

Colossians 3:1-8

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 June 2015

Preacher: Stuart Cashman

[0 : 00] Well, how is it possible for people to change? How is it possible for people to change? How is it possible for someone who is always angry to become someone who is patient and kind? How is it possible for somebody who has always been selfish to become generous?

How is it possible to break old habits, perhaps handed down in generations of families? How is it possible to break addictions? Or is it not possible? Are we entirely dominated by our genes? Do we just dance to the tune of our DNA, as Richard Dawkins was put it?

Is all we are already written down in our genetic code? Can we not break free from it? Well, of course, different people have different ideas about how we change. So in the secular world, there are six-step programs and ten-step programs for people who don't believe in a God, how they can advance and develop and change and control themselves. Or some people would say you need to go to a counsellor, a psychotherapist. They'll teach you deep insights about yourself, which can change you and help you. Of course, religions also have ideas about how you can change. So through doing certain things, through meditation, through keeping certain laws, you can become changed, become a new person. Or many people today will look for some kind of spiritual experience, some kind of cathartic moment which will set their life on a new course.

And if we'd been around in this town of Colossae 2,000 years ago, people would say the same sort of things. Essentially, the way to change is to keep some strict rules, a strict regime.

That's the sort of thing the Stoic philosophers were teaching. Get your body under control. That will free you to be fulfilled. Others said, no, you have to have a religious experience. Come this way.

Enter into our secrets. And that will change you.

[1 : 53] And Paul has just been talking about those things at the end of chapter 2. Really, verses 16 to 23. But you can see his final conclusion of what rules and self-made religion do.

If you look at verse 23 of the previous chapter, just the verse before what we read. These, these rules, have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body.

But they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. Do you hear what he's saying? You have all these strict rules, all these religious practices. They might look good. They might seem wise.

But they actually have no value at all in changing you. In stopping you just indulging your old desires, your sinful ways. It might end up manifesting itself as pride instead of something else. But it doesn't really change you. So can we change? Is there any hope to be different? Is there any hope for being rewired on the inside and living different lives? Well, Paul says yes.

[2 : 55] And it comes not because of what we do, but because of what God has done in Christ. Paul says God has given you new life in Christ. If you've trusted in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died for you and rose to new life, then you have new life too.

And that's where change comes. And that's what he's telling us about here in chapter 3. And then on into chapter 4 as well. He spells out how that works out in our lives. But two things to notice right away about this new life is that first we're under new management.

And secondly, we enjoy a new empowerment. Just look at verse 1 for a moment. If you've been raised with Christ, seek the things above where Christ is. If you've been raised.

He's already told us that we were all human beings. We were once dead. Spiritually dead. Not physically dead. Even as we live and breathe, we're actually dead. He said that back in chapter 2 verse 13.

Just across the page on the other column. On the left hand page. He says you were dead in your trespasses. You were dead in your sins and the wrong things you did. We were all dead.

[4 : 00] But God has made us alive with Christ. And part of that is we're under new management. Turn back over the page again. That's chapter 1 verse 13. Paul reminds us what God has done for us in Christ.

Chapter 1 verse 13. He says he has delivered us from the domain of darkness. And transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son. Once we were in the domain of darkness.

Our lives were ruled and dominated. By the world's ways. By evil. By sin that defined us. We were all under Satan's power. But God has rescued us from that.

We're no longer slaves over there. We're under new management. We've been brought into the kingdom of his beloved son. We're now under the good rule of the Lord Jesus. In chapter 3 verse 1 Paul says.

Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. He's the one who rules the universe. He's the one in control of everything. It's no longer Satan who ruled the domain of darkness. But now the beloved son of the Lord Jesus who is king of everything.

[5 : 02] So we're under new management. And not only are we under new management. We have a new empowerment. You have been raised with Christ Paul says. You now have Christ's life living through you.

Living in you. That's where your life comes from. That's where your power to change comes from. It's from Christ. So you're under new management. You enjoy a new empowerment.

So now. God has given us a new life in Christ. So Christians must live that life by faith now. Okay. So what does that mean? How does it mean? What does it mean? What does it look like?

To live by faith in Christ now. Living out that new life we've got. Well Paul gives us four commands in these verses. That are all a way of exercising our faith in Christ. Putting that in action. So first of all.

First of all is verse 1. Seek the things that are above. In contrast to submitting to earthly rules and religious rules. That Paul was talking about back in verse 20 of the previous chapter.

