

The Overflow Of New Life

Colossians 3:15-17

Pastor John Miller

Let's start back in verses 8-14 to get a running start on our text, Colossians 3:15-17.

Paul says, "But now you yourselves are to put off..."—this is a picture of taking off a soiled garment—"...all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man..."—or "the life before Christ"—"...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."

Then we come to our text, verses 15-17. "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 said, "The surest sign that you're carrying a full bucket is wet feet." I like that. And the surest sign that you are living in Christ's fullness is an overflow of Christ in your life.

So in verses 8-14, Paul is commanding us to put off the grave clothes of the old life and put on the grace clothes of the new life. And I want to point out a few things from these verses. He says, "Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 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."

It's a simple concept: when you became a Christian, you took off the old life and put on the new life. You now walk in the fullness of the newness of life you have in Jesus Christ. So take off the old and put on the new. Paul breaks down the old by saying that it was full of "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language." And we were lying to one another, so don't do that, since you put off these things. Put on the new man, which is our position in Christ, "renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him."

And notice that there were classes in the world before we came to Christ. There was Greek or Jew—the uncircumcision, the circumcision; there was culture—barbarian, Scythian; there was social status—slave or free. But now as believers, we are in Christ and are all one in Him.

Now notice the description of the believer. We are called "the elect of God..."—God has

chosen us by His grace—“...holy...”—which is the Greek word “hagios,” meaning “to be set apart to God”—“...and beloved,” which means we are loved by God. So we are chosen by God, holy and set apart to God and loved by God.

But notice what we are to put on. There are eight things, in verses 12-14. We are to put on “tender mercies...”—or in the King James, “bowels of mercies,” which speaks of the innermost parts or organs of the body—“...kindness, humility...”—or “humble of mind”—“...meekness, longsuffering,” which is sometimes translated “patience” or “endurance.” We are to be forbearing or putting up with each other, we’re to be forgiving of one another—“Even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do”—and we’re to love one another. “But above all these things put on love...”—it’s the Greek word “agape”—“...which is the bond of perfection.” So over all these new clothes you are to put on, you put on love. Love is the mark of the true believer.

So Paul has now set the stage for verses 15-17, where he gives three commands. And the three commands govern what we just read, in verses 8-14. How do I take off? How do I put on the new life? How do I live the life of overflowing Christ in this world?

The three commands are, first in verse 15, “Let the peace of God rule”; second in verse 16, “Let the word of Christ dwell”; and third in verse 17, let the name of Christ be glorified. These are three imperatives or commands. And these commands control the overflow of my Christian life. So they are essential if I am going to overflow with Christ’s love.

The first command is, “Let the peace of God rule.” The better manuscripts have, “Let the peace of Christ rule,” and most of the modern translations have “Christ.” But there is really no problem, because we learned that in Jesus “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” There is only one God in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. So there is no disputing the full deity of Jesus Christ. So “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts....Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” So Paul says, “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body...”—that’s the church—“...and be thankful.”

Now I want you to note four qualities of this “peace of God,” which is to rule in our hearts. Number one, it is a divine peace. It’s the “peace of God,” or literally “the peace of Jesus Christ.”

Before our conversion, we were at war with God, so we had no peace. The Bible says, “‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

Did you note that before you were saved? That you really had no peace? You can go to a drugstore and buy sleep, but you can’t buy “rest for your soul.” Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” Matthew 11:28. You were made by God, you were made for God and you were made to know God. There is no rest for the wicked and no peace until you surrender your life to Christ and have a relationship with God, or peace with God.

So the first thing we experience at our conversion is peace with God. Romans 5:1 says,

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus, salvation involves a new relationship whereby we have peace with God; I'm not fighting or warring against God any longer.

By the way, the war is on our part and not on God's part. God's already signed a peace treaty on the Cross. All we need to do is surrender. We need to put up the white flag in our hearts and say, "God, I surrender." Then the war is over. So we then have this divine peace.

