

THE DOMINION OF CHRIST

Colossians 3:15-17

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PROLOGUE

Deb Kaliman tells about one evening when she and her three-year-old son were sitting at the dinner table looking outside at the birds. She began telling him interesting facts about our feathered friends. Suddenly, he looked her square in the eye and said, “How do you know? Were you a bird once?”

Jesus Christ reveals important facts to us about God. How does he know about God? He knows about God because is the very Son of God. He was equal with God from the beginning of time (see John 1:1-3) and reigns for all eternity. Indeed, he is the ultimate authority and absolute center of life, the world, all things and all times. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

SCRIPTURE

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs 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 (Col 3:15-17 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Christian scholars speak of the authority of Christ in two different ways: the reign of power and the reign of grace. The reign of power refers to his universal kingship. As the very Son of God and Second Person of the Trinity, he is Creator, Sustainer and Judge of the universe. The Psalmist declares:

“The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all” (Ps 103:19 NIV).

The reign of grace refers to Christ’s spiritual kingship. Christ is Head of the Church and Lord over all believers. In Ephesians we read:

“And God has put all things under Christ’s feet and has made him the head over everything for the church” (Eph 1:22 NIV).

The reign of grace is a spiritual kingship because it relates to the spiritual realm and is administered not by force or external means but by spiritual means. Paul speaks of the spiritual kingship of Christ in his letter to the Colossians and tells us of at least five different ways we can acknowledge the reign or dominion of Christ.

1. PEACE (15A)

Christ reigns through peace. The word “peace” in the Bible is rich in meaning and has many nuances. Here, though, it refers to the peace that Christ embodies. Our reading says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body” (15). If we want to show we belong to Christ then we need to demonstrate the peace of Christ to all people and especially our fellow Christians.

Jack Seberry tells about a third-grade Sunday school teacher who was giving a lesson on the commandment, "Honor thy father and mother." "Now, does anyone know a commandment for brothers and sisters?" she asked. One sharp girl raised her hand and said, "Thou shalt not kill."

Now there is more to sharing the peace of Christ with our brothers and sisters than just refraining from killing them – although that is a good start! More positively, it is a decision to treat people the way Christ has treated us. The Apostle Paul gives a description of this kind of peace when he says:

“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:5-7 NIV).

This complements what Paul says in his letter to the Colossians. He paints a vivid picture, "Let the peace of God be the decider of all things within your heart" (Col 3:15). Literally what he says is, "Let the peace of God be the umpire in your heart." He uses a verb from the athletic arena; it is the word that is used of the umpire who settled disputes. If the peace of Jesus Christ is the umpire in any one's heart, then, when emotions clash, the decision of Christ will keep us in the way of love and the Church will remain the one body it is meant to be.

The peace of God is not a warm, soothing feeling you get when all is right, but a way of behaving even when things go wrong. It is not a private emotion but a firm decision to be like Christ even in the face of adversity and conflict. Such peace is possible because of the greater peace we have received through Jesus Christ. As it is written:

“Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us” (Rom 5:1 NLT).

2. HIS WORD (16A)

Christ reigns through his Word. Our text says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (16a). Most Christians and most churches would say the Bible is important. But can we honestly say that the content of the Bible is richly known?

The *Wall Street Journal* has reported that nearly one thousand different cookbooks are published each year in America, many of them glossy, full-color, and expensive. But at the same time, fewer and fewer people are cooking their meals. The reporter for the *Journal* interviewed one woman, a portfolio manager in New York; who had acquired sixteen cookbooks in the last four years and subscribed to two cooking magazines. But she admitted that the last time she prepared a sit-down meal was four years ago, “and,” she said, “it didn’t turn out!”

There are more Bible translations, study aids, and Scripture devotional books available now than any time in history. Christian publishing is big business in America. But for all that, people are reading and studying their Bibles less and less.

David F. Nygren once commented (with tongue-in-cheek), “If all the neglected Bibles were cleaned off simultaneously, we would have a record dust storm, and the sun would go into eclipse for a whole week!” On the other hand, Oswald Chambers said, “If we understood what happens when we use the Word of God, we would use it oftener.”

The word translated as “richly” has to do with size. The point being we need to make plenty of room for God’s Word in our lives. There is an old saying, “A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who is not!”

