

Gospel Living in Christian Community

Good morning. If you have your Bible, I invite you to open it to Colossians 3. We are, of course, continuing in our sermon series through the book of Colossians. If you remember at the beginning of the series, Pastor Nathan suggested that the whole theme of the book is that Jesus Christ is supreme and sufficient. In the first two chapters of Colossians, we see Paul emphasize Christ's supremacy over all things; He is preeminent. In these final two chapters, 3 & 4, we see Christ's sufficiency for our everyday lives: in the church, in relationships, and in the world.

Last week we looked at the passage directly after this one, as Pastor Mike preached on verses 18 through chapter 4 verse 1. I appreciate the time to recover from being sick and thankful for a supporting team of pastors willing to jump in and shift things around when needed. In his message last week, Pastor Mike continually referred back to this passage we are going to look at today as the supporting or foundation passage for his text: putting off and putting on is the basis for our relationships with others. However, he kept referring to a sermon that hadn't been preached yet, so go ahead and just forget everything Pastor Mike said because I'm going a whole different direction. Of course, I'm just kidding.

Today, we will spend our time looking at verses 5-17, the "putting off" of the old self and "putting on" of the new self. Some of you haven't even heard a word I have said yet because you are still in shock that I'm in a suit jacket. I just want to say...I have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new. To be honest, I was this close to wearing a full suit, but I thought maybe that would distract you too much.

Well, in a very similar way to Pastor Mike, I'm going to be drawing on the passage before mine. Which shouldn't surprise you since we are preaching through a whole book. I'll be basing the application of our text on the text Pastor Nathan preached two weeks ago, verses 1-4. The only advantage I have is that Pastor Nathan actually preached his message.

I encourage you to go back and watch the message from Pastor Nathan on those four verses as you will be helped in getting a solid theological understanding of that passage. However, because those verses are the basis for our passage this morning, I want to briefly remind us of the points he made. 1) We have a new direction: we [meaning, those who are trusting and believing in Christ, Christians] are to set our minds on heavenly things, on Christ, not on earthly things. 2) We have a new identity that is hidden in Christ. 3) We have a new future where we will appear with him in glory, where we will become like him. That is our end goal, our final destination. Our passage today, in verses 5-17, is really understanding what our lives are to look like between point 2 (a new identity) and point 3 (a new future). What does it look like to live in this new gospel identity in a new community until we appear with him in glory?

Before we read our passage this morning, I want us to be aware of a pitfall we can easily fall into in reading this passage and others like it:

We can read this passage as a To-Do Checklist. If I just do this and this and this, then I'll be good, without any understanding of the context it is in.

This is continuing the thought of Paul's original argument or discussion in the book of Colossians. We need to be careful not to read it or try to apply it outside of the context he has already been writing. Paul has been laying the foundation of the gospel since the beginning of the book. It is only after he has laid the gospel foundation that he moves into application of those truths into our daily lives. Which is why verses 1-4 are our foundation passage for everything we discuss today. If you don't get the first four verses of this chapter (really the first 2 chapters of Colossians – the gospel), then you cannot proceed to the rest of the text. Because it is the gospel that undergirds all the application Paul is going to speak about going forward (as we saw last week with our relationships).

With that in mind, I'd like to read our passage this morning by beginning in verse 1 as we seek to understand and apply verses 5-17.

READ Colossians 3:1-17

Would you pray with me?...

INTRODUCTION

I want to keep reminding us to avoid the temptation to treat these things as lists to accomplish. Maybe that's just my personality. My natural tendency is to see everything as goals to accomplish or achieve. But I think it would be more helpful to use this passage as an indicator for gauging your spiritual life. Use it as a thermometer to check whether your life is spiritually healthy or not. Determine whether you are living in the old self or in the new.

[ILLUSTRATION]

For the last month, really though it feels like eternity, our family has been going through sickness after sickness. I'm told it's just one of the many joys of having kids in preschool and daycare. For the last several weeks at least one person in our family has been sick, with me being the last victim to succumb to it this past week. We used to have an older thermometer that you put under the arm, and it felt like it took ages for it to get a reading. Which wouldn't be a big deal for us adults but try holding that thing under a toddler or baby for that long. So, I went out and bought one of those in-ear thermometers, and it can read the temperature in like 1 sec. Game changer. Instead of reluctantly taking our kids temperatures because of the battle that would ensue, we could quickly get a check throughout the day to see how they were progressing or not progressing with their fever.

I think that's how we should use this passage this morning, like a thermometer for our spiritual life. When we look at these lists, we should examine our lives and see

whether our life is more characterized by the old self or the new. Tying it back to our foundation passage, how do you know if you are setting your eyes on earthly things or spiritual things? It will be revealed by whether you identify more with the old self and its practices, or the new self and its practices.

