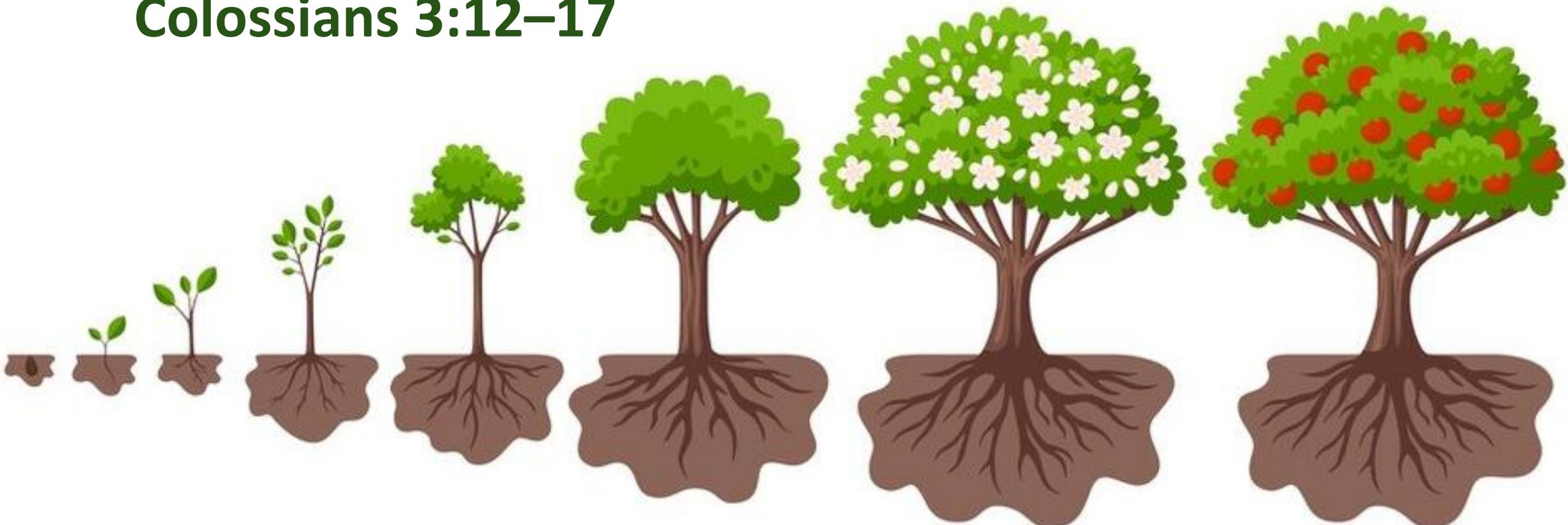


# “Bringing Virtue to Life,”

## Part 4

Colossians 3:12–17

*Christ over All:  
Paul's Letter  
to the Colossians*



## COLOSSIANS 3:12–17

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

## OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS 3:12–17

- Having commanded us to mortify sin (3:5–11) in response to our union with Christ (3:1–4), Paul then describes the virtues that we must nurture in their place (3:12–17).

I. The Christian's Practical Virtues (vv. 12–13)

II. The Christian's Comprehensive Virtue (v. 14)

→ III. The Christian's Internal Virtues (vv. 15–16)

→ IV. The Christian's Vertical Virtue (v. 17)

BRINGING  
VIRTUE  
TO LIFE

### III. The Christian's Internal Virtues (3:15–16)

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“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

- In v. 15, Paul shifts from his active “put on” commands to his passive “let this take place” commands.
- Paul focuses on two primary *internal* virtues which have enormous social ramifications: (1) *the peace of Christ ruling in the heart*; and (2) *the word of Christ dwelling richly within*.
- It is the purpose of Christ’s peace “to rule” and Christ’s word “to indwell,” so let them!

‘**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,**  
**to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful’** (3:15).

### A. The Rule of Christ’s Peace

- “**The peace of Christ**” – the peace that comes specifically *from* Christ, which only He provides (see John 14:27; John 16:33; Rom 5:1, 10–11).
- “**Let . . . rule**” – a continuous effort; “to be in control of someone’s activity,” “to serve as *umpire*, to *arbitrate*, to give the deciding argument.”
- “**In your hearts**” – the *domain* of the ruling; “mission control center” of our person; peace is to arbitrate our thoughts and decisions.
- “**And be thankful**” – *literally*, “keep becoming thankful.”

‘Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God’ (3:16).

## B. The Indwelling of Christ’s Word

- “The word of Christ” – the teaching about Jesus Christ; Paul has focused dominantly on this topic—“Christology”—from 1:15.
- “Let . . . dwell” – a continuous dwelling—a permanent residency; the same verb is used to describe the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11; 2 Tim 1:14), but here refers to the doctrine of Christ.
- “Within you” – emphasizes *corporate* rather than *personal indwelling*.
- “Richly” – “abundantly”; the degree to which this teaching must dwell.

