**LET THE WORD OF CHRIST**

**DWELL IN YOU RICHLY**

Colossians 3:1-17 (Key verse 16a)

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly.”*

We are faced with a new year in the midst of an unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. We face so many challenges…….so many uncertainties and are naturally filled with worries and anxieties, not only on a personal level but also collectively as a ministry. Then how must we live in the New Year? What must we focus on? How can we serve the work of God? May God grant us a clear spiritual direction through today’s passage.

Let’s look at verse 1a. The Phrase since, then, you have been raised with Christ iindicates that what Paul is about to say in today’s passage (Chapter 3)…… follows on………what he already explained in the previous passage. Therefore, let’s spend a few minutes to have another look at what Paul discussed in chapter 2, (but within the context of today’s passage.)

The bible tells us that sin entered the world through Adam (Rom 5:12) and through his disobedience we were all born as…… **sinners**. (Rom 5:19) But what does it exactly mean to be a……. **“sinner**?”……In Colossian 2, Paul explains that…..a sinner………has a…….fallen nature……or a **sinful nature**. (Col 2:11, 13) This sinful nature …… is a distorted……perverted……..and twisted version………of the pure and holy nature that God gave Adam and Eve when He first created them. This sinful nature causes you and me to………. **at the core of our being**…..be sexually corrupted………lustful after sexual pleasure………it gives us evil desires……….make us greedy……and finally make us to love money more than God. (Col 3:5) When God first created Adam, Adam did not have any of these …..qualities…..or should I say…….distortions within him. Because, his nature was still pure and holy! Yet, the moment sin entered his heart……his pure and holy nature……..was instantly distorted into this….. sinful nature. Tragically, as descendants of Adam………we naturally inherited this sinful nature! We are born with it…….flowing in our blood and rooted in our DNA…...That is why no one has to teach us how to get angry…...or how to rage……We do this from a very young age. Also no one has to teach us how to harm other people, we know exactly how to do this from a very young age……..and get better at it the older we get. This is why, before we know it, we slander others and have filthy language on our lips………this is why we so naturally lie…….to effortlessly deceive others. (3:8-9) God did not create man to behave like this………but because of sin……..we have all inherited a sinful nature……..that corrupts the core of our being from birth.

God is holy, and therefore cannot accept us with this sinful nature. So He separates Himself from us. He also prevents us from coming to Him, with this sinful nature. So we are naturally filled with fear, guilt and shame……..as we are destined to one day face God’s wrath. (Eph 2:3) Our sinful nature is truly the greatest tragedy that befell on this earth! So can we get rid of our sinful nature? Or fix it? No we cannot, because our sinful nature is ruled by sin (Rom 6:6), and this makes us slaves to sin………To be a slave to sin means, we have no choice but to constantly do what sin requires…...which is to obey the devil (Eph 2:2) and satisfy the distorted desires of our sinful nature. Only God can change us…….only God, can crush our sinful nature! And make us new! That is exactly what God did.

Paul explains in the previous chapter that on the day we received Christ (2:6)……God took your sinful nature (and mine)……..and united it with Christ………Then God crucified our sinful nature with Christ (Rom 6:6a) ……so that it died with Christ (col 2:20, 3:3) on the cross! Then God buried (our sinful nature) with Christ (col 2:12)(Gal 2:20) and finally……. raised you and me …….with Christ (Col 2:12) as a new creation…… the **old has gone**, the **new has come**! (2 Cor 5:17) In this way, God dealt with our sinful nature! God used Christ…….. to **cut away our sinful nature…..(2:11 NLT) and deal with our sins. …...Before we received Christ (2:6)** it was impossible for us to obey God and grow in the image of Christ. Our sinful nature was too strong. **But because we were raised with Christ, sin lost its power in us.** This was “our old self!” Our hopeless self, that prevented us from overcoming our sinful nature…. **But now, as a new creation in Christ, we can** stand up against sin……..we can obey God……..and we can resist our sinful nature. This is our “new self.” Which Paul speaks about in chapter. To understand today’s passage in chapter 3, we need to first understand this change that occurred within the core of our being….this change from the “old self” to the “new self” …...when God crushed our sinful nature with Christ.

