**Teach and admonish one another in all wisdom**

Text: Colossians 3:16a

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**Scriptures:** Deut 6:4-9, James 3:13-18; Colossians 3:12-17

**Songs Chosen:** ‘Behold our God’, [SttL] 216, 119:33-40, 503, 184

**Series:** The ‘one anothers’ of Scripture (#9)

**Theme:** All who are in Christ, in whom the Word of Christ dwells richly, are called to a mutual ministry of teaching and admonition of one another in all wisdom.

**Proposition:** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom

**Introduction**

I think that you would be shocked if I said, “Let’s eat Grandma!” However, if I put a comma in the sentence and said “Let’s eat, Grandma” then you’d relax and understand my request is that Grandma joins me for a meal – rather than that she **is** the meal. Punctuation in sentences can completely change the meaning in written language and is mirrored by pauses when we speak. How much money is twenty five dollar notes? It depends on where you put the hyphen: Twenty five-dollar notes is $100, whereas twenty-five dollar notes is $25! If you say to someone close to you “I’m sorry I love you” that conveys a very different meaning to the same sentence with a semi-colon “I’m sorry; I love you”. What, you might well ask, has this got to do with our sermon text today?

Well, when the Greek manuscripts were originally written and copied, there was no punctuation between letters and words, no commas, no hyphens, no spaces, no full stops, no semi-colons. There was just a continuous string of Greek letters. In the Greek New Testament manuscripts, most of the time the meaning is clear from the words, but on occasion the wider context of a passage needs to be considered to find the original meaning of the text. So it is with Colossians 3:16 “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*.”

Are we being commanded to teach one another by singing to each other? If you meet with me or perhaps one of the elders because you are seeking spiritual counsel, should we sing our guidance to you? If you see someone in the congregation making spiritually unwise or sinful choices, should you break into song to conveying a warning to them? It is certainly true that we wisely teach and admonish each other when we sing Biblically based psalms and hymns together, but is this the main teaching of the Scripture here?

Our text is connected to the words of the Apostle Paul in Col 1:28 where he writes to the church at Colossae about Christ: “*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ*”. Paul did not primarily proclaim, warn and teach the church in Colossae by singing to them. In nearby Ephesus, he taught in the synagogue, speaking bolding, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). There’s no evidence that he sung the gospel extensively during his missionary journeys.

Therefore, we should not understand that the primary means of teaching and admonishing one another is through song, rather Colossians 3:16 can be understood as follows: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom’.* And, related, but separately: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly…. singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*.” All this to say that our text for this morning’s sermon is the first part of Colossians 3:16 which we’ll consider under three headings:

1. The richly indwelling Word
2. The ministry of teaching and admonition
3. The pure peaceable wisdom of God
4. **The richly indwelling Word**

You and I dwell in our homes. We know our way around these places of residence, and we usually have access to all rooms there, except if we are children, and there are some areas which may be for ‘parents only’.

In our text, the Apostle Paul writes about the Word of Christ dwelling in believers. The Greek word translated ‘dwell’ literally means to take up residence in, to make one’s home in or among. When somebody takes up residence with you in your home, you become familiar with them, their attitudes and habits. So when the Word of Christ dwells within us, we become familiar with the attitudes and behaviours which the Word directs us to. We could rightly say that when the Word of Christ dwells within us we get to know Jesus well.

You might think that the phrase ‘Word of Christ’ only refers to the gospels, or perhaps just to the words recorded there which Jesus spoke and which are highlighted in ‘red letter’ Bibles. However, we know that Jesus Himself is the Word who was with God in the beginning (John 1:1). The Old Testament prophets were animated by the Spirit of Christ when they were inspired to write down God’s revelation (1 Peter 1:11). The ‘Word of Christ’ refers to the entire Bible, every book, chapter, verse, and word within the Holy Scripture. Brothers and sisters, the whole Bible is to dwell abundantly, fully, in us.

Imagine a very expensive home where a rich person lives. The construction of the house would be of the finest materials. There would be great attention to detail in all of the fittings and décor of this home. Perhaps the bathroom taps would be made of pure gold and there would be a grand marble staircase. It wouldn’t matter where you looked, you would be able to readily see that this was the home of a materially wealthy person.

So, when the Scriptures dwell richly within someone, then it doesn’t matter where you look, what behaviour you observe, what words you hear, what attitudes are evident – they all evidence a life saturated with the Word of Christ. Charles Spurgeon, the 19th century English preacher famously said of John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrims Progress, “*Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very* *essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God*”. As you may know, John Bunyan lived during the time of the English Civil War (1642-45) and through multiple epidemics of the bubonic plague. If we could ask him for some pastoral advice about our current situation with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am confident that he would be able to provide Biblical teaching and admonition because the Word of Christ clearly dwelt richly within Him.