That the word of Christ must dwell within the church members *richly* implies that it “should not be superficial or passing but that it should be a deep and penetrating contemplation that enables the message to have transforming power in the life of the community.” —Moo, *Colossians*, 286

It is to be “not with a scanty foothold, but with a large and liberal occupancy.” —Eadie, *Colossians*, 247



“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, **with all wisdom** **teaching** and **admonishing** **one another** with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (3:16).



- “**Teaching**” – “to provide instruction, formally or informally”; the *positive means* by which to achieve a *rich indwelling* of the teaching about Christ.
- “**Admonishing**” – “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct”; the *negative means* by which to achieve a *rich indwelling* of the teaching about Christ.
- “**One another**” – to be implemented by every member of the church.
- “**With all wisdom**” – the necessity of tact; the ability to teach or admonish appropriate to the situation.





“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

—**Colossians 1:28**

An engraving of St. John Chrysostom, a Byzantine Greek Orthodox saint and Doctor of the Church. He is shown from the waist up, wearing a dark, patterned cloak over a white garment. He has a full, dark beard and is looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. A small cross is visible on his chest.

“Tarry not, I entreat, for another to teach thee; thou hast the oracles of God. No man teacheth thee as they; for he indeed oft grudgeth much for vainglory’s sake and envy. Hearken, I entreat you, all ye that are careful for this life, and procure books that will be medicines for the soul. If ye will not any other, yet get you at least the New Testament, the Apostolic Epistles, the Acts, the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If grief befall thee, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take thence comfort of thy trouble, be it loss, or death, or bereavement of relations; or rather dive not into them merely, but take them wholly to thee; keep them in mind.”

—John Chrysostom (AD 347–407), Homily on Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another **with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,** singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (3:16).

- Paul lists three special *means* by which “teaching” and “correction” would be accomplished (see also Eph 5:19):
  - 1) “**Psalms**” – “songs of praise”; used especially to refer to OT psalms.
  - 2) “**Hymns**” – “songs with religious content”; perhaps Christian songs found in part in the NT (e.g. Col 1:15–20; Phil 2:6–11).
  - 3) “**Spiritual songs**” – spontaneous songs voicing spiritual themes and aspiration.

MEANS FOR  
INSTRUCTING  
AND  
CORRECTING  
ACCORDING TO  
THE WORD OF  
CHRIST

**“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (3:16).**

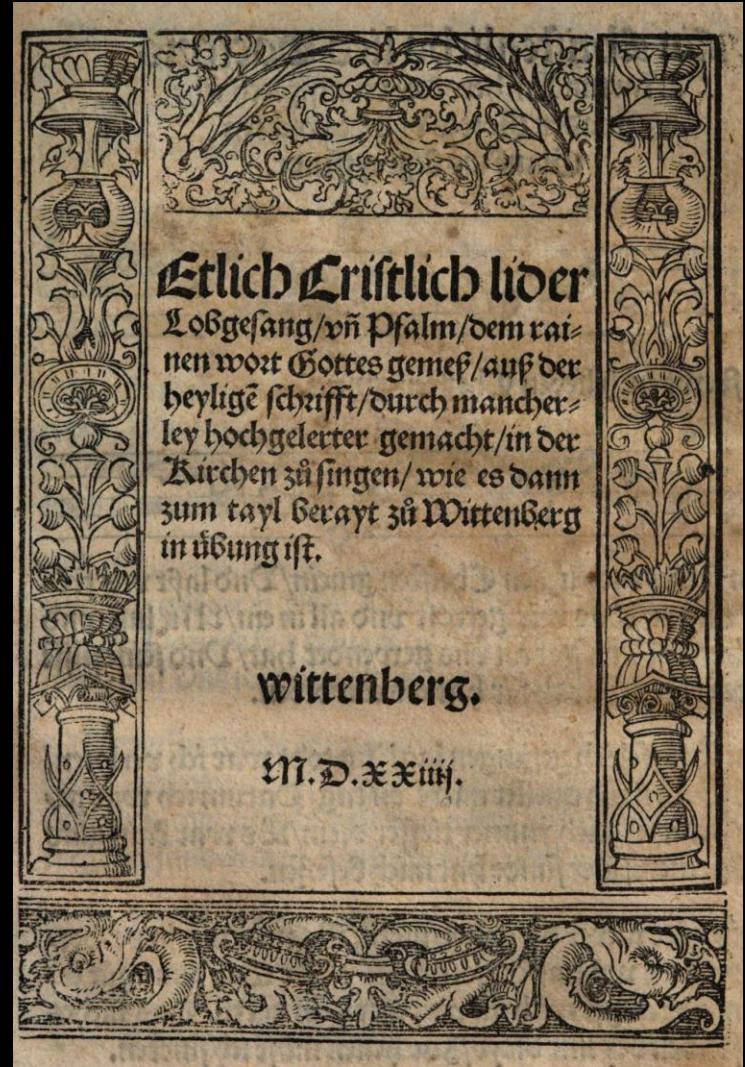
- **“Singing”** – Paul lists a third activity that instills the word of Christ within the members of the church; in addition to “teaching” and “admonishing,” there must also be “singing.”
- **“With thankfulness”** – the response of a heart that recognizes God’s astounding generosity and one’s own unworthiness.
- **“In your hearts”** – from sincerity, not superficiality.
- **“To God”** – not to oneself, but to the One who alone is worthy to receive all the glory for His great and gracious acts.

