Colossians 3:1-17

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Preacher: Jonny Gibson

[0:00] Amen. We continue our series this morning on Glorious Dust, the Christian doctrine of man.!

On Friday night we looked at man as ruler. Yesterday morning we looked at man as ruined.! And then we looked at the proper man, Jesus Christ.
And this morning we're going to look at man as renewed and this evening man as resurrected.
Please have your Bibles open to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 1 to 17.
Eighteen years ago I went to live in South Africa and worked for a Christian organization. And at that time there were a number of dynamic leaders in that organization.
And one of the things that caught their vision was a book by Dr. Steve Covey, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Hands up if you are familiar with that book.
[1:02] A few people. Okay, it's a book that was a bestseller back in the 1990s. And in the book this guy called Steve Covey tries to answer the age old question that many people and cultures have asked throughout the centuries.

How then should we live? Covey worked with two paradigms. He had a paradigm of independence and interdependence.
The paradigm of independence was all about setting goals for the self. The paradigm of interdependence was the self working with others.
And Covey within those two paradigms came up with seven principles. Seven habits of highly effective people. Number one, be proactive.
Two, begin with the end in mind. Three, put first things first. Four, think, win, win. Five, seek first to understand, then to be understood.
[2:06] Six, synergize. Seven, sharpen the saw. Which was his way of saying, go back over all those other principles and see how you're performing in them on a regular basis.

Steve Covey came out at that time to South Africa. He did various presentations and workshops.
And some of these leaders in this Christian organization that I was in went along to hear him.
And they decided that it would be a good thing to try to assimilate Steve Covey's principles into our Christian lives. And so they took the principles of Covey and they Christianized them.
Be proactive. Take control of the things in your life that God has given into your control. Begin with the end in mind. Think about what kind of a Christian and what acts of Christian service you would like to be remembered for at your funeral.
So, Covey in his workshop had this very dynamic example where he would get people to come up and walk up to the front to look into a coffin. He brought a coffin into his workshop.
[3:15] And as they looked into the coffin, there was a mirror in the coffin. And so they're just looking back at themselves. And he said, what do you want someone to say about you at your funeral?

Begin with the end in mind. Put first things first. That's easy to Christianize. Seek first the kingdom of God.
And on it went. And at the time, I remember as a young Christian feeling slightly uncomfortable with this. But not knowing exactly why. But over the years, I've come to see what was wrong with it.
The problem was that Jesus Christ was not Lord of the Christian's everyday life. Steve Covey was.
No matter how much you Christianize the principles of Covey, at the end of the day, he was setting the agenda for how you lived your life.
The paradigm and the principles were his. Jesus was just borrowing them. The integration created a compartmentalized Christ. Jesus was Lord of your soul.

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[4:24] Covey was Lord of your functioning. Jesus was Lord of your spirit. Covey was Lord of your day-to-day living. Even if Jesus provided the principles, Covey was controlling the paradigm.

The problem with these leaders in South Africa was that they had too small a view of Christ. And too small a view of Christ always leads to compromised Christian living.
Too small a view of Christ always leads to compromised Christian living. And in this letter to the Colossians, before Paul gets to the practicalities of how we are to live in chapter 3, he first gives us a big view of Christ.
Look back with me at chapter 1, verse 15 to 20. Just glance down as I work through these points here. Verse 15.
Christ is the firstborn over all creation. He is the cosmic Christ, not a compartmentalized Christ. Verse 16. In him all things were created.
[5:34] Not just the physical, tangible things, but invisible things like governments and marriage and ethics. Verse 17. In him all those things hold together.

Verse 18. He's the head of the body, his church, the beginning, and the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything, everything, he might have supremacy.
Verse 19. All God's fullness dwells in him. Verse 20. All things have been reconciled to him. And then look at chapter 2, verse 2 and 3.
Paul prays 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.
What treasures of wisdom and knowledge? How to get saved? How to get saved? Wisdom and knowledge? Or all wisdom and knowledge?
[6:43] Well, if Jesus is the firstborn over all creation, if all things were created through him, then doesn't all wisdom and knowledge reside in Christ?