In Philippians 4:7, though, it says, that we have "the peace of God, which passes all understanding."

There is an important distinction here about this peace. There is the "peace with God," which is salvation, and there is "the peace of God," which is sanctification. The moment I am justified or saved or born again, I have "peace with God." Then as I walk in faith, I "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." I learn to trust God with my life, and I grow in my relationship with God. I begin to experience, practically, "the peace of God" in my heart.

And you can't have the peace of God ruling in your heart unless you first have peace with God. All my human relationships will be strained if I don't have peace with God. I won't have the peace of God and won't get along with others.

Jesus said 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." This is the peace that only God can give to your soul. It starts with salvation and leads to sanctification with "the peace of God" ruling in your hearts.

Now remember that Paul is writing the words of our text while in prison and in chains. Yet he talked about having "the peace of God" ruling in our hearts. It's this divine, sanctified peace that only God can give us.

The second quality of this "peace of God" is that it is a ruling peace, verse 15. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." The word "rule" is an athletic term, which means "to act as umpire." It means that God's peace should be arbitrator of all our activities and our decisions.

Some people are really into watching football on TV. And sometimes there is a review of a play in which a referee makes a final decision about the play. He is arbitrating or deciding. That's what it means to rule or to be the umpire or referee.

The referee or umpire in your heart for the will of God is the peace of God. You need to be careful here, because it's a subjective experience. We sometimes impose our own ideas and say, "I have a peace" about something when we need to align it, as well, with the Word of God. God will never give you a peace about a situation if it is contrary to His Word.

Sometimes a person will come to me and say, "I'm praying about divorcing my spouse. I don't have any Biblical reason for it, but I have a peace from God about it." That's like saying, "I really have a peace about robbing a bank. And I've been praying that God would bless it, that I would

make a big haul and give 10% to God.” That’s stupid.

You need to know the Word of God to know the will of God, and God’s will always align with God’s Word. Then when you are in God’s will, you’ll have peace. God’s Word says, “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits.” It’s the peace of God ruling and arbitrating in your heart and in your life. God’s Word should control your life. God should constantly regulate all activities of the believer by His peace. How important that is. God will give you His peace through His Word.

Third, this is also a peace of unity, verse 15. “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body.” That’s so important. It’s a fellowship of believers, the body of Christ. This peace operates in the church, in the family of God. We’re brothers and sisters in Christ, and we should love the Lord. God is our Father. We should love one another and have the peace of God.

In your marriage, in your family and on your job we will have harmony, if we are aligned with the Word of God. Then we will have the peace of God and we’ll seek the glory of God in our lives. It’s God’s Word constantly regulating the believer’s life.

Fourth, this peace is a peace that brings thanksgiving in a believer’s heart. Verse 15 ends with the command, “And be thankful.” So “let the peace of God rule...”—as a referee—“...in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body...”—that’s the church—“...and be thankful.” The command “and be thankful” literally means “and thankful continually become” or “learn to be thankful.”

God’s grace in salvation brings me peace with God, the peace of God, which in turn brings me a thankful heart. At the end of our section, in verse 17, Paul says, “giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Our text opens with thanksgiving, in verse 15, and ends with thanksgiving again, in verse 17. And in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” So this ruling peace results in thankfulness to God. A thankful believer acknowledges the working of the sovereign will of God in their life and in their circumstances.

As you grow in sanctification as a believer, you not only grow in likeness to Christ, which is the goal, but you’re also growing in thankfulness to God. You have peace with God, which you’re thankful for, and you have the peace of God, which brings you joy and thankfulness in your heart.

What a glorious thing it is to grow as a believer. When you get older and have walked with the Lord for some time, you’re able to have a perspective you didn’t have when you were a younger believer.

I’ve noticed that in my own life. David said in Psalm 37:25, “I have been young, and now am old.” I remember when I was a young preacher I used to say, “Well, I’m still young. I’m not yet old, so I don’t know the perspective that David has.” Then David said, “Yet I have not seen the

righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.”