3. PRAISE (16B)

Christ reigns through praise. Our passage says, “sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (16). Some people try to make a distinction between psalms, hymns and spiritual songs but in reality they are just different ways of describing the same thing, that is, vocal praise set to music.

The faith of the Church has always been expressed to God in praise. It is worth noting that from the very beginning Christianity was a singing faith. An ancient historian by the name of Philo tells us that the early Christians would often spend entire evenings singing hymns and songs. One of the earliest descriptions of a church service comes to us from a

non-Christian called Pliny, who was the Roman governor of Bithynia (near the Black Sea). He sent a report of the activities of the Christians to Trajan, the Roman Emperor, in which he said, "They meet at dawn to sing a hymn to Christ as God."

There are few things that more demonstrably show we belong to Christ than praise. And there are so many different ways to praise God. The Psalmist exhorts:

“Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!” (Ps 150 NRSV).

It is obvious from reading the psalms that many different kinds of instruments can be used to praise God such as stringed instruments (like guitars), brass instruments (like trumpets), percussion instruments (like drums and cymbals) and many others as well.

4. AMBASSADORS (17A)

Christ reigns through ambassadors. We are his ambassadors. Paul says, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (17a). In his letter to the Corinthians he is more explicit, “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Cor 5:20 NIV).

If you are an ambassador for your country there are at least three things that can be said of you. First of all, you are going to live in a land that is not your own. You are going to be someplace that is not your true home. Secondly, as an ambassador, when you speak, you do not just speak for yourself, but you speak on behalf of your country and the president of your country. Thirdly, whatever you say or do reflects back upon your country. The honor of your country is in your hands. For good or ill, people will judge your country by your conduct.

Similar things can be said of those who are ambassadors for Christ. First of all, we live in a land that is not our true home. We are citizens of heaven. Jesus urges his followers to remember that while we may be in the world we are not of the world (Jn 17:11, 14). Secondly, as ambassadors of Christ we represent Christ and speak on his behalf. How are people going to know about Christ unless we tell them? Thirdly, as Christians, all that we say and do reflects back on the One we represent. The honor of Christ and his church is in our hands. We are his ambassadors.

5. GRATEFUL HEARTS (15B, 16C, 17B)

Christ reigns through grateful hearts. Perhaps the greatest way to express the reign of Christ in our lives is through gratitude. The importance of gratitude is emphasized not once but three different times in this short passage.

Of course, we cannot make people be grateful. They have to arrive there on their own. But that doesn't keep us from trying.

It was Thanksgiving Day and the town grouch was grumbling as usual. His neighbor was fed-up and asked, "Don't you have anything to be thankful for?" "Nope," he replied. So the neighbor said, "Have you considered thanking God for turning your nose right side up?" "Why would I be thankful for that?" responded the grumbler. "Because," said the neighbor, "He could have put it on you upside down. Then when you sneezed you would have blown your thankless head off!"

The Bible says, "In every thing give thanks" (1 Thess 5:18). This does not mean that everything is good, but that in every situation we should always give thanks for something that is good. Jesus never suggested we rejoice in evil. Rather, he indicated that in the face of insults, hardship, and persecution we are to rely on God's power and find something positive to appreciate.

You can always find something to be thankful for if you look long enough. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), a well-known Bible scholar, was once robbed of his wallet. Knowing that it was his duty to give thanks in everything, he meditated on this incident and recorded in his diary the following:

Let me be thankful, first, because he never robbed me before; second, because although he took my purse, he did not take my life; third, because although he took all I possessed, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.

CONCLUSION

Christ reigns in power and grace. Everyone is under his reign of power whether or not they know it and whether or not they desire it. On the other hand, no one is under the reign of grace unless (at some point) they know it and desire it. Being in this spiritual kingdom is a gift from God to be received by faith. Faith is a personal trust in God which acknowledges the authority of Jesus Christ. The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas:

"Sirs, what do I have to do to be saved, to really live?" They said, "Put your entire trust in the Master Jesus. Then you'll live as you were meant to live"

(Acts 16:31 MSG).

In order to live as we were meant to live we need to acknowledge the reign of Christ. We acknowledge his reign by pursuing the peace of Christ, following the Word of Christ, extolling the praise of Christ, living as ambassadors of Christ, and expressing full gratitude to Christ. Those who acknowledge Christ's authority will show that they belong to Christ. And those who belong to Christ in this life will reign with him in the next (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 3:21).