[5 : 59] He says instead of submitting to those. Seek Christ. Indeed keep seeking Christ. Verse 1. If you've been raised with Christ. Since you've been raised with Christ. Seek the things that are above.

Where Christ is seated. At the right hand of God. So we already have a relationship with Christ. If we've trusted in him.

We've been raised with him. Our life is bundled up in Christ if you like. We are with him. There is a relationship there. So what we're to do though is to keep seeking him. Keep seeking his character. Seeking Christ's ways. Where Christ is. Is a place dominated. By his character. His rule. His ways. So seeking the things above. Means keep seeking Christ's ways.

Keep seeking his character. Now think about it for a moment. When a man falls in love with a woman. What is on his mind? What is gripping his heart? It's how he can please her.

[6 : 56] It's who she is. How he can know her better. It's what things does she like. What things will captivate her. How can he spend time with her? That's what Paul is saying here.

As a young man. Seeks. With his head and his heart. To know that woman. I don't understand her. So you've been raised with Christ. He is your life. Seek Christ.

Seek the things above. Seek his ways. And it means don't give up. What happens when you're seeking something? What kind of things do people seek? In the singles columns.

You get women seeking men. Or men seeking women. For a long lasting relationship. Some people seek the ideal job. Some people seek pleasure on holiday. And it involves the heart and the head. Doesn't it? Even when I lose my wallet. When I'm seeking my wallet. Everything else flies out the window. I'm just looking for this thing I've lost. Which I need. So Paul says. Keep seeking the things of Christ.

[7 : 53] Keep seeking who he is. Head and heart. See so often we seek lesser things. Don't we? We seek a new job. We seek a bit of peace and quiet.

We seek a relationship. Do we seek to know Christ? Seek to have our heads and our hearts. Plugged into him in the same way. Here's how we begin.

To live the new life. It's by keep seeking Christ. Moment by moment. Setting out desires on him. So that's the first command. The second command is in verse 2. Set your minds on things that are above.

Not on things that are on earth. Now. We need to be clear what Paul's talking about there. Don't we? Otherwise we'll get very confused. What is the contrast between the things that are above. And the things that are on earth?

I guess our general. If we go out into the streets and ask people. They say well things on earth are real things. And things up in. Things up above. Well that's just imagination. Well that's just kind of values and feelings.

[8 : 54] It's not real facts. Earth is to do with facts. All that's to do with feelings and beliefs. Well that's not the contrast Paul is making. The contrast is not between the spiritual. And the material.

Solid stuff. Rather the contrast. And nor is it between inward feelings and outward facts. The contrast really is between the new things above.

And the old things of earth. Or the perfect and the beautiful. The things that are broken and marred. The things that are permanent are the things above.

The things that are passing are the things below. No. So Paul says. Keep thinking about things above. Keep your minds set on things that are above.

He's saying. Keep your minds on what is eternal. Not what is temporary. Keep your minds on what is perfect. Not what is broken. In this world. A world marred by human rebellion against God.

[9 : 54] Marred by sin and sickness. And ill health. Keep your minds on your new home. The place God has for you. Not on where you currently are. How does that help us?

Well in 500 years from time. What will it matter about how much. How important will it be how much money you made in this life? How important will it be how many children you had?

How important will it be where you went on holiday? Those things don't define us. Those things don't matter. What makes a difference?

Is our new hope. The things that are above. The perfect world. Imagine it like this. Well. Let me tell you a story. A few years ago we lived in America. And we moved back to this country.

And those last few months in America. Where was my mind? It wasn't in. Trying to understand American football better. Because that was passing. I was going to come back here. It wasn't in.

[10 : 52] Trying to invest money in the US. Partly I was a student. So I didn't have any. It was about. Do I have a job to come back to? What would that job look like? Everything was about coming home.

We didn't buy that many things. We knew anything we bought. We'd either have to ditch. Or pay to get shipped back to this country. So our minds. Our minds were set on coming home.

And what it would be to live back here. That's what Paul is telling us. Keep thinking about Christ's ways. Keep thinking about the perfect place. The new world.

The new home. That is yours one day. Keep thinking. Keep your thoughts up there. Let that shape your ambitions. And your desires. And your focus. And ultimately your character.

Now why does he say that? What's the basis for saying this? Does he want us all to be so heavenly minded. We're of no earthly use. As someone once said. No. Because this is reality.

[11 : 47] Look at verse 3. Here's the reason why he says this. For 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. So this is the reality of your life. Your life is all wrapped up in the Lord Jesus Christ. People will say about friends.

