us. Notice it in the text: "teaching." This is the positive instruction of God's truth. It tells me how to be a husband and how to be a wife and how to be a parent. It tells me how to relate to one another—in the home and in the church. It is so important that in the church, that it be centered on God's Word.

"Admonishing one another," verse 16, means "the warning" or "the correcting." When you read the Bible, it corrects you and directs you. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..."—that means the Word of God is breathed out by God—"...and is profitable..."—it's the most profitable book you could ever read. We watch TV, we go to movies, we hang out with friends, we read other books, but we don't spend time in the Word of God. It's "...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Someone broke that down and said, "Doctrine is what is right, reproof is what is wrong, correction is how to get right and instruction in righteousness is how to live right." I think that is so important.

Notice in verse 16 the words "one another." Paul uses that familiar phrase. So you are "admonishing one another" in God's Word "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." The psalms mentioned here is God's "play list" in the Old Testament. Do you know that the book of Psalms are songs? Different musicians wrote them. David wrote some. Others wrote them, including Asaph. They were written to actually sing to the Lord. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever."

Then there are hymns. Mary sang the beautiful hymn “Great is Thy faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.” So we sing these hymns. These are songs that are spiritual and edify and build up.

There are hymns in the Bible. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul says, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” Did you know that was a song? This “faithful saying” from the pastoral epistle is a song. They were to be sung.

Then we have “spiritual songs.” These are all other songs that are spiritual and edify the believer and glorify God.

Then also notice in verse 16 that as we sing the Word of God—the psalms, the hymns, the spiritual songs—that we are doing it with grace in our hearts to the Lord. So Jesus puts a song in our hearts. Do you know that Christians sing? Do you know that Christianity is a singing religion?

It’s interesting. I just took the New Testament, and I found some interesting information. Jesus sang in the upper room as they were celebrating the Passover. The disciples sang in the upper room the night before Jesus was crucified. Mary sang her Magnificat when the angel Gabriel visited her and told her that she would give birth to the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, sang before the Lord. Paul was in prison with Silas in Acts 16. They were beaten and thrown into stocks and at midnight the Bible says they were “singing hymns to God.”

It’s easy to sing when you’re in a comfortable church on a comfortable pew and the sun is shining on a Sunday morning. But imagine being falsely accused, arrested, beaten, put in jail, your hands and feet in stocks and another person says, “Let’s sing to the Lord.”

“I’m not going to sing right now! I’m mad at God.”

But Paul and Silas began to sing praises and God sent an earthquake. Someone said that God was tapping His foot to the music, and the earthquake happened. It was probably a country-music song. While they were praising the Lord, the jail was opened, the prisoners were freed but remained and the jailer was converted.

The Bible also tells us that believers should sing spiritual songs of thanksgiving in Ephesians 5:19. Then in Revelation 14:3 it says that when you get to heaven, there are 144,000 singing a new song. The believers are singing the song of redemption, the glory to God.

Do you know that when we get to heaven, we’re going to sing? From time to time people say, “I came to your church at Revival, but you sing too much. I’m a Christian but not a singing Christian.”

“Well, what are you going to do when you get to heaven? You’ll say, ‘Oh, no. This is like Revival. I can’t believe it.’”

Jesus puts songs in our hearts. You always know your life is full when there is a song in your heart. That’s an indication of being filled with the Spirit; your feet are getting wet and others are getting the joy of the Lord as it comes forth from your life. What a blessing that is! So we’re singing to the Lord.

Notice two things about our singing. We do it “with grace” in our hearts. Literally in the Greek this is “with graciousness” because of His grace. When you realize how amazing God’s grace is, you cannot but sing to the Lord. We have an audience of one. Verse 16 says, “to the Lord.” When you come to church on Sunday, who are you singing to? You’re not singing to me, you’re not singing to the worship team; you’re singing “to the Lord.” You’re thinking about His goodness and His mercy and His grace to you and how He saved you by His grace.

He starts to pluck the strings of your heart by His Spirit, and a song comes forth. Now it doesn’t say a “good” song. You may not have a good voice. That’s why the Bible says, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord.” But it’s from the heart and it’s to the Lord. And the Lord delights in it.

Sometimes I can’t help but think that when we’re singing and worshipping the Lord that the angels, in a holy hush, just quiet down, and they listen to the song of the redeemed with awe. In John 4, Jesus told the woman at the well that the true worshippers worship in spirit and in truth.