So you get the picture. Christ is the cosmic Christ, not the compartmentalized Christ. He's the Christ of creation, not just the Christ of Christians.
He's the Christ of every corner of this globe, not just the Christ of you in your small corner and me in mine. Jesus is Lord, and he is Lord of all, which means that he is Lord of all aspects of the way we live our lives as human beings on this earth.
Look at how Paul exhorts us when it comes to our Christian lives in chapter 2, verse 6 to 8. How did you receive him?
You received him as Lord. So walk with him as Lord. Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith just as you were taught, abiding in thankfulness.
[7:55] See to it that no one teach you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Paul does not want us to live in ways that integrate secular thinking with a Christian worldview. He didn't want the Colossians to integrate the best of Greco-Roman ethics and the Christian faith.
He said Jesus Christ is enough. He is Lord of all. You see that in verse 9 as well. For in him the fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.
Do you see that? In Christ you have been brought to fullness as a human being. Jesus Christ is enough. The problem with the leaders in South Africa was that they were looking for wisdom for how to live outside of Christ, when all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge for living lay in Christ.
Well, if the approach of those leaders in South Africa was wrong, how then should we live? Well, Paul gives us four simple exhortations of how we are to live our lives in chapter 3.
[9:27] And with each of these exhortations, he gives us a basis, a reason for why we are to live this way. Number one, set your hearts on things above.

Set your hearts on things above. Verses 1 and 2. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. I'm sure you've all heard the saying, that person is so heavenly minded, they are of no earthly use.
Is that a familiar saying? Well, that is not what Paul means here. Paul doesn't have a false dichotomy between physical and spiritual. As if here he is saying, fix your minds on the spiritual things of life, not on the physical things.

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No, the apostle Paul is the great theologian of the physical realm. He says, whether you eat or drink, two physical, mundane realities, you are to do them to the glory of God.
[10:37] So Paul is not against the physical realm. In chapter 2, verse 20, he speaks against those who disparage earthly foods. No, Paul wants us to be so heavenly minded that we are of great earthly use.

So if he doesn't have a dichotomy going on here between the physical and the spiritual, between heaven and earth, what does he mean? By setting your mind on things above.
Well, Paul is using those two spatial areas of heaven and earth as symbols of the old and new orders, the old and new ages.
Things above, the new realm, where Christ is seated, and things below are the old realm, Satan's rule.
Hence the reference in verse 1 to where Christ is seated. Set your mind on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father. And when Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father, what did he do?
[11:44] He inaugurated a new world order. And Paul is saying, set your mind on that new world order, not on the world order of Satan and that old life that you once lived.

We are to set our hearts to the tune of God's rule, Christ's rule, over all things. So that's the first exhortation. Set your mind on things above, on this new world order.
And then Paul gives us a reason. Because you have experienced a realm change through union with Christ. Because you have experienced a realm change through union with Christ.
Verses 3 and 4. 4, note the word 4, because you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
Do you see the realm change there? If we died, that means that we had a first life that is now past. And if our life is now hidden with Christ in God, that means we have a second life that is now present.
[12:59] In other words, we died and rose again. We have experienced, through union with Christ, a realm change. We died with Christ and we have been raised with Christ.

My boys and girls, in Sunday Street this morning, you heard about the two great giants. And those two great giants have people hanging from their belts.
And I want you to keep that picture in mind because Jesus was like, Jesus is one of those giants. And we were hooked onto his belt so that when Jesus fell into death, we fell with him.
And when Jesus rose up from death, we rose with him because we were attached to his belt. And that is what Paul is saying here.
We have experienced a realm change. And because we have experienced a realm change, we are to live like it. Now that realm change doesn't change us as a human being.
[14:07] You don't walk around with a glow on your face or with a halo over your head. You don't have a tattoo on your forehead that says realm change. When you go to fly somewhere in Europe and you hand your passport over, it doesn't say British citizen and a Christian citizen.

