

# Colossians 3:9-17

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Preacher: Stuart Cashman

[ 0 : 00 ] A few years ago I was talking to a friend of mine called Sanjay. Sanjay is a nominal Hindu, comes from a Hindu background. And we were talking about religion. It's just his career, just the material.

It's over here in religion and spirituality are about filling a sort of gap somewhere, a compartment in his life. I wonder what do you think about religion and spirituality? Are they things to provide structure and order?

Are they things to fill a gap? Certainly a lot of people would think that, don't they? One of the things the Apostle Paul is trying to make clear to the Colossians here as he writes to them is that religion or spirituality, true spirituality, is not about things we do.

It's not about providing a structure for us. It's not about filling a hole in our lives. It's not really about what we do at all. Rather, it's about what God is doing. What God has done in Christ.

And what God does in the lives of all who trust in Jesus Christ. It's not really about us. It's about him and what he's doing. And that is really where we're getting to as we get down to chapter 3, verse 9.

[ 1 : 28 ] He's reminding them that religion is not about fulfilling your potential or filling a hole.

Rather, it's about what God is doing. And at the heart of what God is doing, is God is making a new society, a new humanity.

He's making people new. You can see that if you look for a second at verse 12. See how Paul describes believers in Jesus Christ. He says, put on men as God's chosen ones.

Holy and beloved. Holy. Separated out from the rest of the world. Beloved by God. You're part of God's new society. You're God's new people. And so living as God's new people means you have to put off the old things, Paul says, and put on the new clothes.

Just like when you change your clothes. You have to take off what you were wearing and put on something new. So that is what Paul is saying here. So there's something to take off. Look at verse 9. See the contrast to verse 9 and verse 12.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices. And put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

[ 2 : 34 ] Now when you hear that word self, it all sounds very individualistic, doesn't it? It sounds all about what I do. But actually God isn't just interested in making a new me or a new you.

He's interested in making a whole new people. So if you look down, I don't know if you often do this, if you look down at footnotes in your Bible, if you're using one of these Bibles here, you'll see in verse 7, verse 9 rather, where it talks about the old self.

There's a little footnote, number 4. If you look down to 4 at the bottom, it says, in the original language, it says man. You've taken off the old man and put on the new man.

Now what does that mean? Well let me try to illustrate it like this. There are many cities in this country that people are saying are divided into two halves. In Glasgow there is a green half and a blue half.

In Liverpool there is a blue half and a red half. In Manchester there is a red half and a sky blue half. What do I mean? As you know about football, we'll know. I mean that Glasgow is kind of divided between the green of Celtic and the blue of Glasgow Rangers.

[ 3 : 39 ] Liverpool divided between the blue of Everton and the red of Liverpool FC. Manchester divided between the red of Man United and the sky blue of Man City. In these cities, roughly speaking, everybody is one half or the other.

But Paul is saying that all of humanity is divided into two teams. And everyone is a member of those two teams. One of those two teams. Either a member of the old man, the old team, or the new man, the new team.

Now who's the old man, who's the new man? Well the new man, the team captain for the new team if you like, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul has told us back in chapter 1 that Christ is the image of the invisible God.

Chapter 1, verse 15. And he's the beginning of a whole new society, a whole new humanity. Verse 18. He's the beginning, he's the head of the church. He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. So the new man is this risen Lord Jesus Christ. He's the team captain, representative of this new society that God is building. So who's the old man?

[ 4 : 45 ] Well Paul doesn't say it explicitly here in Colossians. He does in other letters. But he hits out of here in Colossians. The old man, the representative who leads that old team, is Adam, the first man in the Bible.

Back in the very start of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, Adam was made in the image of God. But Adam fell short of that. He distorted God's image. By trying to get knowledge apart from God. So in Genesis chapter 3 we read about Adam eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He was trying to know things without knowing God. And so he failed as a team leader. And all of us are naturally born in Adam's team, in the old man. We all naturally are not what we were made to do. We're all naturally enemies against God. That's what Paul told the Colossians back in chapter 21, verse 1.

You're alienated from God. That's what we all were. And every human being is on one of these two teams. We're either in the old man or the new man. Let's call the two teams Adam Wanderers.

