

The Word-less “Church”

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Many American churches are in a mess. Theologically they are indifferent, confused, or dangerously wrong. Liturgically they are the captives of superficial fads. Morally they live lives indistinguishable from the world. They often have a lot of people, money, and activities. But are they really churches, or have they degenerated into peculiar clubs?

What has gone wrong? At the heart of the mess is a simple phenomenon: the churches seem to have lost a love for and confidence in the Word of God. They still carry Bibles and declare the authority of the Scriptures. They still have sermons based on Bible verses and still have Bible study classes. But not much of the Bible is actually read in their services. Their sermons and studies usually do not examine the Bible to see what it thinks is important for the people of God. Increasingly they treat the Bible as tidbits of poetic inspiration, of pop psychology, and of self-help advice. Congregations where the Bible is ignored or abused are in the gravest peril. Churches that depart from the Word will soon find that God has departed from them.

What solution does the Bible teach for this sad situation? The short but profound answer is given by Paul in 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.” We need the Word to dwell in us richly so that we will know the truths that God thinks are most important and so that we will know His purposes and priorities. We need to be concerned less about “felt-needs” and more about the real needs of lost sinners as taught in the Bible. Paul not only calls us here to have the Word dwell in us richly, but shows us what that rich experience of the Word looks like. He shows us that in three points. (Paul was a preacher, after all.)

FIRST, he calls us to be educated by the Word, which will lead us on to ever-richer wisdom by “teaching and admonishing one another.” Paul is reminding us that the Word must be taught and applied to us as a part of it dwelling richly in us. The church must encourage and facilitate such teaching whether in preaching, Bible studies, reading, or conversations. We must be growing in the Word.

It is not just information, however, that we are to be gathering from the Word. We must be growing in a knowledge of the will of God for us: “**And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**” (Col. 1:19) Knowing the will of God will make us wise and in that wisdom we will be renewed in the image of our Creator, an image so damaged by sin: “**Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.**” (Col. 3:10)

This wisdom will also reorder our priorities and purposes, from that which is worldly to that which is heavenly: “**The hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel.**” (Col. 1:5) When that Word dwells in us richly we can be confident that we know the full will of God: “I became a minister according to the

stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known” (1:25). From the Bible we know all that we need for salvation and godliness.

SECOND, Paul calls us to expressing the Word from ever-renewed hearts in our “singing.” Interestingly, Paul connects the Word dwelling in us richly with singing. He reminds us that singing is an invaluable means of placing the truth of God deep in our minds and hearts. I have known of elderly Christians far gone with Alzheimer’s disease who can still sing songs of praise to God. Singing also helps connect truth to our emotions. It helps us experience the encouragement and assurance of our faith: “**That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**” (Col. 2:2–3)

The importance of singing, of course, makes the content of our songs vital. If we sing shallow, repetitive songs, we will not be hiding much of the Word in our hearts. But if we sing the Word itself in its fullness and richness, we will be making ourselves rich indeed. We need to remember that God has given us a book of songs, the Psalter, to help us in our singing.

THIRD, Paul calls us to remember the effect of the Word to make us a people with ever-ready “thanksgiving.” Three times in Colossians 3:15–17 Paul calls us to thankfulness. When the “word of Christ” dwells in us richly, we will be led on to lives of gratitude. As we learn and contemplate all that God has done for us in creation, providence, and redemption, we will be filled with thanksgiving. As we recall His promises of forgiveness, renewal, preservation, and glory, we will live as a truly thankful people.

We need the word of Christ to dwell in us richly today more than ever. Then churches may escape being a mess and become the radiant body of Christ as God intended.

沒有神話語的“教會”

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翻譯：朱一民

許多美國教會情況很糟。以神學方面來說，他們不但輕忽神學，陷入迷惑，甚至到了危險謬誤的地步。在敬拜儀式上，他們醉心於追隨最新的潮流。在道德上，他們與世界並無分別。他們人多、錢多、活動多，但這是教會嗎？還是已經淪落成社交俱樂部？