There's nothing to indicate as you walk down the street that you are any different to Tommy or Jenny in that street. And yet Paul says you have experienced a realm change.
It's why in verse 4 he says that your life is hidden. In verse 3, your life is hidden with Christ in God. It is a real change.
It is a realm change. But it is invisible to people in this world. But Paul's point is, though it is invisible, it is a real change.
And you are to set your hearts on things above because you have experienced that realm change. So that's Paul's first point.
[15:16] Since you have experienced a realm change through union with Christ, set your hearts on things above. And that basis, that realm change, becomes the basis for the next exhortation.

Number two. Because you have experienced a realm change through union with Christ, put to death your old vices. Verses 5 to 7.
Because you have experienced a realm change through union with Christ, put to death your old vices. Notice the therefore at the beginning of verse 5.
Put to death therefore. In other words, since you died with Christ, so put to death. Do you see how the experience fits with what we are to do?

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We died with Christ, so we are to put to death. I remember reading last year on the internet, the BBC reported on a man who lives his whole life in England as if he's in the 1940s.
[16:20] 1940s. The furniture in his house is from the 1940s. He drives a car from the 1940s. He dresses like he belongs in the 1940s.

He styles his hair like he's from the 1940s. He eats food from the 1940s. All his cereal boxes are from the 1940s.
Now why is that weird? Well, for some of you maybe it's not. Why is it weird?
Because we live in 2010s. Don't we? We live in 2015. It's not normal. Your furniture should look a bit more like it belongs in this era. Your car, your clothes, your hairstyle, your food.
You live like you belong in the era in which you live. And what Paul is saying is don't live like you belong in that old era of the 1940s.
[17:18] Your old vices belong in the 1940s. You have experienced a realm change into 2015. So live like it.

Put to death those old vices that belong to that old era. And Paul gives us a list of them there in verse 5.
They are to do with sex and greed. Sexual immorality, any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse, impurity, any immoral sexual conduct with your boyfriend or your girlfriend, lust, shameful passion that leads to sexual excesses, porn addictions, lusting after men and women, evil desires, sins of our fleshly nature, greed, which is covetousness, this insatiable desire to always have the next thing, the next iPhone, the next piece of music on iTunes.
And in verse 6, Paul gives us another reason why we are to put it to death. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. And then he reminds us again of the realm change.
In these you too once walked when you were living in them, those things belong in the 1940s. You once lived then, but you do no longer.
[18:43] So put off these things. So that is Paul's second exhortation. Because you have experienced a realm change through union with Christ, put to death your old vices.

Third, put off your old vices because you have experienced a real change through recreation by God.
Put off your old vices because you have experienced a real change through recreation by God. Verses 8 to 11. But now you must put them all away.
Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.
Here there is not Greek and Jew circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.
[19:52] If killing was the image Paul used in verse 5 because we had experienced the realm change of dying and rising, now he changes the metaphor.

It's no longer killing, but now it's one of dressing. He's basically saying, take off that old clothes, those old clothes of anger, of sexual lust, all of those things.
Take them off. They belong to that old era. The image fits the description of what we have experienced.
If you've experienced a change, well, then you put on new clothes. I saw some of you yesterday playing volleyball. You're running around and working up a sweat.
I mean, what did you do when you got home? Well, hopefully you had a shower or maybe this morning you had a shower. What do you do after you've been running around and getting all sweaty?
[20:51] What do you do? Do you put your old clothes back on? At this point some of the young men are going. You put new clothes on. Why? Because you've experienced a new change.

You've been recreated in the shower. You've experienced a washing. And so you now dress like it. And that is what Paul is saying here.
Put off those things. Go and have a shower. Get rid of them. This time they're to do with the heart and the mouth. Anger and rage. Temper.
Malice. Slander. Filthy language. This putting off and putting on is another way of speaking about repentance.