A person within whom the Word of Christ dwells richly has a wise understanding of the Biblical principles of truth, liberty of conscience, love for others, charitable judgements, equity, humility, unity in Christ, Scriptural ethics and the principles of interpretation of the book of Revelation.

A good question to ask is “How can you and I ensure that the Word of Christ inhabits us richly?” Here are four ways:

* **Reading** the Bible. Jesus assumed that the Pharisees knew the Old Testament well. He repeatedly asked them “*have you not read”* (e.g. Mat 12:3,5; 19:4; 22:31, Mark 12:10,26; Luke 6:3). The difficulty most of us face is not that it is hard to read Scripture, but that it is hard to keep the distractions of other, less vital activities, at bay. It may often or even always seem easier to watch TV, browse the internet or get engrossed in our favourite hobbies than to read the Word of Christ.
* **Hearing** – listening to Scripture. As all Israel did when Moses read the ‘Book of the Covenant’ in their hearing (Exo 24:7). When Joshua later read all the words of the law everyone heard including the ‘little ones’ – the small children who were present.

It is good for us all to hear the Bible read aloud in our worship services, at Bible study groups and to take advantage of the technology which allows us to listen to Scripture from our phones, other devices or on Christian radio.

* **Meditating** on the Scriptures. Not only does the Word need to get into us, it needs to be understood by us so that we can think about it as we go about daily tasks which do not require our brains to be fully engaged. Of the godly person, Psalm 1:2 says, **“***his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night*”. Meditation on the Word is like a cow chewing the cud, gradually digesting her food by stages so that it can then be swallowed to her nutritional benefit.
* **Memorising** the Word**.** All of us are capable of remembering some important pieces of information unless we suffer from complete memory loss. We know our own names, likely our phone number and our address. We commit high priority information to memory usually by repeating it until we can reproduce it accurately on demand.

Christian parent, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly so that you can readily fulfil your vow to ‘do all in your power to instruct your children in the truth of the Christian faith’. Brothers and sisters in Christ, let the Word of Christ dwell in us a;; richly so that we can ‘help care for the instruction in the faith’ of all the children in our covenant community – which brings us to our second point.

1. **The ministry of teaching and admonition**

A teacher is a person who helps others to learn. We have all had teachers: parents, instructors at school, college, polytechnic or university. When the Apostle Paul writes that believers are to teach one another, it is clear from his previous clause ‘Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly’ that teaching here is instruction in the Scriptures. Teaching the Word of God is certainly a key part of the role of Pastors. Jesus is a teacher (e.g. Matt 9:11), as was the Apostle Paul (Col 1:28). The Apostle Paul taught the younger man Timothy to teach others (e.g. 1 Tim 6:2) and to entrust the apostolic teaching to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tit 2:2).

Ministers in our churches undergo rigorous training in the Scriptures, including oral presbytery examinations in order to demonstrate that they are capable preachers and teachers who can ‘*rightly handle the word of truth*’ (2 Tim 2:15). Elders are biblically qualified for their office by being (amongst other things) ‘*able to teach*’ the Scriptures (1 Tim 3:2). Those who teach others as part of their office are responsible for the influence they have over their trusting students (James 3:1). Those with an office involving publicly teaching in the church are called to ‘*equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ*’ (Eph 4:12).

It is clear from our text that one of those works of ministry is teaching the Word of Christ to one another as members of the body of Christ. Teaching is not just the domain of the Minister and the Elders in the church! Each one of us as members of this congregation are called to a teaching ministry as we convey the truth of the Word of Christ which dwells within us. In general, the more richly the Word inhabits us, the better equipped we will be to teach others.

Being under the teaching of God’s truth is not just about receiving and understanding information, but also about learning how to live our lives in willing holy obedience to Christ our Lord. Have you ever had anyone in your home who has been learning to play the violin? The sound of a beginner has been described as like that of a cat being strangled! When we are learning we make mistakes; it’s part of the process! Thomas Edison the inventor of the electric light-bulb said “*I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work*”.

Repeated failure is the road to success, but with a good teacher, the number of failures is greatly reduced, and the road is much shorter. That is where correction comes in! The learner violinist greatly benefits from a good teacher who can correct their bow technique, warn them to change the position of their elbow and teach them the correct pressure to exert on the strings. It wouldn’t have taken Thomas Edison’s students 10,000 times to get their first light bulb to work – they would have had a teacher who could correct their mistakes and guide them rapidly to success.

Correction is the essence of the Biblical word ‘admonition’. The Greek word here literally means to place in the mind and so to warn or give notice to beforehand; especially of danger or evil. Admonition is a form of directed personal counselling which seeks to help another person by providing guidance through warning, cautioning, reproving or exhorting.