I've titled the message this morning Gospel Living in Christian Community as I believe we see that in our text today. We are going to look at three points this morning: Setting our minds on Christ helps us to 1) put off the old self, 2) put on the new self, and 3) live in gospel unity.

PUT OFF THE OLD SELF

Let's start with the command to **Put Off the Old Self**.

We see right at out of the gate, Paul commands these Colossian believers to "put to death" what is earthly in them. But Paul has already told them that if they are Christians, they have died with Christ and have been raised with him. We saw this in chapter 2:11-12:

¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

- **Colossians 2:11-12**

Even the beginning of chapter 3 is assuming they have already died with Christ:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

- **Colossians 3:1**

In verse 3, he says, “For you have died.” The “putting to death” Paul has in mind here should already be true of a believer. The work of the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us and making us more like Christ. Paul is basically saying, “If you are truly a Christian, then go along with or let the Spirit do his work in you.” Be who you already are in Christ. Be dead to your old self. One commentator put it this way: “Union with Christ, because it puts us in a new relationship to sin and brings us into the sphere of the Spirit’s power, *will* impact the way we live.”

As Paul mentioned in verse 2, we are not to set our minds on earthly things. Here he explains what these earthly things are with two lists. In the first list, we have sexual immorality, impurity, passion (or lust), evil desire, and covetousness (or greed). Paul connects greed to the previous mentioned sins with the statement, “which is idolatry.” In the pagan cultures of the time and in Roman culture especially, idol worship and sexual sins went hand-in-hand. This is mentioned all over the Bible from the Old Testament to Revelation. When you replace God with anything else, but especially when we replace him with ourselves, we distort everything from the good design God established when he created the world. We begin worshiping the creation rather than the Creator as Paul tells us in Romans 1.

And when you think about this list and flip it, it seems like a natural sinful progression, doesn’t it? You are greedy, an uncontrollable desire for more than you have (whether that is a person or thing). You begin to have an insatiable desire for it that is not of God, it is an evil desire. This leads to a rising passion in you, or this lust. Which leads to a person becoming impure in their thoughts or motives to pursue these desires and passion. As one commentator defined impurity saying, “impurity refers more generally to any moral corruption, but it is applied quite often to sexual sins.” And it’s clear in our context Paul is referring to sexual impurity. And finally, this leads to the physical act of sexual immorality, meaning any kind of sexual sin. Anything that would be outside of God’s good design in creation for sex in the covenant of marriage: sex outside of marriage (hooking up, boyfriend/girlfriend, long term relationship), LGBTQ+, pornography, sex trafficking. These are just to name a few.

And Paul is very clear here and elsewhere that the wrath of God on these things is coming. We sometimes want to gloss over or even ignore the wrath of God. You know, I was just having this conversation with someone a few weeks ago. We were talking about how people will say they don't want to sound condemning or judgmental to their friends or family by holding true to God's Word or standing firm on the things God has clearly stated as sin against him. They would say, "Why should we tell other people they are wrong for living that way or doing those things? Isn't God Love? How is that loving?" And before you know it, you are compromising on things very clearly against God and his Word. In the end, it's not showing love to them if you are more concerned about their view of you than God's wrath coming against them.

So, we often gloss over God's wrath. We want to promote God's love and grace and mercy. And God is Love. And he is gracious. And he is merciful. But we must never forget that God is also (at the same time) Holy, just, and righteous. He does not take sin lightly, like we do. I don't think we really understand the depth of our sin against God. The reason we constantly sing of God's love and grace and mercy is because, as the song In Christ Alone says, "the wrath of God was satisfied, for every sin on him [Christ] was laid, here in the death of Christ I live." It is not that God is indifferent to sin or just ignores it, but that Christ atoned for all the wrath against your sin, *if* you are trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. But be warned, if you are not trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, there is coming a day when God will no longer withhold his judgement on sin. This is a reality expressed all throughout the New Testament. And that day of the Lord will be when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead.

Let me encourage you if you have not trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior for the forgiveness of your sins, to do that today! Find a pastor or someone this morning and ask how you can be forgiven of your sins and reconciled to God. Don't leave today without knowing the free gift of grace offered through Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross and death defeating resurrection.

Paul challenges the Colossian believers by telling them, this kind of living should not characterize their life anymore. Again, let's remember our foundation

passage: If they have truly been raised with Christ and are setting their eyes on him, these things should no longer have a part of their life. Though they were once walking and living in those things, it should be put to death.

