

# Colossians 3

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Date: 19 August 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] We live in a confusing world, and I'm not talking about things like why people would want to eat asparagus or why little children refuse to take their afternoon naps when they give their left kidneys to have one when they hit their 30s.

I'm talking about more serious things than that. You see, our culture tells you, be yourself, be true to who you really are, don't change, be the authentic you, but be a better you.

You see, the US First Lady's signature campaign is called Be Best. Now, that could be anything. It can mean anything you want it to mean, and that's the point.

Be a better person and be the best at something. Work harder to be better and be the better you that you already are. At the same time, you can see why there's a multi-billion dollar global industry that wants to help us to be a better you with all kinds of self-help advice, all manners of spirituality, to be more mature, more capable, more healthy, etc.

Which, ironically, is having someone else tell you how to change. It's all very confusing, because it is contradictory. Do I need to change, do I need to change, or do I not?

[ 1 : 30 ] And Paul writes here to the Colossian church about this very question, and he tells them, you have to change if you're a Christian. But more than that, you are changed, because everything changes, because everything has changed, and that's not up for debate, but it's that why of the hell that we need to talk about.

What's the background here? Well, he's writing to this church in Colossae, and he's writing to encourage them, and commend them, and warn them. Because there is some kind of heresy that they're being faced with, and that they're risking being drawn into, with false teachers telling them something, some kind of belief system, that we don't have all the detail of.

But it seemed to involve some kind of seeking of spiritual maturity, through more spiritually advanced people accessing higher powers of some kind, or things above, that they called it, through worshipping angels.

And at the same time, it seemed like they had all kinds of rules and procedures, things you had to do to become more mature. You know, you can see in chapter 2, verses 21 to 22, he kind of uses their language, it seems, he says, don't handle, don't taste, don't touch.

So there's some kind of Jewish, syncretistic religion here going on. But the point is, and we don't have all the details, it seems like it's some kind of philosophy or religion that says, if you do this and do that, if you eat the right foods and abstain from doing that, if you're more spiritual than the next person and have the right insight, if you can gain access to the higher powers, then you will achieve true spirituality.

[ 3 : 26 ] This kind of change will give you heaven on earth. Does that sound familiar? Now there are many ways you can respond to that.

The question is, what did Paul do here? And interestingly, for two chapters before we get to this passage that we just read, he's extolled Jesus Christ.

See, the reason we don't know all the ins and outs of what this heresy involves is partly because Paul doesn't go blow by blow, point for point, and respond to it.

Which may be a good thing for us to remember when we engage with the culture around us. But that's a sermon for another day. See, he tells them, let me tell you about the one who is more excellent than any so-called wise philosophy.

The one who's done more excellent things than any good deeds. And there's much there. And we've got to remember, you know, he's writing to these people on parchment and scrolls that were expensive and scarce.

[ 4 : 34 ] There wasn't a Xerox machine that you could run off a whole book with. You had to make your words count. And he's done this for two chapters before we get here, telling them about Jesus Christ and how excellent he is.

Let me just read you a bit from chapter 1. There's a very well-known bit from verse 15. He says, he's the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth.

Visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things.

And in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. How does Paul encourage the church in Colossal in this situation they face?

[ 5 : 42 ] He exalts Christ. He said, let's begin at the beginning. Not at your situation. Not the heretical philosophy of these false teachers. Let's begin at Christ, the head of the body, the church.

If we're talking first principles for the best life, then let's start with the one who created and sustains all life.

And then he says in chapter 2, verse 20, just before the passages that we read, he says, If you died with Christ in the things of this world, why do you think working on human understandings of how to be better will work?

They appear wise, but they're self-made religions, and they're useless in stopping the sinful nature that is your real problem. Verse 23.

See, that's where we pick it up. He says, if you've died with Christ, you're raised to life with him too. And that changes everything.

[ 6 : 46 ] The first thing that changes when we're raised to life with Christ, he says, is our perspective and our priorities. He says, it's not some abstract philosophical or spiritual idea that we should think about.

It's a very concrete person that he wants us to focus about. When he addresses this heresy, he says, yes, there are more things in the world that we see.

There are more important things in many ways, but the things above you're looking for is the one above. In Colossians, in chapter 3, verse 1, if then you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ wears your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

He turns the tables on these false teachers. Seek the things above, yes, affirming that there is more than just the things of this world, using their own phrase, but what they should really seek is the one above.

[ 8 : 02 ] The Christ who died, was raised from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of God. But there's more to it than that, even. So you're now one with him.

You realise that? You've been raised with Christ. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, he says. If you're a believer in Christ, that is true for you as well. What is true for Christ is true for us. Because he lives, we live. Because he has his being in God, we have our being in God.