[ 5 : 53 ] Because Adam wandered from the truth. Or Christ United. Because in Christ, God's people are being united into a new society. Now bearing that in mind, that idea in your mind of these two teams that everybody's on.

Let's look again at what Paul is saying in verses 9 to 11. Get a little snapshot of the characteristics of these two teams. So verse 9. Do not lie to one another. Seeing that you've put off the old man with its practices.

You're not on that old team anymore. You've put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge. After the image of its creator. So that old man, that old team, Adam Wanderers, are characterized by lying to one another.

It's a matter of pride. No one wants to admit to the truth. It's also characterized by faulty knowledge. Having tried to have knowledge apart from God, they ended up not knowing anything properly. If I can use a computer analogy for the moment. It's like a hard drive that's been corrupted. It needs to be wiped clean and all the software reinstalled. So it is with human thinking. We don't know anything right because we have tried to leave God out of the picture.

[ 7 : 00 ] But God's new society is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. And the result of this faulty thinking, the result of this falsely lying, is division in society in the old team.

Societies break down, don't they? People fight each other. People fight their identity in their achievements or in their nationality or in their status. So there's division. But not in God's new humanity.

Not in Christ united. Look at how Paul describes it in verse 11. Here, in Christ, and in Christ, in God's new humanity, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

So they're united. In that verse, Paul is examining all the major divisions in society in his day and in our day. Ethnic divisions, racial divisions, Jew and Gentile.

Religious divisions, circumcised and uncircumcised. Cultural divisions, barbarian and Scythian. For the Greeks, barbarians were the lowest of the low, they didn't speak Greek.

[ 8 : 10 ] And the Scythians were the worst of them all. They were really uncultured. I don't know what the equivalent would be today. Opera lovers who love high culture and look down on people who like boy bands.

I don't know. Something like that. And Paul says, those divisions are gone. Also, socio-economic divisions are gone. There's no longer slave and free. Now, why have all those things been obliterated?

Why are all those divisions knocked down? Paul says, because Christ is all. Nothing else matters. No human status, no human achievement, no ethnic background.

None of those things matter. Because Christ is all-important. Not only that, but Christ is in all. In other words, wherever you look, you see Christ living in his people.

So here we have God's new society. Christ united. Instead of Adam wanderers, he wandered off from the truth and lied and know nothing. Know nothing truly. Here we have this new society.

[ 9 : 11 ] And isn't it an appealing idea that people of all sorts of backgrounds, whatever their gender, whatever their ethnic background, whatever their social standing, whatever their cultural background, isn't it a beautiful thing that all these people could be united in one new society?

In a sense, isn't that one of the great dreams of our world to get people living together in harmony? It's one of the things John Lennon is talking about in his famous song, Imagine, back in the 70s. Imagine there are no countries.

It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill and die for. No religion to. Imagine all the people living life in peace. It's kind of aspiration whenever the Olympic Games comes up, isn't it?

All these nations getting together in harmony. And yet, the reality is we fall far short of that idealism, don't we? But one day there will be a truly multicultural society where there are no divisions.

But that will only happen in Jesus Christ. So that is God's new society that he's building. Away from falsehood. Away from divisions. Away from faulty knowledge.

[ 10 : 19 ] Uniting people together as we are always meant to do, meant to be. And Paul is saying to the Colossians here, look, God has put you in Christ already. When you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour, when you were baptised into him, he says in chapter 2, verse 12, you're included in Christ.

You're included in part of God's new society. So now, be what you are. Live out this new identity. Live out what God is making you to be. Because God is renewing humanity in Christ.

He says he was put off the old way of life and put on Christ's new life with gratitude. Now that's the big message. What does that look like in practice? Well, Paul gives us four little snapshots in verses 12 to 17 of what it looks like to live that new life that God has given to those who trust in Christ.

And if you're, excuse me, extending the footballing analogy to breaking point, it means, first of all, being clothed by Christ's character. Being clothed by Christ's character.

It's putting on new kit, isn't it? Look at verses 12 to 14. Putting off the old ways putting on Christ's character. When a footballer is transferred from one team to another. Or when you get home from work and take off your work clothes to relax.