Think about it for a moment. If you are truly setting your mind on things above, setting your mind on Christ, then what do you have to covet here on earth? What passion or sexual immorality is going to satisfy you the only way Christ can? Our life has been hidden with Christ, we have a new identity, an eternal inheritance. When we focus on heavenly things and on our Savior, we more clearly see how temporal, how fleeting, how ridiculous (really) the things of the world truly are. While those things promise life and fulfillment and acceptance, they only bring death and emptiness and judgement. Are you allowing the greed of this world and the sexual immorality of our culture to consume your mind or are you setting your mind on Christ?

...Okay...I know that was intense. Everyone take a deep breath with me. This is probably a good time to remind ourselves of an uplifting gospel truth. Romans 8:1 says:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- Romans 8:1

Praise God for that, right!? But maybe some of you felt like that last list didn't apply to you as much, so you didn't feel the weight of it. Maybe that's not where you struggle most. Well, the second list of earthly things to "put off" are in verses 8-9. In addition to all that was mentioned before, Paul urges them to also put off anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from their mouth, and lying to one another. What Paul is basically getting at here is unwholesome talk or perverse speech that is often expressed in our anger or wrath or malice or slander or lying.

Is that one striking a chord with anyone here this morning? Anyone else in here get frustrated? The person who cuts you off in traffic, the person who almost hits you, the child who disobeys or talks back, the spouse who didn't do the thing you asked for the 100th time, the employee who can't ever get their work right, the boss who keeps piling on your workload, and on and on. Is your response to those situations, "Grace and peace to you brother and sister." If you answered yes, then you are perfect man. James 3:2 says:

And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

- James 3:2

James goes on to call our tongue:

a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

- James 3:8-10

It would seem like this one definitely strikes a chord with all of us. This is part of the old self that should no longer characterize the life of a believer. Is this a struggle for you? Do you find yourself cursing others, belittling other, lying to others, slandering others? Jesus tells us this is a reflection of our own heart:

¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.

- Matthew 15:18

If we are setting our eyes on Christ, on heavenly things, would we speak like that?

Have you ever met someone who "cleans up" their speech when they walk into a church? Or when they find out you are a Christian? It almost always happens

when I talk to someone for a while, and they ask what I do, and I tell them I'm a pastor. You can see in their eyes how they are trying to backpedal the whole previous conversation and then if they "slip up" again, they apologize. If even unbelievers have this sense about them when dealing with a pastor or being in a church building, how much more should we as Christians, who are indwelt with the Holy Spirit be sensitive to this. If we are setting our minds on Christ, do we dare gaze into the face of Jesus and speak with unwholesome or perverse speech?

But let's pull out from our individualistic mentality for a minute and realize that Paul is not only concerned about a person's individual walk with God, but he is also concerned about the communal aspect of our salvation. This is not the kind of speech that should be used in gospel community, with one another in the church. He says in verse 9, "Do not lie to one another." Paul is writing to these Colossians believers. As believers, our gatherings should not consist of gossip and slander, lying and obscene talk. These are earthly things. We should expect this kind of behavior, this kind of speech in the world, in your workplace, but not in this new community in Christ. We are to set our minds on heavenly things.

Paul says in verse 16 what kind of speech should characterize this new community. When we set our minds on things above, on Christ, we speak the word of Christ to one another:

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- Colossians 3:16

We believe the Word of God is true because God is True, and we are to be people of truth. We went into greater detail about this specific passage over the summer in our Worship in the Word series, and you can find that online. We are to teach and admonish and sing Scripture over one another. That is the kind of speech we should have when gazing on heavenly things.

Do you still have your spiritual thermometer out? Is your life characterized by the old self? How about this, would other people describe you in terms of the old self? Are you living in the old self with its practice? Let me remind you that you have died to the old self with Christ. Put it off. Put it to death. Live as one who has died to the old self.

PUT ON THE NEW SELF

Now let's turn our attention to our next point: setting our eyes on Christ helps us to **Put on the New Self.**

I first want us to notice that this new self we are putting on is in a progressive state. This idea of progressive sanctification. Though we are dead to the old self, it has its lingering effects and desires that still tempt us today. Though its power over us is dead, we are creatures of habit.

[ILLUSTRATION]

Anyone have any guesses for how many days it takes to form a new habit? The correct number is...there isn't one. People have been researching this question and have determined...it just depends on the person and the circumstance. If you do a quick google search it says an average of 66 days, but digging a little further it states that it ranges from 18 to 254 days. It might be easier to form some habits and harder to form others. Starting a habit to eat dessert every night is going to be much easier to keep than going to the gym every day. There is no magic number. But what does that research tell us? It tells us that people are creatures of habit. We like our routines and our habits, and it's often hard to break old habits much less establish new ones.