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When we become Christians we put off the old self and we put on the new self. The danger with it is that you may think well we're the ones who convert ourselves.
[21:51] If we're the ones we are to put off the old vices and to put on as we'll see in verse 12 new virtues then that sounds a bit like we're the ones who convert ourselves.

But look at verse 10. And put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.
I want you to notice there being renewed. it's in the passive tense which means that the self is not the one that is renewing itself. And Paul tells us who it is that's renewing the self.
At the very end of verse 10 it's creator. God is the one who renews ourselves. We cannot renew ourselves.
It's that beautiful image in the voyage of the dawn trader C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia where Eustace is dressed in a dragon outfit and he's trying to unzip his dragon clothes and each time he unzips his dragon clothes underneath there's another dragon skin and he keeps unzipping these dragon skins and stepping out of them and he realizes there's another one underneath until Aslan says to him you will have to let me undress you.
[23:15] And when Aslan sticks his claw in he says he stuck his claw right into my heart and took off my dragon skin.

You see at the heart of the Christian faith is the doctrine of conversion of regeneration we need Christ like Aslan to stick his hand into our hearts and to completely undress us and to redress us with a new self.
And Paul's point is once you have experienced that real change by recreation from God once you have experienced it.
Live like it. Live like it. The whole of Christian ethics can be reduced to this be who you are. Be who you are.
Are you a new creature in Christ? Have you been renewed in your inner self? Then be who you are. Act like who you are. And that is what Paul is exhorting us to do.
[24:27] Put off the old vices because you have experienced that real change by recreation from God. Now Paul doesn't move straight to verse 12 about what we are to put on having put off these old vices.

Verse 11 acts a bit like a bridge it's a bit like the hinge on a swinging door where you move from one room into another and verse 11 is a bit like that swinging door.
It refers to our new selves but now Paul speaks about our new self in the context of the church. Here in the new self that has been created by God there is no Greek and Jew circumcised and uncircumcised barbarian scythian slave free but Christ is all and is in all.
Paul's point here is that Christ is preeminent in all things and he is present in all Christians and that is the basis for his next exhortation.
Do you notice the therefore or the then at the beginning of verse 12 put on then precisely because Christ is preeminent in all things and present in all Christians put on therefore as God's chosen ones holy and beloved compassion compassion kindness humility meekness and patience and verse 14 and above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony this is Paul's fourth exhortation because Christ is preeminent in all things and is present in all Christians put on Christ's graces put on Christ's graces it's a bit like I said yesterday you played sport and you got a bit sweaty you have a shower what do you put on after you have a shower new clothes you don't put your old clothes back on defeats the point of having a shower and Paul is saying since Christ is preeminent in all things and present in all
[26:46] Christians when you've experienced that realm change that real change dress like it put on new clothes and each of these virtues reflect Christ and his attitude compassion is the word used for Jesus throughout the gospels kindness speaks of God's gracious attitude to us as sinners in Christ humility Philippians 2 Christ being the perfect example of humility gentleness Jesus was known for being meek and mild patient God is long suffering with us not wanting anyone to perish so each of these virtues are Christ's graces they are the way that Jesus Christ himself would act Paul gets practical in verse 13 bearing with one another and if one has a complaint another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you remember on a cross when Jesus was dying forgive them for they know not what they do and then verse 14 he climaxes the grace with love above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony he's not just talking to the self as an individual he's not speaking to the self in the context of the church do you see that

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which binds everything together in perfect harmony verse 15 and let the peace of