That’s basically saying that God takes care of you. That’s one of the overarching themes of our passage. How do I have the love of God, the Word of God and the peace of God in my heart? I know that God is so loving that He wouldn’t allow anything in my life that would hurt me. I know that God is so wise that it is impossible for Him to make a mistake. That’s awesome! He is so loving that whatever He allows is for His loving purpose, for my good and for His glory. You must rest on that important truth. And He’s so wise that He knows what He’s doing. God makes no mistakes. It’s so very important.

So first, we need to “Let the peace of God rule in [our] hearts.” We are called in one body, the harmony of the church, and we are called to be thankful. It’s something that we grow progressively into as we are sanctified.

The second command is “Let the word of Christ dwell,” verse 16. Paul says, “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.” No doubt there is thanksgiving in that worship when we sing to the Lord.

First, what does Paul mean by “the word of Christ,” in verse 16? It means the words spoken by and about Jesus in the Gospels. Some people have a red-letter Bible. So these are the words of Christ. What a marvelous thing it is to let the words of Christ dwell in us. And in the context, it is a synonym for all of Scripture, the Bible, the Word of God and the Word of the Lord.

All of Scripture points to Jesus Christ. He is the central theme of the Bible. He said, “Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of Me.” If you miss Jesus in your Bible, you miss the Bible. You miss everything. If you don’t find Jesus on the pages of your Bible, then you’re not reading the Bible as you properly should.

Secondly, God’s Word is to “dwell in you.” The word “dwell” 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 letting your heart become Christ’s home.

When someone comes over to your house, have you ever used the expression, “Make yourself at home”? We don’t really mean that. “You want me to make myself at home? You want me to go to the refrigerator and drink out of the carton? You want me to take my shoes off and throw my socks, and wherever they land, they land?” That would be making myself at home.

When we say, “Make yourself at home,” what we really mean is, “Just sit there and don’t move. Whatever you do, don’t look in the closet.” Have you ever had guests over and before they come, you shut the door into the bedroom or close off a messy room?

But the opposite is true when Christ comes into our hearts. He wants to make it His home. He wants to clean up every area of our lives. He wants to have access to every drawer, every room. He wants to know all that is going on. He wants the Word of God to go into every

compartment of our lives and have its way. And what could be more important than having the Word of God, Christ's peace, ruling and dwelling richly in your marriage relationship? It's very important to let Christ's Word have its way and be at home in your heart.

Third, God's Word should dwell in you how? "Richly in all wisdom." That means that we must highly prize and appreciate God's Word. The word "richly" indicates that we not only have the Bible in our lives, but we also value the Bible. We treasure it "richly." And it brings us "wisdom." The Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." We find wisdom in God's Word.

We must read the Bible, we must believe the Bible and we must obey the Bible. We must put it into practice. "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves," James 1:22 says.

I'm sure there are a lot of people who go to church every Sunday who hear the Word, who hear the Bible preached and expanded upon, but they don't read the Bible when they go home. Have you fed on the Word of God? Do you meditate on the Word of God? Do you read the Word of God? Do you delight in the Word of God? Does it "dwell in you richly?" If not, you're not growing in sanctification. Your feet are not wet; you're not overflowing with Christ in your life. It'll affect your marriage, your peace and your joy. So you want the Word of Christ to "dwell in you richly."

Now notice the effect of the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly, verse 16. There is "teaching and admonishing." It says there is "teaching and admonishing one another." The "teaching" is the positive instruction of truth found in God's Word. There is teaching on marriage, on relationships in the home, in the church and in the family—teaching on life. "Admonishing" is warning and correcting. So there is the positive teaching, and there is the negative admonishing.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..."—or "God breathed"—"...and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." That statement means that the Bible tells us what is right—"doctrine," what is wrong—"reproof," how to get right—"correction" and how to stay right—"instruction in righteousness." This is why the Bible gives us all we need for "life and godliness." The psalmist says, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."