Have you ever had something change in your routine and yet you find yourself still trying to do the old habit? I deleted my social media apps probably a little over a year ago now. I was in a bad habit of as soon as I sat down somewhere, I would pull out my phone, open social media, and begin

scrolling endlessly. But you know what I still catch myself doing? Sitting down, unlocking my phone, and staring at my home page only to realize I don't have anything to look at anymore and locking it again. I had built this habit over years of opening my phone, opening up social media and scrolling for a while. But now that I have removed the apps, I still find myself going back to the same habit of trying to open them.

Social media's power over me is dead, but the habits still remain. But Paul tells us this new self, while it is a sure reality, is not yet complete. Our new self is "being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Remember, I said this passage really sits between Pastor Nathan's two points of New Identity and New Future. We know from verse 4 what that future will be:

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

- Colossians 3:4

But we are not yet to that point. As one commentator put it, "We are in a state of 'becoming.'" Paul says elsewhere, in 2 Corinthians 4:16:

...Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

- 2 Corinthians 4:16

And Romans 12:2:

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...

- Romans 12:2

Our new selves are being renewed, but into what? It says, "in the image of its creator." Where have we seen this kind of language before? Genesis 1, right? The Creation account. When God made man and woman after his own image. Paul is

saying, this new self is not just some better virtues or character traits we possess, but God is making a whole new creation, a whole new humanity. And this is evidenced by the very next verse:

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

- Colossians 3:11

Paul is not saying that Greeks no longer exist, or Jews no longer exist, or that any of these things just disappear. He is saying that this is no longer the defining factor of your identity. You are not defined by these things; you are defined by Christ. He is the common denominator. A new humanity is being built by him and in him. Jesus is the firstborn of the new creation, and we are included in that new creation. And this new self is expressed by the very character of Jesus: a compassionate heart, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

But this new humanity, this character of Jesus, is not just for our own spiritual growth. There is a communal aspect to our salvation Paul is emphasizing. And I think we live in what is still largely an individualistic culture. We hear messages from our world about “living your truth” or “being true to yourself.” People choose to attend schools, pursue jobs, and a host of other things purely on their personal, individual decision.

In fact, did you know that there are even people who would move 9 hours away from where they grew up, with no regard for how it affects their family, all to pursue a career? I mean, seriously, who would do such thing? Well, me, I guess. I say that kiddingly, because my wife and I did value the opinions of our family in making that decision, but it was not the driving factor. However, in a group centered culture, the thoughts and opinions of the whole group outweigh the thoughts and opinions of the individual.

However, we are a product of our culture. We have internalized the individualistic nature of our society, and it affects how we view and how we think about

everything, including how we approach Scripture. We have even turned the gospel message into solely an individualized salvation: Jesus came to die for you. Is Jesus your personal Savior? And it's not that these things are wrong or untrue, but we tend to view our entire Christianity in an individualistic way. How am I doing in my spiritual disciplines? I don't need church; I can worship God on my own. I don't need to grow with other believers; I have my own personal relationship with God.

We tend to completely miss the other side of the coin. We are not only personally saved, forgiven of our sins, and reconciled to God, but we are adopted into the family of God. We are saved into a new community. This is the context Paul sees the new self. It is not a new self with a personal devotional life devoid of church or community, but it is a new humanity that thrives in community with other believers.

It is in this new humanity that Paul urges these believers to put on the character of Christ. He calls us God's chosen ones, holy and loved. Can you believe that? Us! We are now the chosen people of God! Why? Because God has set us apart for himself (that's the holy part) and he has set his love on us. Just dwell on that for a moment! If you are a believer this morning, the God of the universe has set you apart for himself and set his love on you. You are part of his chosen people.

If you are part of this chosen people, then what should these people look like? What characterizes their life? The very characteristics of Jesus: compassionate heart, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. These all describe Jesus, himself.

Do you still have your spiritual thermometer handy? Are you in community with other believers, seeking that community, or are you trying to do the Christian life on your own? To Paul and really all of the New Testament, a Christian not involved in a local church is an oxymoron. Paul would never assume that a Christian who has been born into this new humanity, this new community, would

then choose not to be involved in that community. So, are you plugged into a local church?

How about this: Do you see your life progressing into more Christlikeness? Are you becoming more or less compassionate? More or less kind? Or humble? Meek? Patient? This is a good indicator of whether you are living in the old self or living in the new. As we set our minds on Christ, we begin to become more like him and put on the new self.