So now, let’s look again at verse 1a of today’s passage. It reads, since, then, you have been raised with Christ…….or put differently………since then our sinful nature has been crushed by the resurrection of Christ ……..and you and I……. are now……. a “new self”……what changes should we make to the way we live our lives in this world? Practically, what should we do this year? What should we focus on? **The first thing** we must do is set our hearts and minds on things above and no longer only on earthly things.(1-2) Here things above refers to heaven, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. And things below, are the earth where we are staying. Before we received Christ, we were never concerned about things above. We just thought the visible, earthly world …with all the challenges and problems we face in the world……..are all there was to our existence. So we focused only on earthly things. And made it to be our main concern in our lives. However, since we died to this world and our life is now hidden with Christ in God above (3) ..we must know that ….. one day we will go to heaven to be with Christ and with God. Where are going to the “things above.” Therefore, the earthly things are no longer our main concern or focus……….but the things above are! Because that is where we are going! Also our hope is no longer in the things of the world…..but our hope is rather to one day see Christ and stand with Him in glory. (4) So, God calls on us to take our hearts and minds off the earthly things, and place them on heavenly things above. We can stop living in this world. Indeed, we have to work….we have to study, we have to face challenges…however we must know that there are things above. That is more important than any problem or challenge we face in this world.

What else should we practically do differently, as a “new self” in Christ living in this world? Look at verse 5. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Here the earthly nature refers to our sinful nature…….. But hold on one moment……Earlier we said that God crucified our sinful nature with Christ and buried it with Christ. Does this not mean that our sinful nature is already dead? Why then does Paul tell us to put it to death? Indeed, God did crucify our sinful nature……..but as long as we live in the flesh, we are still under its influence. We can compare our sinful nature to a chicken whose head was cut off. Although the chicken’s head is cut off and it is indeed dead, its body still runs around. Yet, it lacks power and direction. And can easily be pushed down. Likewise, although God has crucified our sinful nature with Christ………. While we live in the flesh……..our sinful nature is still kicking and running around within us……... But since God has crushed it, He calls on us to now……...with great urgency…….. determination…….and commitment…….. bring our sinful nature under control. Stop the headless chicken from running around….We must put it to death!! No compromise!

What, then are the things that belong to our sinful nature? Look again at verse 5. ….sexual immorality, impurity, lust,(sexual corruption) evil desires and greed. Although we have received Christ, and are indeed a new creation…….these sins remain in us as part of our crushed sinful nature. It is dead but is still moving. God calls on us to put it to death…..we must kill it off with vigor and determination, not only because it disturbs us……but because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (6) How can we, who are a new creation do the very things on which God will one day come to pour out His wrath. We must put our sinful nature to death. We must bring it under control.

There is more……look at verse 8. (Read) .. Indeed, God has crushed our sinful nature with Christ……..however, its influence…….the after effects….are still prevalent in your heart and mind……..that is why, even though we are believers and born again Christians, we find within us such [ungodly] things as anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language on our lips. Before we received Christ, we used to walk in these ways, in the life we once lived (7) . But now, after we received Christ…….and received a new life with a new nature …….we MUST………..rid ourselves of all these things!! This is what we must do this year. Bring our sinful nature under control and rid ourselves of these things. And put our sinful nature to death……..What will happen if we don’t do these things? What if do not put our sinful nature to death? Will God reject us? No! However, we will struggle so much with our sins…..and do so many stupid things that will disrupt our lives, disrupt the people around us…….and prevent us from fulfilling the purpose God has for our lives. That is why, it is in our best interest that God calls on us to put to death our sinful nature and get rid of the earthly things.