In verse 16, it says "one another." It's talking about doing this in the church. And how do we teach and admonish one another? In "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." The Old Testament book of Psalms is Hebrew poetry. The verses were written to be sung to the Lord. What a wonderful thing it is when we take the psalms and sing them to the Lord! They are also great to meditate on and to use as a song or prayer to God.

Hymns are songs of praise to the glory of God. Many places in the New Testament contain what Bible scholars believe are songs that the early church sang. One of them is 1 Timothy

1:15, where 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.”

So there are psalms and hymns, and there also are spiritual songs. These are all other songs that are spiritual, that edify the believer and glorify God. “Spiritual songs” is sometimes used for secular songs as well. Sometimes Christians ask, “Is it okay for a believer to listen to non-Christian, nonspiritual songs?” There is no hard-and-fast rule that says you can’t listen to music that is secular.

But if you’re a Christian, why wouldn’t you want to choose to listen to songs that are sacred and would edify? If you’re alone in your car and you’re listening to secular songs, they’re probably not going to instruct you, admonish you or edify you.

I was listening to a hymn, “Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” in my car the other day. How my heart thrilled to hear that! Every word was theologically, doctrinally, Biblically sound, glorifying God.

Especially at Christmastime there are so many sacred, Christmas songs. If anyone can write a Christmas song, it’s a believer. Some of the most precious, Christmas songs are written by pastors, men of God who love the Word of God, with the Spirit of God flowing out of their lives. How marvelous that is.

Augustine said, “There should be three essentials of a hymn: number one, it should be praise; number two, it must be addressed to God; and number three, it must be sung.” Christianity is a singing religion. Christians sing! I’ve met people who say, “I come to your church. I like it but you sing too much.” I think to myself, Something’s not right here.” You might not like all the songs we sing, but it’s not about you or about us; it’s about God. Some people may leave here and ask, “What’d you think about the worship today?” It doesn’t matter what we think. We’re singing to an audience of one. That’s God. Worship is to Him; not to us. And our songs should be edifying, instructive and building us up. I like the fact that Jesus said, “True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” So it’s a spiritual act of worship and should be based on the truth of God’s Word.

Jesus puts a song in our hearts. I thought about that this week too. I didn’t sing until I got saved. Jesus put a song in my heart. Has He put a song in your heart? Do you ever just break forth in song? You say, “I don’t sing very well.” That’s why the Bible says, “Make a joyful noise.” Grunt, groan, bark—whatever it might be—but do it “as unto the Lord.” The Lord looks past the quality of the voice and looks at the heart. How marvelous that is. Christians sing joyfully to the Lord.

In the history of the church, revivals always involved worship and song. During the Protestant Reformation under the leadership of Martin Luther and others, hymns were brought back into the church. Singing in the church had almost died out, but the Reformation brought it back into the church. During the time of the Wesleyan revivals, Charles Wesley wrote so many

marvelous hymns. God used that. During the time of the Moody-Sankey team, Ira Sankey traveled with D. L. Moody, and Gospel songs were sung. And in the late '60s and early '70s, when the Jesus movement broke out in California then across the United States, hippies were getting saved. They took their guitars and sang contemporary worship songs to the Lord. Sometimes the church freaked out a little bit over it. "Whoa, what's wrong here!" But that was the birth of contemporary, Christian music that we often have in our church today.

So in our churches today, we come together to worship God in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." In Ephesians 5:19, Paul says, "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Notice what Paul says in our text in verse 16: "singing with grace in your hearts." That literally means "with graciousness," "because of His grace" or "with gratitude or thankfulness for God's grace." Christians sing because they're thankful for the grace of God. They're thankful that God saved them by His grace. And if you've been saved by grace, there's going to be a song in your heart. It's one of the evident signs that you're a Christian. You sing to the Lord. You worship. What a powerful testimony it is when we have a singing church.

Singing also is "to the Lord," verse 16. He is the audience of one to whom we are singing. We sing "to the Lord."

Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16 are parallel verses. They both speak of the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly and being filled with the Holy Spirit. They're synonymous. What is significant is that the same results of being filled with the Spirit are the same results of letting "the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." I believe to be Spirit filled is to be Word filled as well. You can't neglect your Bible and be a Spirit-filled Christian.

In Ephesians 5:18, which parallels our text, Paul says, "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." So there is the negative first: don't be intoxicated with wine. But we are to "be filled with the Spirit." That is an imperative in the passive voice in the Greek. It's a command in the present tense, or "Let the Spirit continually fill you." And this command is all inclusive; all Christians should be filled with the Spirit.

And now notice, in verses 19-21, when you are "filled with the Spirit," it is the same thing that happens when "the Word of Christ dwell[s] in you richly." You then will be "speaking to one another..."—that's the body of Christ—"...in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." That means that the Lord is plucking the strings of your heart. And then you also will be "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God."

So there are three things that result from the Spirit's filling, when "the word of Christ dwell[s] in you richly": you're joyful, thankful and submissive. When the Spirit of God fills your life and controls you, you're joyful, thankful and submissive.

Is the bucket of your life overflowing? Do you have wet feet? If not, then "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Be filled with the Spirit.

Verse 17 has one last command. It is to let the name of Christ be glorified. Number one was, "Let the peace of God rule"; number two, "Let the word of Christ dwell"; and number three, let the name of the Lord Jesus be glorified.

This is the conclusion of this section on sanctification. In verse 17, Paul 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."

What does Paul mean by "the name of the Lord Jesus"? The "name" speaks of His person and character. Everything in what you say and in what you do should all be governed and controlled by the nature and character of Christ for His glory.

There are three features involved in this command. The scope of the command is whatever you do in word or deed. So it involves everything you say and do. All of life is to be governed and controlled by the nature and character of Christ. Is it Christ-like? Is it like Jesus? This covers everything.

Secondly, all of life should be lived under His authority and for His glory. "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" means for His glory or for His sake; for His name, His nature and His character. It's all done for His glory. Nothing should be permitted in our lives that cannot be associated with Jesus Christ. Verse 4, "Christ...is our life."

Thirdly, in verse 17, all we do should be done with thanksgiving "to God the Father." It says, "giving thanks to God the Father through Him." It literally would read "becoming thankful." Again, it indicates that it is a process, it's progressive, it's growing.

One of the secrets of life is to go through all of the hardships, heartaches, difficulties and bitter experiences and not become sour; to not let sickness, bereavement, sorrows, pain, loss or disappointments make me sour or hard.

Have you ever noticed that when people get old, they sometimes get cantankerous, grouchy, gripey, picky or complaining? It's not easy getting old; it's not for wimps. It's a challenge.

But the key to growing sweeter, as you grow in the Lord, is to remember to "let the peace of God rule in your hearts....Let the word of God dwell in your richly." And make all of life about the glory of Christ. And realize that God is so loving that nothing can happen to me unless it is filtered through His love. He's so wise that nothing can happen to me unless it is allowed for His purpose, for my good and for His glory. Then our response is thankfulness. So Paul closes this whole section of governing the spiritual life with "becoming thankful." And remember that Paul is in chains when he writes this, yet he is thankful.

God has promised to take care of us. He's our Father. And notice the context here: He has promised to take care of you, He is "the Father" and we do this "through Him."

In Matthew 6:26, Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor

gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

I used to love to hear that song sung by Ethel Waters at the Billy Graham crusades:

"I sing because I'm happy.

I sing because I'm free.

For His eye is on the sparrow,

And I know He watches me."

So Paul brings us back to the fact that we are children of God, and we should learn to grow in thankfulness. And the thing that controls this whole, spiritual overflow of our lives are these three things: "the peace of God" ruling, "the word of Christ" dwelling and the name of the Lord Jesus being glorified. It's all about the glory of God. Live for His glory.