Christ rule in your hearts to which you indeed were called in one body do you see that you're never addressed as an individual but only ever as an individual who is a member of Christ's church John Calvin put it well in the context of church life he said let love be your guide let love be your guide as we put on Christ's graces as we relate to each other we are to let love be our guide in all our relationships Paul goes on to climax in verse 16 and 17 that everything we do is to be done for Christ the word of Christ is to dwell in us richly in verse 17 whatever you do in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ giving thanks to God the Father through him note the preeminence and presence of Christ again everything is to be done for Christ why because he is preeminent in all things and we are to do it through
Christ because he is present in all Christians so that's Paul's final exhortation because Christ is preeminent in all things and present in all Christians put on Christ's graces one of the things that they teach you as a young preacher at Cornhill or at Bible College is that when you read a Bible passage you should try and summarize that Bible passage in one sentence so some of the young men or girls here have done Cornhill or learnt how to lead a Bible study you would have remembered that you have to try and put everything into one sentence and that's a really helpful thing to do but another helpful concept is to think not only what is the overarching theme or point of this passage but what is the golden thread that ties it all together what is the theological backbone on which the flesh of this passage takes place what do you think is that golden thread in this passage well it's union with
Christ isn't it we died with Christ we were raised with Christ our lives are hidden with Christ we will appear with Christ verse 11 Christ is in all of us do you see there's the paradigm for Christian living union with Jesus Christ and when you keep that paradigm in your mind that we died with Christ we are raised with Christ Christ is present in all of us then it comes with force then these imperatives that Paul gives us they come with force and impact into our lives what I want to do in our closing moments is just press home some of those exhortations sexual immorality we are to put it off we are to kill it why because you are united to Jesus Christ so think about it when you are tempted to commit some kind of sexual immorality staying up late with your fiance or your boyfriend or your girlfriend remember this
Christ is in that bedroom he is in that car he is in the back row of the cinema because Christ is in you your life is hidden with Christ in God so live out your sexuality in a way that honors him not shames him anger the next time you are in a heated exchange with your spouse or a Christian friend remember who it is you're speaking to you're speaking to someone who is united to Jesus Christ you're speaking to someone whose life is hidden with Christ you are talking to Christ and wouldn't that change the way we speak to each other I saw a plaque in a Christian home once that said Christ is the head of this home the unseen guest at every meal the silent listener to every conversation the way we relate to each other in our marriages in our families with our parents let us remember that
[33:05] Christ is in that person who we're talking to malice and slander the next time you're having a coffee with someone and you want to start slagging off another Christian you are starting to slag off Christ because he is in that person that person is united to your savior so to slag them off is to slag Christ off think about the graces compassion whenever a friend confides in you that they're struggling in some way and you listen indifferently or without compassion then you lack compassion to someone who is in Christ Christ is in that person so you are to clothe yourself with compassion forgiveness when you refuse to forgive that brother or sister then you're refusing to follow the way of Christ Christ is in them Christ is in you and yet you're refusing to forgive them when the

Christ who is in you said father forgive them for they know not what they do humility instead of living for self humility helps us to live for others but if you're not willing to sacrifice for others who are united to Christ you are not willing to sacrifice for Christ for Christ is in that person do you see how union with Christ is the paradigm in which Christian ethics!
it is the dynamic power and motivation to kill our old vices and to put on Christ's graces see who needs Steve Covey and his paradigm and principles when you realize that you are united to Jesus Christ and you have experienced a real change by recreation from God so then brothers and sisters just as we receive Christ Jesus as Lord let us continue to live in him and as we do that then I think the impact in our world can be really significant at Christmas time one of the things that I often

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receive as a present are new clothes mainly because my wife thinks I do live in the 1940s so every Christmas I get some new clothes and you know what it's like in the UK you get new clothes you go round to the in house and someone says oh that's a nice shirt where'd you get it and you say oh well
Jackie bought me it where'd she buy it oh she got it from white stuff and so you end up talking about the shop and the sales that are on and where you can get good clothes from well wouldn't it be great if when the world looked in on the church they said to us you guys dress different your conduct your mood your manner your speech it is full of compassion kindness humility gentleness patience forgiving love where do you get your clothes from let us pray

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