“There is much to learn from this verse about how we should worship. However, let me lean into one primary principle regarding corporate singing: music in worship should be viewed as an extension of the ministry of the Word. Too often in many churches, preaching and music conflict. Our preaching and singing, however, should work together so that the Word of Christ dwells richly in the saints. For that matter, all that happens in our corporate gatherings should build up the Lord’s people through the ministry of the Word. When we teach, admonish, and sing to one another, the Word of Christ dwells in us more richly.

These three elements, when practiced in the wisdom of Christ (Col 2:3), serve a specific purpose: mutual edification.

Singing in worship is not a form of entertainment; it is a powerful tool for building one another up in Christlikeness.”

—H. B. Charles, Jr.



The title page of the first Lutheran hymnal, published in 1524.

## THE CHRISTIAN'S STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

- ✓ You must care about doctrine—particularly about the doctrine of Christ and our union with Him. Yearn for it, because it is essential for your good (1 Peter 2:2).
- ✓ Allow others to teach you. Seek it out! We are always in need of instruction, no matter our level of maturity (Proverbs 18:15). That you “know it already” is an illusion.
- ✓ Stop resisting correction. It is a mark of naivete and stubbornness to think that you are impeccable (Proverbs 12:1). Listen to the sum of the admonishment, even if the manner is not perfect. Be thankful that someone was bold enough to warn you (Proverbs 27:6).

- ✓ **Recognize that giving instruction and correction is a responsibility not only for elders, but for every church member. Take courage and utilize your conversations for this “one-another” ministry.**
- ✓ **Guard your motives. It is not about your personal agenda or promotion, but about the propagation of the word of Christ. Before you speak, ask yourself, “Whose glory is at stake?”**
- ✓ **Guard your manners. It is not just about speaking truth but doing so “with all wisdom.” Work hard on appropriate timing and appropriate wording (Proverbs 25:11).**

- ✓ Increase your appreciation for the role that singing is to play in the Christian life. It is not only for the musically-talented; it is integral for all believers.
- ✓ Recognize that the singing of the church is categorically different than the singing of the world. We sing not to entertain, but to edify one another and exalt God.
- ✓ Look for the songs that are doctrinally rich—that teach you something lofty about God, the cross of Christ, the grace of the gospel, and the hope of glory.

## IV. The Christian's Vertical Virtue (3:17)

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“Whatever you do in word or deed, *do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*”

- Paul ends the entire “put-on” section (vv. 12–17) with a summary command that provides ultimate guidance for the Christian life.
- Paul repeatedly referred to “Christ” in the preceding verses, but the last time he mentioned “Jesus” was in 2:6–7, in another summary command.
- **Colossians 2:6-7** – “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and* overflowing with gratitude.”