Ephesians 5:18-21 is a beautiful, parallel passage. Colossians and Ephesians are parallel books, but they have two different emphases. In Colossians, the emphasis is on Christ, the head of the body. In Ephesians, the emphasis is on Christ, the body. The focus in Colossians is on Christ; the focus in Ephesians is on the body.

Ephesians 5:18 says, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation...”—but here’s the command—“...but be filled with the Spirit...”—that’s the parallel to Colossians 3:16: “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you.” What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? It means the Word of Christ is dwelling in you. Why? Same results. Ephesians 5:19 says, “...speaking to one another...”—in the body of Christ—“...in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”—and then he adds—“...submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

Then the next thing Paul goes into is marriage: “Wives, submit to your own husbands... husbands, love your wives...children, obey your parents...fathers, do not provoke your children...bondservants, be obedient to...your masters...masters, do the same things to them” that which is just and equal. You see how these rules can transform our lives and the world around us?

So a Word-filled Christian is a Spirit-filled Christian. And you can’t be a Spirit-filled Christian

without the Bible. For you to walk in the Spirit and live in the Spirit, the Word of Christ needs to dwell in you richly. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to transform the child of God into the image of the Son of God. There's no substitute. That's the only way our lives can be changed and transformed. Then it results in joyfulness, thankfulness and submission.

Is the bucket of your life overflowing? Do you have wet feet? Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

There is one last, command or imperative, in verse 17. That is, let the name of Christ be glorified. So the peace of Christ ruling, the Word of Christ dwelling and now the name of Christ being glorified. Verse 17 says, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." When we let the peace of Christ rule and the Word of Christ dwell, then our lives will bring glory to God.

What does Paul mean by the name of the Lord glorified? "The name of the Lord" is a term used for the nature, the character, the being, the person. When you say, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower," you are talking about God's nature, God's character, God's person, God's attributes, God's being. So what he is saying is let Jesus, the Person, be glorified in all that you say and in all that you do. In all of life.

I want you to note the features and scope of this command. "Whatever you do in word or deed." Whatever you say and whatever you do. That means pretty much all of life. God's concerned about your attitudes, your words and your actions. All of life is to be sanctified. Our words come from our hearts. So when our hearts are full of Christ, what spills out is the love of Christ. The Bible says, "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." One of the best indicators of where you are with God is the words that are coming out of your mouth.

What words come out of your mouth? Do they glorify Jesus? Do they honor Jesus? Do they magnify Him?

Notice, secondly, that all of life should be lived under the authority of and to the glory of Jesus Christ. I love it when Paul says in verse 17, "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Nothing should be permitted in our lives that cannot be associated with Jesus Christ. If you're going to go to the theater, you should take Jesus Christ with you. You don't say, "Jesus, I don't think you're going to like this movie. I think you ought to stay in the car. It's a little edgy. I'll be back in a couple of hours." If you're in the theater and Jesus has His eyes covered, you shouldn't be watching it.

The Bible says, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you were sealed unto the day of redemption." The thoughts, attitudes, words and actions can grieve the Holy Spirit if they're not Christ-like. So everything in life needs to be submitted to His authority. Can I do my work to the glory of God? Can I do my play time to the glory of God? Can my hobbies that I get involved in be to the glory and honor of Jesus Christ? All of my life—my marriage, my parenting, my career; everything—needs to be submitted to the authority of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, notice that all we do should be done with thanksgiving to God our Father. Verse 17 says, "...giving thanks to God the Father through Him." This literally says, "Become thankful." It's the idea of becoming thankful, because God is our Father. I love that. God is our Father Who loves me, saves me by His grace, takes care of me, guides me and provides for me. He feeds the birds, He clothes the flowers; will He not then take care of me, "O ye of little faith"? Yes, He will. We're thankful to the Lord, because He is our Father in heaven. He's promised to take care of us.

When life is difficult, when your friends forsake you, when you're discouraged and down, you have a Father in heaven Who loves you. He will never leave you, and He will never forsake you. So you can let His peace rule in your hearts, you can let His Word dwell in your heart and you can let His name be glorified in the way that you live. You want to let the peace rule, the Word dwell and the name of Christ be glorified.

What great a commandment of life as we enter into this busy, hectic time of the year called Christmas. Let's not forget Christ this Christmas.