Your existence, he says, is hidden in God. Safe, secure and untouchable by anyone. And that's why Paul starts by explaining who Christ is.

And how we relate to him in his death and resurrection. Your perspective and priorities change because of the supreme excellence of the Saviour who died for you and now reigns at the right hand of the Father.

[ 9 : 08 ] But it doesn't just stay with perspective and priorities in this passage. This isn't some airy-fairy pie in the sky, head in the clouds change in perspective that he's talking about.

Exactly the opposite. See, thinking upon Christ, he says, Having our being centered on him and our life from him has a very real effect on our actions and attitude.

There is a dangerous line of thinking that Christians have to deal with more and more. Which even creeps into the church, influenced and strengthened by the world around us.

It goes something like this. He says, If Christ accepts me as a sinner and loves me, I don't have to change how I live and what I do. And yes, it's absolutely true that God accepts us how we are. We can't ever bring anything to the table to be saved. And praise the Lord, that is true. Otherwise, none of us would be saved. None of us would be here. But the point Paul is making is that God doesn't want us to stay the way we are.

[10:21] We should never fall for that lie. And even if we tell that lie to ourselves, sometimes, maybe subtly, not in this kind of over-explicit way, but the things that we struggle with, that niggling sin that we just can't seem to get rid of, that can wait for another day.

I think that's possibly the way that it plays out for us. And here's why it can't stay the way it is. He says, If we're united to Christ, as we've seen, there's no way that can happen. Notice the order that Paul does this in. He says, Since you've been raised with Christ, He is your life. And since your life is hidden, is secure with Him in God already, you will appear with Him in glory. These things are past realities that shape our present and will continue for all eternity. There is no way that we can stay the way we were if we will be appearing with Christ in glory.

[11:38] And he says, Be on that path of change to appear with Him in glory. And then he says, Now go and do these things. Change because you have been changed.

Change is hard. And it needs to be so fundamental, so hard that Paul calls it putting to death sin. Notice how in verse 5 he goes for the most intimate and most besetting, most secret sins in our lives very often.

He says, Put to death therefore what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passions, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Now all of these have in common that they're placing our needs, our desires, our idea of what we're owed and want in place of focusing on Christ as the one who gives us our very lives.

That's why he calls, he sums it up with, which is idolatry. We're worshipping something else.

Ourselves. And in verse 8 he goes on and he says, you know, it's not just about your kind of internal sins, your internal things that need to change.

[12:57] This impacts our relationships with one another. And the external manifestation of that focus on ourselves. And he addresses all kinds of things about speech to one another.

How we speak to and about one another. But then in verse 12 is the positive command, isn't it? Take off these things, put to death these things, and put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against one another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Put off the old way of doing things.

Because you've put off the old self. Put on the new person, because in Christ you are a new person. Become in practice what you are in principle already.

You know, I don't know if you've heard people say sometimes, dress for the job you want, not the one you have. You can't keep on dressing like the intern with the torn jeans if you want to be the CEO.

[14:13] Paul's saying, dress like the person you already are. Wear those attributes of God. Kindness and humility, patience, like the person united to Jesus, that you are.

In Genesis 1 we read how God makes people in his image. And we know what went wrong with the four. And here we have this remarkable phrase in verse 9.

Not verse 9. Verse 10, where it says, you've put on the new self which has been renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Isn't that staggering? What went wrong with the four is being corrected every day in a Christian's life. As we put off this old self and put on the new self.

And it feels hard. It doesn't feel that way every day when we battle the sin, when we lose our temper again. when we enjoy that off joke at work slightly too much or something like that.

[15:30] But don't give up. There is a finality to this. He says, put off all of these things once and for all and once you've come to faith in Christ, sin never has the same power over you as it has before.

But there's an ongoing nature to it too. we must continue putting off sin. We must continue seeking more and more to be like Christ. I don't know if you saw the HMS Queen Elizabeth on a new aircraft carrier set sail for America this week on a kind of main and Atlantic voyage.

It's a fantastic ship. But when it needs to turn around it doesn't happen in a moment. It takes a while.

But when it starts to turn it turns. And you don't want to be a sailboat that gets in the way of that ship turning. And if you're sitting here tonight discouraged about something that you're struggling with that you've been struggling with maybe for years maybe all your life some kind of sin that maybe someone doesn't even someone else doesn't even know about take courage from this.

Your change to the person that will appear with Christ in glory is more powerful than that ship turning around and is done by God himself. You see Paul is not trying to rebuke these Christians in Colossae and I'm not I'm not trying to do that tonight either.