LIVE IN GOSPEL UNITY

Finally, this morning, let's quickly look at our last point: setting our minds on Christ helps us to **Live in Gospel Unity.**

Again, Paul has in mind here, not just the spiritual formation for individual growth, but for life among a new humanity, a new community. Right after Paul lists these five character traits of the new self, he moves into how to interact with other believers in the church. He says in verse 13:

¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

- Colossians 3:13

Bearing and forgiving. He mentions both a passive element and an active element. It doesn't take as much to bear with someone as forgive someone, right? I mean, maybe some restraint, biting your tongue. But it is really just allowing something to take place. It's passive. Anybody rub shoulders with anyone in the church before? Had a dispute? Or as Anakin Skywalker would say, "Aggressive negotiations"? Never, right?

Yeah, Paul knew all too well what happens inside a church. A bunch of sinners saved by grace are going to continue to be a bunch of sinners saved by grace. Paul

says, when someone in the church does something against you, you are to bear with the other person. This is the first step in living in gospel unity. However, if we stop there, we can easily allow bitterness to seep in and take root. How many times can you bear with someone before it becomes too much?

This is why Paul doesn't just say to bear with one another (which we should be doing if we are not already) but more than that, we should forgive one another. This takes initiative. This takes action on our part. It is this idea of an act of grace, something that is freely offered and not deserved. Forgiving someone means you cancel the other person's debt against you. We saw that God did this very thing for us in Christ in chapter 2 verses 13-14:

having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

- Colossians 2:13-14

Which is why Paul says:

as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

- Colossians 3:13

One commentator noted that "Christ establishes not only the pattern but the possibility of forgiveness."

[ILLUSTRATION]

As many of you know, we are in the middle of raising a toddler, our daughter being 3 years old. So, as you might well expect, we have a lot of moments of "aggressive negotiations" happening in our home. But even through all the meltdowns or tantrums or frustration, I try to remind myself that there is an opportunity to teach Evelyn about Jesus. Typically, after everything and everyone calms down and we begin to talk about what happened and about asking forgiveness from mommy and daddy, one of the things I try to tell Evelyn is that the reason I am able to forgive her is because Jesus has forgiven me of all my sins. I tell her "Daddy is not perfect,

and I have been forgiven by Jesus when he died on the cross for my sins. Because he has forgiven me, I can forgive you.” Now, I don’t think she understands what I means...yet. But, I’m planting those gospel truths in her that forgiveness comes through Jesus Christ. We can forgive because we have been forgiven.

Paul goes on to say that above all of these character traits, above the bearing and forgiving, we are to put on love. It is the supreme virtue. It binds and keeps all the other previous virtues listed together in harmony with one another. It’s like my outfit this morning. You know, pants, nice shoes, and button-down shirt. It’s nice. But what really brings it all together is the suit jacket. It is the supreme piece of clothing, right? It brings the whole outfit together.

What is the point of all of this? What is the reason Paul says we are to put on our new selves? Why are we to display the character of Christ and bear and forgive with one another? So that we live in unity with one another. He says in verse 15:

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

- Colossians 3:15

This new community we have been saved into is meant to be different from the world. There should be love, grace, peace, and thanksgiving found here. Let’s pull out our spiritual thermometer again, but this time let’s hold it to our church. Is this what characterizes Cornerstone? Do we bear with one another and forgive one another when we wrong each other? Are we a place of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience? Do we love one another? Are we a peace-making people?

If the answer is no to any of those, then what is your responsibility in that? Are you bearing and forgiving others? Are you compassionate, kind, humble, meek, or patient? Who do you need to forgive today? Is there someone you have been bearing with, but you are beginning to hold a grudge or allow bitterness to fester?

Make it right today. Take action and forgive them. When we set our minds on Christ and realize how much we have been forgiven, though we fail every single day, who are we to withhold forgiveness? We are to be a people of peace, living in unity with one another, displaying the gospel in how deal with each other.

CONCLUSION

As we have walked through this passage this morning, I hope you have been able to examine your own walk with God and gauge where you are spiritually. Is your life more characterized by the old self and its practices or the new self? Maybe your next step this morning is to seek repentance from God for living in the old self. Ask him to strengthen you to walk by the Spirit, for the Holy Spirit to do his work of sanctification in you, for your life to be characterize by Christlikeness.

Maybe your next step this morning is to become a member. Maybe you have been attending for a while but have not taken the step to covenant yourself with this local body of believers to be held accountable and pursue God's mission of making disciples together. We would be happy to talk with you about how to do that.

However God has been speaking to you this morning, let us be doers of the Word and not hearers only and respond in faith. Paul urges the Colossian believers, and us today, to set our minds on Christ: to put off the old self, put on the new self, and live in gospel unity with one another.

Would you pray with me?