[ 11 : 34 ] You get changed. You put on the new clothes. And that's what Paul is commanding the Colossians to do here. Verse 12. Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

He knows that description he uses there for God's people. Chosen, holy, beloved. They are all words that are applied in the New Testament to the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Paul said, if you're in Christ, then you have the status of Christ. Separate, holy, that's what holy means. Set apart, beloved, chosen. It applies to you too. You share Christ's status and so you're to show Christ's character.

Because all the qualities he lists here are all things that are used to describe the Lord Jesus Christ or God the Father in the New Testament. So, of course, Christ had a compassionate heart.

He reached out and touched the leper who asked to be healed. God is full of kindness to us. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. Christ was humble, full of humility, leaving the throne of heaven to become a human being, to serve us by dying on a cross for us.

[ 12 : 45 ] There's humility, isn't it? God has forgiven us. Look how Paul goes on, verse 13. Bearing with each other and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you almost also must forgive.

God has forgiven us so much in Christ, hasn't he? If we've trusted in him. How churlish, how rebellious to refuse to forgive others, to refuse to bear with others when they make life a little difficult for us in some ways.

You notice as well, Jesus Christ was the only truly human person who ever lived. As human beings who were made in God's image. But only Jesus has ever lived truly as the image of God, as Paul said back in the beginning of this book, verse 15 of chapter 1.

So, to be in Christ is to be truly human. And that is possible because God is rewriting what is on our hard drives. Verse 10, we are being renewed in knowledge after the image of our Creator.

In other words, God is doing a job in you. He's doing a work in you. He is renewing you, making you what you should be, making you truly human. That is what true spirituality is.

[14:01] And look what else he says. Verse 14, above all these virtues, put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. In the Lord Jesus Christ, we see God's love perfectly displayed, don't we?

It's one who died in our place. When there was nothing lovely about us, he came to rescue us. So Paul says, it's God's people. You want to share that same love to one another. It's love that makes a church whole.

So to live as those who are part of God's new society means to be clothed in God's character. It means to put on a new set of clothes and take off the old ones. Now how is that possible?

It's possible because of what God is doing. It means every time we find ourselves tempted to bear a grudge, every time we find ourselves turning in on ourselves rather than turning out to others in compassion, we can pray for forgiveness and pray for God's help that he would enable us to be the new people he's made us to be.

So put off the old ways, put on the new team string, be clothed in Christ's character. So firstly, be clothed in Christ's character. Secondly, be refereed by Christ's peace.

[15:12] Verse 15. See what he says? Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you are called in one body and be thankful. Now that word ruled there is a fairly unusual word.

It's used in the original language of umpires ruling over a game. Umpires calling out who's winning or not, who's keeping to the rules or not. A similar word, word from the same root, was used back in verse 18 of chapter 2 where Paul says, do not let anyone disqualify you by insisting on religious rules or spiritual experiences.

So what he's saying here is, don't let anyone else judge you, rather let the peace of Christ be the one who referees your conduct and allows the game to flow smoothly amongst God's people. Now what does that mean? Well what it doesn't mean is a kind of subjective internal feeling of peace. Because people use that to justify anything. Oh I have real peace about shouting at her because she deserved it.

Oh I have real peace about getting involved in this relationship with someone I'm not married to. I have real peace about it. It must be alright. No, that is not what Paul is talking about.

[16:23] He's not talking about an individual subjective feeling of peace. That's clear from the context. He's talking about relationships with one another in a community. It's also clear from what he says what this peace is at the end of that verse.

At the end of verse 15 he says you're indeed called in one body. We're called to peace together. Called to be one people together. That is the peace of Christ.

The peace that he has objectively worked for us. Breaking down those divisions that could keep us apart. Divisions of race, of class, of culture, of socio-economic differences.

Christ has broken them all down. That's the peace he brings. So how does his peace referees? Well it means when we're tempted to think to gossip or criticise others other Christians particularly we have to we let the peace of Christ rule.

That peace blows the whistle on that kind of behaviour because that breaks community rather than making it doesn't it? Or if we're tempted to gossip about another Christian at the workplace. We have to stop because the peace of Christ blows the whistle on that.

[17:35] That doesn't make for the unity which Christ has won for us. We must be refereed by what maintains and fosters the peace that Christ has given us in his new society.