[17:01] Take heart and be encouraged. God is doing a great work in you but we will only see the result of finally when he returns in glory.

See here's how John Owen writes about it. He says set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin sick souls.

Live in this and thou wilt die a conqueror. Yeah thou wilt. Through the good providence of God live to see thy lust dead at thy feet.

We all look forward to that. But there's more to it than that needs to change Paul says. It's not just our perspective and priorities or our actions and attitudes it's our very identity and ideology that changes.

You see in a few places we've read some pretty fundamental things about who we should think we are. In verse 4 he says Christ who is your life?

[18:07] Verse 9 put off the old self. Verse 10 you've put on the new self. And then verse 11 here there is not Greek and Jew circumcised and uncircumcised barbarians in the slave free but Christ is all and in all and he's talking about the body of Christ.

You see it's so fundamental this change that happens when you come to faith in Christ when you're united to Christ by faith. That all of these human distinctions all of these human divisions very often that cause so much difficulty and so much discord in the world that we live in fall away.

He's covering everything Jew and Gentile those who have the promise of Abraham and those who didn't cultured people and uncultured those who are masters and those who serve those with social status and those who didn't have any social status any value in society.

Now of course all distinctions between human beings all the rich diversity that God created us in doesn't immediately disappear and won't disappear and that's a great thing but it propels into insignificance he's arguing compared to the very source of our new lives the very core of our identity being a new creation in Christ those things don't define us primarily now you may ask why is this all that strange even if we know the culture around us get their identity from these things and what people do in a city like London one of the primary things that defines you we know mostly that that's not true why does Paul put so much emphasis on it you see it's relevant for us I think because he's not writing to a church that is struggling they've not bought into this false teaching it wouldn't seem here's how he describes them in the letter in chapter 1 verse 4 he says we've heard of your faith in

Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints chapter 2 verse 5 he said though I'm absent in body yet I am with you in spirit rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ chapter 2 verse 8 see that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ implication being they've not been taken captive by these things yet and even just in this passage that we read they have God's chosen ones holy and beloved and let's not forget those words spoken of Christ in the New Testament and Israel in the Old Testament so that's a good reference from the apostle Paul for a church if a church got a letter from Paul giving them an appraisal this is about as good as you can expect this is not as good as they come this isn't the Corinthian church or the

[21:25] Galatian church where Paul is very direct in addressing their immorality their divisions or even their downright racism we need to be reminded of this ourselves because day to day it's very easy to be influenced by the world around us in our thinking about who we are just like this commended church in Colossus needed to be reminded of this and were at risk of finding their identity in something the exclusivity of this spiritual realm that they were able to access it's not even that our identity primarily can come from being members of IPC healing but it must be that we're members of the body of this one living saviour reigning and ruling over all things at the right hand of

the father the head of this body Jesus Christ here's we've seen our perspective and priorities our actions and attitudes and our identity and ideology change when we're raised to life with

Christ but of all of these things I think the last one is maybe the most difficult and our identity and ideology influence so much of what we do on a day to day basis our actions unthinkingly even flows from those things so that church in Colossal with a glowing report from Paul needs to hear this maybe we need to be reminded of our common identity in Christ as well here's a question when you're asked to describe yourself to someone what is the first thing that comes to mind is it that you're a redeemed saved child of God united to Christ by faith I don't think I would always start off with that if I had to write a short blurb about myself and it can be subtle it can be subtle even at church how easy is it to only speak to the people we know the people we know we've got something in common with put on the old self

Paul says put on the new self and that happens he tells us in verse 15 by letting the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful and 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 isn't it spectacular that even when Paul calls us to actively work towards Christ likeness where Christ's image supersedes our own that Christ's word does the work isn't that grace upon grace see we can do this work because he does the work but we need each other to do this the church this church every Sunday when we're together here models this very new humanity that he's talking about and in this church in this very church we have

English people Welsh people Americans Iranians Canadiens South Africans and and and if I give a number of how many nationalities we have I probably have it wrong there are many we've got families and single people old and young wealthy and not wealthy people powerful people and struggling people every Sunday we model the fact here together that we're putting on that old self and putting on the new self and change is hard fundamental hard change is very hard identity change is incredibly hard identity theft it seems it's much easier but this is how we manage to change in such a way that we do everything we do as Paul calls us to do whether word or deed for Christ by Christ's own word changing us by being encouraged through our singing together singing psalms hymns and spiritual songs and teaching and admonishment and encouraging each other to remember what he's done for and in and through us every Sunday how often do we think about it like that when we get up to sing there's much more going on there than singing words of the page let us keep encouraging and admonishing one another to put on that new self day after day doing everything for Christ and looking forward to appearing with him in glory amen