What else should we stop doing? Look at verse (9a) Do not lie to each other. Again, it is interesting to note that Paul is not talking to unbelievers…….but to the believers in the Colossian church. Believers just like you and me. The truth is, though we are in Christ…….though we are born again……we still lie……because lying is part of our sinful nature……and as we said our sinful nature is still kicking and running around like a headless chicken within us. But we must bring it under control….we must deal with it by stop lying…..to each other. Now, some of you may say, “I do not lie; especially to people at church.” But our **hearts are corrupt and deceitful above all things** (Jer 17:9). Whenever we open our mouths, we lie. For example to exaggerate is to lie. When we show off, we magnify our strong points, and we lie. When we fail to stand up for others, we lie. When we talk long about others' mistakes while hardly talking about our own shortcomings, we lie. But Paul tells us, do not lie to each other, since you have taken **off your old self** with its practices and have put on the **new self***.* (9-10a) Amen.

At this point of the message, some of you might wonder: if God crucified our sinful nature with Christ, why did He leave it running around in us like a headless chicken? Why not bring it to a complete standstill in us……..even totally remove it from us. Look at verse 10. It reads….. the **new self** …..is being renewed …….in the image of its Creator. Here it is important to note the phrase “being renewed”……It indicates that we are in an ongoing transition…….from the old sinful self………into the beautiful and perfect image of our Creator God. Here we can learn that God left the after-effects of our sinful nature within us……not to harm or make our lives unnecessary difficult…….but rather to give us an opportunity to grow in His image………..over time……..Look at verses 12. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Wow! These are all virtues that describes the character of God. They are the exact opposite to what Paul told us to get rid of in verse 8!! Do you remember? Paul told us to get rid of anger, and here in verse 12 he says we have to adopt compassion……he told us to get rid of rage and here…… to adopt kindness……….we have to replace malice with gentleness…….and replace slander with patience……….all of which indicates God’s purpose for leaving our sinful nature within our bodies…………that is to gradually renew our fallen nature into the image of our Creator…...and ultimately the peace of Christ…… (peace from Christ) rule in our hearts. (15) This is God’s hope and plan for us.

But in reality, to patiently move away from the sinful nature toward the likeness of Christ…….and to have the peace of Christ in this world is not easy! Especially now, with the covid pandemic. We face so many uncertainties…..challenges and troubles……..and because of our sinful nature, we are attacked **by serious anxieties**. How then can we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts? Also, as we struggle so much to make ends meet in this world, how can we take our hearts and minds off the earthly things and all the challenges we face….to instead seek after things above…….in heaven……… where Christ is? It sounds ridiculous right? And what about putting to death our sinful nature…...and clothing ourselves with the virtues of Christ…….. Our sinful nature seems still too strong….so we simply do not have the energy to deal with this now, right!!!? Indeed!!!! All of these commands only burdens our already wearied hearts. And I am sure, if we end the message here………we will all go home discouraged and disappointed……..because we know on our own we simply can’t do it…..life is simply too much and our sinful nature still has us in a grip.

But fortunately, this is not the end of the message…….we still have to look at our key verse…...verse 16a. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. This is the secret for overcoming our sinful nature. Humanly speaking it is impossible to set our hearts and minds on things above……...we only want to look at the things below………Also it is impossible to put to death the things belonging to our earthly nature……….because we somehow still enjoy gratifying it. Moreover, it is hard for us to clothe ourselves with the characteristics of God and so have the peace of Christ dwell in us……...Indeed, because of our sinful nature wriggling around in us, we can hardly do any of these things. And are easily discouraged. Yet, there is one thing we can absolutely do……..is let the word of Christ (or the word of God) dwell in us richly. When the word of Christ dwells in us richly……...we are suddenly empowered……we are suddenly able to overcome our sinful nature with power. We have suddenly a desire to set our hearts and minds on things above. We are suddenly disgusted by our earthly ways…….Because, the word of Christ, is living and active. God's word has dynamic power. It is sharper than a double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts (Heb 4:12). The word of God reveals all our problems and yet provides us with solutions……gives us his wisdom. It empowers us……..it teaches us……...it encourages and motivates us……..it gives us life!! It directs us and it cleanses us! It is through the word of God that all our problems are solved, because through the word of Christ…..God himself leads us to follow His wisdom to overcome them all.