You might say “who am I to teach others or to admonish them?’ The answer should be “you are someone in whom the Word of Christ dwells richly”. The Lord always equips His people for the tasks He calls them to! Now some of us will be more equipped than others. Our effectiveness as teachers and admonishers will largely depend upon who much the Word of Christ dwells within us, and how close the relationships we have with one another are. It’s difficult to effectively admonish someone who does not know you and who has not had the opportunity to grow to trust you. Speaking of loving correction, the Proverbs wisely reveal that “*faithful are the wounds of a friend*” (27:6). Befriending our brothers and sisters in Christ greatly assists in us teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, which brings us to our third point:

1. **The pure peaceable wisdom of God**

Who would want to be operated on by an incompetent surgeon? Surely you want to be confident that when they took a scalpel to your body and opened you up with it, they had the necessary skills to do a good job. In the spiritual realm, the Word of Christ is a sharper that any two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). Much damage can be inflicted on the souls of others by false teaching and ungodly correction.

Look at the last three words of our text: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another* ***in all wisdom***” (Col 3:16). Wisdom is the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. The Bible identifies two kinds of wisdom: The wisdom of God which is foolishness to the unbelieving world (1 Cor 1:23-25). This wisdom is heavenly, spiritual. And the ‘wisdom’ of the world which is in truth foolishness (1 Cor 1:27). This wisdom is earthly, unspiritual (James 3:15).

You probably don’t need me to tell you that the wisdom referred to in our text is the wisdom of God which is, in the words of James “*first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits*” (James 3:17). This is not the ‘wisdom’ that comes from jealousy and selfish ambition (James 3:16). Those who are wise with the wisdom of God do not desire to teach others because they think they are better than them. They are willing teachers because they have a heartfelt love for their brothers and sisters in Christ and they desire that they and others grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18)

Those who are wise with the wisdom of God do not desire to admonish others because they like the idea of being a ‘spiritual police-person’. They are willing admonishers because they have a heartfelt love for their brothers and sisters in Christ and they desire to save them from the painful consequences of unwise choices in life. When done in all the wisdom of God our teaching and admonition of one another is one of the ways in which we love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34).

There is certainly the danger of wielding the sharp sword of God’s Word unwisely and damaging one another as we teach and admonish. However, I think perhaps a greater danger in our church is that we may not pick up the sword at all! Reasons for this may include: a sense being inadequate for the task, fear of making a mistake, laziness or ignorance of our responsibility as teachers and admonishers. There is an insufficiency for us all as those who are called to minister to others (e.g. 2 Cor 2:16), but we serve in the power of Christ. Paul writes to the Philippians (4:13) “*I can do all things through him who strengthens me*”. The body of Christ not only needs faithful ministers and elders to preach and teach, but also faithful members who will teach and admonish one another.

A number of people have commented to me in recent months just how disruptive the Covid-19 pandemic and the surrounding issues of vaccinations and government restrictions are to church life. That’s true, but there is also great opportunity here to glorify Christ as we show how much we love one another as we teach and admonish one another in all wisdom having let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. Our New Zealand society and many families in this nation are bitterly divided by strongly held opinions about how concerned we should be about Covid-19, whether or not to be vaccinated and/or if the current government is making good decisions for our country.

Here in the church we also have different opinions about these things. So what is the difference between us and the world outside the church? Wisdom. We have the true, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, merciful and productive heavenly wisdom of God. In contrast the world only has the foolish earthly wisdom of man. We can teach one another about being careful to pass on factual information from reputable sources. We can teach one another about loving one another, whether they are immunocompromised, anxious about their health, concerned about potential side effects of a vaccine, or are not confident that a vaccine has been sufficiently well tested.

We can admonish one another if we start to judge the motives of others rather than being charitable and upholding one another’s Christian liberty (Rom 14). We can teach others by example not to look down on others who make different decisions to us, or who hold different views about matters upon which the Scriptures allow freedom. We can admonish one another for careless speech which is corrupting and does not build up. When we teach and admonish one another in all God’s wisdom then we minister to one another peacefully, gently, being open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits (James 3:17).

So, brothers and sisters in our Lord, will you commit yourself today to: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another**in all wisdom*” (Col 3:16)? Are you in the habit of reading, hearing, meditating upon and memorizing the Bible?

Perhaps you are someone in whom the Word of Christ has not yet found a home? If so then listen to the invitation which Jesus offers: “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*." (Matt 28:28-30).

The people in this church who know Jesus are equipped to teach you about their Saviour because the Word of Christ dwells in them. We would like to tell you how much Jesus has first loved us so that you can see why we love one another, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.

AMEN.