And one of the practical ways we can help that is the very last thing Paul says in verse 15 and be thankful. Isn't it the heart's cry of every human being to belong to a community where they're accepted and loved and feel at home?

Paul says that's what you have in Christ. So be thankful for that privilege. Be thankful and let Christ's peace be your referee. So be clothed in Christ's character refereed by Christ's peace. And thirdly verse 16 coached by Christ's word. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom singing psalms hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Let the word of Christ be your coach directing you how to live. The word of Christ is the gospel the message about Jesus who came from heaven to rescue rebels like us and who one day will return.

[18:47] It says that dwell richly among us as that message grips our hearts it transforms our lives it dwells richly in producing fruit in our lives fruit of changed character fruit of a united community

fruit of pleasing God in everything all those things that Paul prayed for back in chapter 1 Now how does God's word dwell richly among us?

What does that mean for us here at Ealing Lunchtime Talks? Well Paul tells us two things it means doesn't he? It means speaking and singing look at verse 16 let the word of Christ dwell in you richly teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom that's exactly what Paul did back in chapter 1 verse 28 he says he warms and teaches everyone it's the same words in the original language so we're to keep speaking the gospel message to each other to encourage us to live that way and to correct each other where we're not living in the line with the truth of the gospel another way we do that is not just by speaking but by singing singing heart psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God Sunday by Sunday in church as we sing partly what we're doing is instructing one another teaching and admonishing each other but notice also the word results in thankfulness with thankfulness in your hearts to God Paul says see an important aspect of living as part of

God's new society is it's the word of Christ that coaches us if we do not have the word God's truth at the heart of what we're doing and saying with one another then we'll just be directed by the world around us won't we or by our own feelings or by the attitudes and assumptions of the world so we need to correct each other to help us bring ourselves in line with the truth of who we are in Christ now that's clearly mainly something for the local church but what does it mean for us here if we actually go to different churches on a Sunday well if you're another Christian in your workplace and many of you do bring them along to the lunchtime talks you can encourage each other talk about it on the way back to your desk what you heard today or on a Monday morning with colleagues who are Christians find out what they heard in their church find out what they heard the previous day encourage one another!

ways so be clothed in Christ's character be refereed by Christ's peace be coached by Christ's word and finally verse 17 living this new life means representing Christ in everything rejoicing in Christ in everything look at verse 17 whatever you do in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him as part of God's new society every area of our lives is an opportunity to thank him and serve him in the Lord Jesus God isn't just interested in the religious stuff not just interested in what you do on a Sunday not just interested in you praying or reading the Bible God is interested in every aspect of life he created all of it there's not a corner of life but there's not an opportunity to serve him so when you come to work as as as as as as as he waits for you to get back at six o'clock or seven o'clock and then be interested again everything can be done in the name of the Lord Jesus as Paul puts it here what does it mean to do something in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ well think for a moment about when we hear on the news a spokesman for Downing Street said what's that person doing they're speaking in the name of Downing Street or in the name of the Prime Minister aren't they there are two aspects to that they're representing the Prime Minister by what they do but they're also under the authority of the Prime Minister so he only do or say the things that he will sign off on the things he's authorised and so it is for Christians to do things in the name of the Lord Jesus these were representing him we'll see in coming weeks how we represent him in the workplace it also means we're under his authority so we can only do things in the name of Jesus that Jesus could sign off on that Jesus could approve so we can't moan and grumble about our boss in the name of Jesus because that's not something he can approve we can't hold a grudge against somebody else because that's not something he can approve but we can do anything with thankfulness because that is something he can approve we can notice again gratitude and thankfulness as to be the key note of God's new society so in verses 12 to 15 they end with and be thankful so thankfulness is expressed in all our relating thankfulness is expressed in verse 16 in all our speaking and singing in verse 17 thankfulness is expressed in all our living we can be thankful because if it was not for God's work for us we'd still be on Adam Wanderers we'd be on the old team lost spiritually dead with no hope but if we trust in Jesus Christ we're part of God's new society with a good hope an eternal future ahead of us and God at work in our lives to renew us and make us truly human which team do you want to be on? which team are you on? for all who will turn to Christ will be part of our new society let me pray for us Thank you.