Indeed we are faced with a worldwide pandemic……..and indeed we currently faced with many challenges and will encounter many more in the rest of 2021………students faces many challenges to register and find accommodation……. Graduates are looking for jobs and places to stay…….budgets are tight and the economy is slow. Considering these things on its own, it is hard to look ahead and say we are ready and hopeful. Our sinful nature, makes things even worse as it so easily discourages and paralyses us. But there is a way to move!! There is a way to move forward. There is a way to challenge all that lies ahead. We must let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. If we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly God can give us the victory over each and every challenge……...solve our problems……...help us put to death our sinful nature and in the process help us grow in His image……....while the unshakable peace of Christ rule in our hearts. That is God’s plan..that is His vision for us……if only we let the word of Christ swell in us richly. The Holy Spirit works in us through the word and will give us all these by God's power. Therefore, this year…… our job is to let the word of God dwell in us richly. Pandemic or no pandemic….we are moving. Challenges or no challenges…we are moving!! Because the word of God fills us with power. Amen.

But what exactly does it mean that the word of Christ……DWELL in our hearts? To dwell means to remain for a time…….or to live for a period of time in a specific place. Morning….afternoon and evening. It is always present in our hearts. For it to do so, we need to not only receive the word with our head, but with our hearts and our spirits, hold on to it. And then obey it. And not only once a week or once a month, but every day so that it can dwell in us RICHLY…. This is essential that the word of Christ dwell in us…..not poorly or scarcely…..but richly. Then the word of Christ is so plentiful within us…….. That God himself can powerfully help us and lead us through any challenge. Because the word is always there to move us ahead. And also, that God can provide us with desire and his great power to obey all his commands and grow in His image.

In conclusion:

We stand at the beginning of a new year. Like every year, and perhaps more so now that we face a worldwide pandemic……….we have so many worries, fears and our sinful natures paralyses our hearts. If we just try to fight and defeat them on our own, we can never win. But we should not focus on driving them out. Instead, we must struggle to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. That is the focus point…..not the problem. When the word dwells in us richly, worries and worldly thoughts lose their place to stand within us. They get pushed out. I pray that the more difficult the times become, the more we may love God's word. May we read and deeply meditate on the word. There are tremendous blessings in meditating on the Scriptures (Ps 1:1-2).

Then how can we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly this year? As a ministry, we have several ways. The first way is to every day have morning devotion, by reading and analysing God’s word with prayer. The second way is through 1-1 bible studies where we can discuss the word of God and meditate on it. Thirdly, is by writing weekly testimony and sharing it with our bible teacher and fellowship members. Lastly, we can receive the word every Sunday. These are just some ways that our ministry follows to let the word of God dwell richly in us. But there are many other ways we can all do in our private time - like listening to an audio bible or to online sermons as well as memorizing scriptures. Heaven and earth will disappear but God's word, even the smallest letter of the word, will remain unchanged. I pray that we may eat, drink, and breathe God’s precious word of life this year. I pray that we may receive the word with our minds and hearts and entrust ourselves to the word so that the word may transform us day by day (Ac 20:32).....into the image of God. Amen. We can say many things about our lives. We can say many things about our country. We can say many things about the pandemic…..but in the end it does not matter. What matters is how God helps us in a particular situation. And how God’s word directs and teach and leads us to carry out His will in a particular situation. Therefore, this year, let us take off our minds and hearts from the earthly things and set it up above. And let the word of God take us there. Let the word of God strengthen us to put to death all that belongs to our sinful nature. Let the word of God instills the peace of Christ in us. Regardless of the situation. That is what God wants to give you and me this year. As individuals we will surely be blessed if we let the word of God dwell in us richly. But if we do so collectively as a ministry, how much more can God use this ministry. To lead other people, to also experience what we experience. And spread the good news of Jesus Christ, the peace of God and the victory of God through Christ. Therefore, lock down or no lockdown, this is our direction. Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. Let’s pray based on this verse. Let’s obey this verse. And God will surely do great things in us this year. Amen.