Football is his life. He just goes to a football match all the time. Or his work is his life. Everything else is. He takes a back seat. Compared to working hard. And earning money. And pushing on.

Paul says no.

When we use it. When we use that term like that. We mean people's goal. People's obsession. Is what they're doing here. Paul says no. Your life. Is not wrapped up in these old things. Your life. Is in Jesus Christ.

That's hidden at the moment. No one can see it. No one can see who you truly are. No one can see the goal of your life. The Lord Jesus. No one can see the source of your life. The risen Lord Jesus.

[12 : 43] But that's where your life is. And when he comes back. What will happen? Verse 4. When Christ who is your life appears. You also will appear with him.

In glory. You'll appear with him. In perfection. Then. Everyone will see what your life really is.

Everyone will see who Jesus is. And who you are. Because of your faith in him.

When he comes back. And makes everything new. When his old world has passed away completely. When there is no more death. Or mourning. Or crying. Or pain. And we get to live in a

new. A physical.

New world. With the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's your future. That's your destiny. That's your goal. That's your life. So keep your mind.

Thinking about Christ's ways. See before we were united to Christ. We were spiritually dead. We couldn't think about these things. We didn't have any access.

[13:38] Any hope. Of a life like this. We were dead. But now we have the life of Jesus in us. So this is possible. We have batteries at home. The torch is at home. But the batteries in them are dead.

That doesn't mean he's going to get some more batteries. I always forget. Those torches are useless. There's no light in them at all. Because there's no power. That's how every human being naturally is. But those who have been brought to life in Christ.

Have his life. Therefore have the power. Albeit hidden now. So Paul says, by faith embrace that. Keep thinking about Christ and his ways.

He will shape your ambitions, your attitudes and your general direction. As slowly as that happens, we will become what God has rescued us to be. Instead of the slaves we once were.

Instead of the dead beings we once were. We will become the reflections of Christ. That God has saved us to be. So since God has given us new life.

[14:38] We're to keep seeking Christ. Our hearts as well as our heads. We're to keep thinking about Christ's ways. But there's also some old stuff that needs to be got rid of. That's what Paul comes on to.

In verses 5 to 8. So just because a Christian has a new life. Just because we have life in Christ now. Doesn't mean we're perfect now, does it?

Anyone who's trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ knows that our old habits, our old ways die hard. We still struggle with doubt. With impatience. With anger. With lust. Whatever it is. We're still a seed to all those kind of sins within us.

We're not made new yet. And just as in my garden every weekend I get a chance I need to go out and dig up some weeds and kill off all the stuff that's bad. So we need to do that in our own lives, Paul says.

So he's got two further commands. Having said, seek and think. He now says, first of all, verse 5, put to death. Verse 5. Put to death, therefore, whatever is earthly in you.

[15:37] Whatever belongs to the old life. Whatever belongs to what is passing rather than what is eternal. Whatever belongs to what is broken rather than what is perfect and beautiful that Christ is bringing you in.

Put it to death. What are those things? What's earthly in us? Sexual immorality. Impurity. Passion. Evil desire. And covetousness. Which is idolatry.

See, Paul is saying, be what you are. You have a new life in Christ. Therefore, get rid of this old stuff. Kick it all out. Put it off. Get rid of it. And he spells out what that looks like in one particular sort of concrete example.

Do you notice how he works from a very specific, at the start of verse 5, to the general attitude that lies behind it? So, sexual immorality. That word in the original language is pornea, the word from which we get pornography in English.

In the original, any sexual relationship outside of marriage. Paul says, get rid of that. And what else is there? Well, impurity. Which is the taint in our moral character that comes through any immoral behavior.

[16:42] If you like, it's the step before the actual act. And before that, there's passion. Uncontrolled desire. An evil desire. The wicked twist makes a desire that could be good.

A desire for love and intimacy into something manipulative and bad. The evil desire. And where does all this begin? The start of that list. The end of that list of verse 5.

And covetousness, which is idolatry. See, Paul is tracing back the final act, the sexually immoral act, to where it all begins. With covetousness. With wanting something that isn't ours.

With setting our hopes and affections on something which we shouldn't want. Now, in our culture, covetousness is the fuel that drives the economy, isn't it? Every advert you see on TV, every advert you see on the bus is there to say, that this will make you happy.

You need to buy this product. You need to go to this movie. You need to do this job if you want to be truly happy. So covetousness is worshipping these things that are made. And seeking our

happiness, our security.