哪裡出錯了？這團混亂的核心現象，乃是許多教會對神的話語失去了信心與興趣。他們雖然手捧聖經，並宣告經文的權威性；他們依然引用經句講道，甚至還有查經班，但經文卻很少在這些服事之中被認真閱讀。他們的講道或研讀中，很少深入查考經文意義及對屬神的人有何重要的教導，反而只是當做一種文學的啟發、心理學的應用或者自我成長的工具。這種濫用或忽視聖經的人，就一定會陷入嚴重的危機之中。若是教會離棄聖經，也必會發現神也離開了他們。

無論作甚麼, 或說話或行事, 都要奉主耶穌的名, 藉著他感謝父神。

聖經對這種情況的教導是什麼？保羅在歌羅西書三章十六節有一段精闢的答覆：**你們要讓基督的信息豐豐富富地長住在你們心裏。要用各樣的智慧互相教導、規勸，用詩篇、聖詩、靈歌從心底發出感謝的聲音來頌讚上帝。**我們需要把上帝的智慧存在心裡，這樣才能明白來自上帝最要緊的真理，才能清楚他的目的與優先順序。我們應該不再專注在自己膚淺的“情緒”上的需要，而要思考聖經教導有關於一個罪人的真實需要。保羅不但指出了讓基督的道理深植我心的重要性，他也說明了神的話語內住的實際意義。他用三點（他畢竟是個傳道人）來說明。

首先，他要我們向聖經學習，這樣我們才能領受從神而來豐豐富富的智慧，讓我們“互相教導、規勸”。保羅告訴我們，神的話豐富內住在我們裡面的一個重要條件是“聖經要經常被教導並應用在我們身上”。教會必須鼓勵與提供這樣的教導，不論在講台，查經班，讀書會或者一般的對話中---我們必須在神的道中成長。

這種學習，學的不只是一般的知識，而是我們成長所更需要的：明白神的旨意。如同西1:9:「**因此，自從聽到了有關你們的消息，我們不斷地為你們禱告，求上帝使你們從聖靈得到各樣的智慧和理解力，能夠充分地認識他的旨意。**」明白神的旨意，可以使我們有智慧。藉著這樣智慧，我們從造物主領受的形像，才得以更新，而這個形像曾被罪所損毀。西3:10:「**換上了新我。這新我，由創造主上帝按照自己的形像不斷地加以更新，能夠完全地認識他。**」這種智慧也會重新設定我們的優先順序與目標，從屬地的變成屬天的，「**你們的信心和愛心都是以那為你們保存在天上的盼望為根據的。**」（西1:5）當神的話豐富富住在我們裡面時，我們就確實明白神的旨意：「為了你們的益處，上帝把這任務交給我，使我作教會的僕人。這任務是要我充分地把上帝的道傳的完備。」（西1:25）因此從聖經裡，我們得到所有與我們救恩與聖潔有關的需要。

其次，保羅要我們從更新的心靈，藉著歌聲，衷心表達神的道。有趣的是，保羅把歌唱與道豐富的內住連結起來。他提醒我們，歌唱是把神的道牢牢植入我們心靈深處的方法。我認識一位罹患阿茲海默症晚期的基督徒，仍能用詩歌來讚美神。歌唱可以把真理與我們的情感連結，讓我們領會從信心而來的激勵與確信：「**我要使他們得到鼓勵，能夠以愛心團結，有那從真知灼見所產生充足的信心來認識上帝的奧秘；這奧秘就是基督本身。他是開啟上帝所儲藏著的一切智慧和知識的鑰匙。**」（西2:2-3）

鑑於歌唱的重要功能，使得歌詞的內涵益發要緊。如果我們所唱的是膚淺又重複的詞句，我們就無法把神的道顯明於心。但如果我們將神的道豐富又完整的唱出來，我們就得以成為豐富。要記得，神已賜給我們詩篇，來幫助我們的歌唱。

第三，保羅要我們記得，神的道會讓我們成為凡事謝恩的人。保羅在歌羅西書3:15-17中，三次提及要感恩。當基督的道住在我們裡面時，我們就會過一個感恩的生活。每當我們思想到神所做創造、護理、救贖之工時，我們必定充滿感恩之情。當我們回想祂應許的赦罪、更新、保守以及榮耀，我們會真正的活出感恩的生命。

我們今天，尤勝於昔日，需要神的話語來豐豐富富的住在我們裡面。這樣，教會才可以遠離混亂，按照著神的旨意，成為基督榮耀的身體。