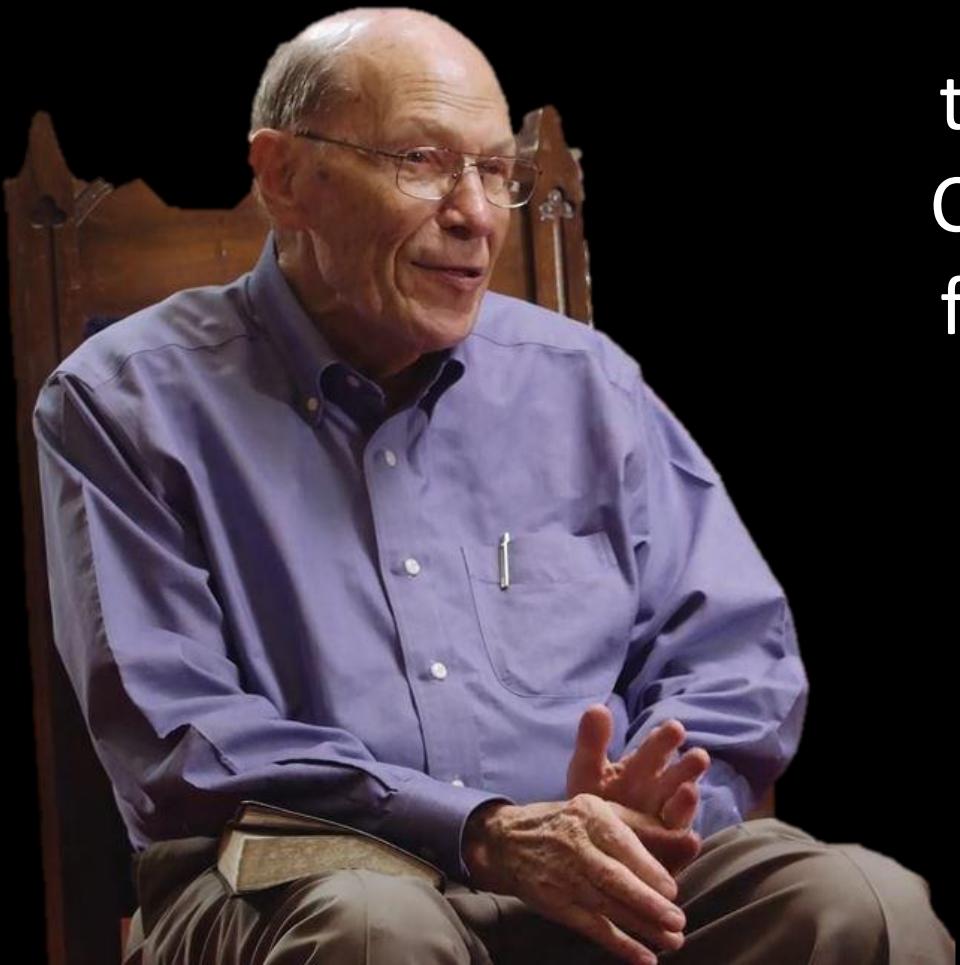
**“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (3:17).**

- **“Whatever you do”** – a statement that is both intensive and comprehensive: “Every last thing that you do, from A to Z.”
- **“In word or deed”** – describes “the totality of one’s interaction with the world.”
- **“[Do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus”** – “under the authority of”; Paul employs a common phrase from the OT, “in the name of the LORD,” in which “the LORD” referred to *Yahweh* (בָּשָׂם יְהֹוָה).
- **“Lord Jesus”** – emphasizes Jesus’ supreme authority; this high Christology certainly fits the emphasis of Colossians.

“This is the highest Christian morality, a vivid and practical recognition of Christ in everything said and done. Not simply in religious service, but in the business of daily life; not merely in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, but in the language of friendship and of bargain, of the forum and the fireside; not simply in deeds which, in their very aspect, are a Christian compliance . . . but in every act, in solitude and society, in daily toil, in the occupations of trade, or negotiations of commerce. This is a high test. It is comparatively easy to engage in religious discourse, but far more difficult to discourse on everything in a religious spirit; comparatively easy to do a professedly Christian act, but far more difficult to do every act in a Christian spirit. In the one case the mind sets a watch upon itself, and speaks and acts under the immediate consciousness of its theme and purpose, but in the other, the heart is so influenced by religious feeling, that without an effort it acknowledges the name of Christ.” —John Eadie, *Colossians*, 249

“Whatever you do in word or deed, *do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father*” (3:17).

- **“Giving thanks”** – another one of Paul’s frequent references to *thanksgiving* in Colossians (see 1:3; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2).
- **“Through Him”** – through Christ, the One whose authority we recognize as binding over every aspect of life; He is the Mediator who alone has opened the way to God; our *thanksgiving* isn’t *thanksgiving* unless offered through Him.
- **“To God the Father”** – the One to whom all the glory ultimately goes (1:3; 3:16); “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

A photograph of an elderly man with glasses and a purple shirt, sitting in a chair and gesturing with his hands.

“Because you and I are in Christ Jesus,  
His glory and our good are linked  
together. Because we are united with  
Christ, whatever is for His glory is also  
for our good. And whatever is for our  
good is for His glory.”

—Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*, 144

## THE CHRISTIAN'S STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

- ✓ Avoid seeking simple “black and white” rules for determining your steps (“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”—the legalists mentioned in Col 2:21).
- ✓ Instead of superficial, performance-based legalism, motivate your life by the lordship of Christ, acknowledging His supreme authority and striving to please Him above all.
- ✓ Apply the lordship of Jesus Christ not only in the abstract things of life, but in the practical, routine things of life; make your confession that “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9) your lifestyle.

- ✓ Refuse to compartmentalize your life between “the spiritual” (church, Sunday) and “the secular” (work, Monday through Saturday); nothing is to remain independent from His authority.
- ✓ In moments of decision, ask what option will allow you to honor most consistently the character and will of Jesus.
- ✓ Intentionally incorporate an ever-increasing attitude of gratitude; Jesus’ sovereignty over your life, and your submission to His lordship, is a *good thing* that will result in your *best life* in the life to come.