[17 : 48] It's something that is not God. It's something that is not actually designed to fulfil us. And make us secure. And make us happy. And that's where sin starts. It starts in turning our back on the living God.

And seeking security and happiness is something else. That then leads on to these other things. The evil desires. The immorality. The purity. In some cases, the sexual morality as well.

We already have Christ, Paul says. Why could you want anything else? But Paul also gives us another reason to put these things to death. Or put these things off. Put these things to death. Look at verse 6. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. So Paul is saying, kill this stuff off before it kills you. Because God's wrath, God's settled personal hostility towards all this evil. His settled hostility towards all that pollutes and corrupts his people and his world is coming. Like the tidal wave coming in off the tsunami. It is coming, Paul says.

[18 : 52] Because of these things. So put them off. Kill the sin before it kills you. Do that by faith. Do that by faith. Embracing who God has made you in Christ. Rules won't change you.

Special insights and knowledge won't change you. Spiritual experiences won't change you. What will change you is what God has done. Making you alive with Christ.

So, put to death this old stuff, he says. Keep seeking Christ. Keep thinking about Christ's ways. Put to death all sin. With Christ's power in you.

And then finally, verses 7 and 8. Put away as well. Put to death, then put away. Put away some behaviours. Verse 7. In these you too once walked.

In all that sexual immorality and covetousness. It was all part of the world around you. You just walked in it, says Paul. That was your way of life. That's what you did when you were living in them. But now. Something has changed.

[19 : 50] You're alive. So, but now. You just put them all away. Anger, wrath, malice, slander. And the same talk from your mouth. Just as when you left school. You put away that school uniform.

You weren't going to put it back on again. Paul says, put it all away. That's old stuff. There is a new way to live now. Once you're like everyone else.

Now you're different. And all these things he lists in verse 8. You see what they do? They all damage relationships, don't they? They all break down community. We all long to live in a place where we belong.

In a place where we feel secure and happy. Where people know us and love us. But the list of vices that Paul mentions in verse 8. All destroy that. They all break down relationships. They break down community. And they're all completely un-Christ-like, aren't they?

There's nothing of the Lord Jesus in them. So one of the things Paul mentions. Anger. Harboring, seething thoughts against others. And that leads to wrath.

[20 : 47] Venting our anger. Making it public. Like water breaking out of a dam. Malice. Intention to harm others because they've hurt us.

Or we feel they've let us down. Slander. Deliberately saying things to ruin another's reputation. A scene talk. Words that just fly out when we can't keep it back.

Because of the anger seething underneath. Well of course these days people hear this and go, Hang on, that's not right. I need to be authentic. I need to be true to myself. If I feel angry I need to say it.

I need to express myself. Paul says, no you don't. You might have done that in the past before you knew Jesus. That was your old way. Now to be authentic is to live the life of Christ.

Because Christ is your life. So put away all these things which are inauthentic. Which are not you. They're not the way you are. If you're a Christian, if you've trusted in Jesus, then Christ is your life.

[21 : 42] He said, by his strength, by his life working in you, put away all these things. See, old ways need to be challenged. Old ways need to be changed.

If we truly belong to Jesus Christ, we can never say, well, I have a bad temper. It's just the way I am. Or I'm just not a patient person. I don't trust other people. You cannot say those things.

Because if we're in Christ, then he is our life. We are becoming like him. So when anger creeps into us, when we're tempted to speak slander, when we're tempted to gossip, when we're tempted to have malicious attitude to other people, what do we do?

We need to recognize those things for what they are. They're intruders. They don't belong in us. You wouldn't let a masked man wander around your home in the middle of the night, would you?

You'd call the police and get rid of him.

And so when anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, when they crop up in our lives, we can't say, well, that's not me. It's there in our house. What we can say is, those things do not belong. And by faith, look to Christ to chase those intruders away.

[22 : 50] See, how is change possible? How is change possible? We cannot change ourselves. Strict rules will not change us.

Religious experience, through meditation, through pilgrimage even, will not change the heart of our being. Rigorous self-discipline will not change our hearts.

Just as sucking tablets will not cure pneumonia. So none of those things will change our hearts.

What will change our hearts? It's what God has done, not what we do.

If we trust in Christ, God makes us alive with him. So we can keep seeking Christ's ways. Keep thinking about Christ's ways. Put to death our old ways.

Put away our old practices. And embrace by faith, the new life God gives us. Let's pray for God's help in that.