



PUTTING OFF THE OLD SELF

Pastor Dillon Barber // May 12, 2024

Text: Colossians 3:1-11

Big Idea: In order to put on our new self in Christ, first we must take off the old.

Happy Mother's Day everyone!!!

My name is Dillon if we haven't met yet and it's a pleasure to be with you this morning. Before we jump into our text I want to take a moment and thank everyone who donated and shopped at our rummage sale last weekend. A huge thank you to all the amazing volunteers who helped setup and sell and cleanup the mess. It was a bit of a scramble to sell before the rain hit last Saturday but we pulled it off and earned about \$7,500 for missions. Doug is taking a dozen young people to Croatia this summer to partner with missionaries there and help with a youth summer camp. These funds will cover about a quarter of their costs. If you want to contribute to the team you can do so online through our online giving, or check with Doug about other ways to support the team.

Intro: This morning we continue our Colossians series that we are calling Freedom in Christ. Paul wrote this letter from prison to a church that he did not plant and had not visited. His heart was to encourage and strengthen the church and to address false teaching that was challenging the identity and authority of Jesus and what it means to live as one who has been redeemed.

This week we begin chapter three. This is really the first half of a two-part passage. Today we are going to talk about what it looks like to put off our old self, and next week Doug is going to walk us through what it looks like to put on the New Self.

Do any of you like to go shopping for new clothes? Is that fun for any of you? I don't particularly like shopping for clothing, mostly because there are a thousand other things I'd rather do, but also because I don't like the fitting room or dressing room experience. If I do manage find some article of clothing I need, I have to take it into a small closet, sometimes in the very middle of the store, and undress. Super awkward right? Its uncomfortable. But if I want to try on something new, to put on something new, first I must take off the old clothes I'm wearing. Even if it is uncomfortable to do so. I think this is why so many men just shop for clothing at Costco. There are no dressing rooms, you buy it, take it home, and return it if it doesn't fit.

In Colossians chapter 3, Paul addressed the importance of taking off or dying to our old self, so that we can put on our new self that is in Christ. Sometimes it is tough, awkward, even painful work. Sometimes we try to get rid of old habits or ways of thinking but we struggle and fail. Sometimes we even give up completely and settle for brokenness and unhealth because it is easier, or at least we think it is. However, if we are willing to lean into the Spirit, cooperate with the work that God is doing in us, the reward of health is far greater than the pain of the process and will help us to become the healthy, spirit filled, Christ followers we were designed to be.

So where do we start? The first lesson we learn from Paul is: Putting off our old self begins with a change in identity. Take a look at verses 1-4. This time pay attention to our position in Christ. (READ).

Are these verses perfectly clear to you? When I first read this I was a bit confused. It seems more like a riddle than instruction. Is Paul asking a question or making a statement? Are we raised with Christ or dead in

Christ? Which is it? So then I had to go back and read the whole letter again and finally in chapter two it began to make sense. Looking back at chapter 2, verses 11-15, Paul says (Read 11-15.). Now in Chapter 3 Paul is re-iterating the same concept. In Christ we have died to the old self, the sinful self, and have been buried with him in his death. The good news is that just as Christ was raised up in the resurrection we also are raised up in him and given new life. This newness of life is very real and present in us as Christ followers, but also incomplete. We won't be truly, fully transformed into our new self and new identity until Christ returns in glory and we return with him.

Paul summarized this same concept Galatians 2:20. He says "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me."

Doesn't that make a lot more sense? The first step in taking off our old self is understanding our new identity in Christ. We are born again people. Spiritually resurrected beings. Our identity is now tied to Christ, the one who saved us and gave us new life. We are no longer our own, we were purchased with a price, and now we belong to Jesus.

Step one, understand our new identity, Step two: We have to shift our focus off of worldly things, onto heavenly things.

Let's look again at verses 1-4, this time pay attention to what we should be looking at or seeking after.

Paul tells us twice in this passage to shift our focus off of ourselves, off of the world and the things of the world, and to seek or to set our minds on the things above. Our focus should be on heaven where Christ is.

Raise your hands if this is difficult for you at times. Raise your hands if it is hard to keep a heavenly mindset in the middle of this crazy world and all the things going on in our lives. This is hard friends. I have a hard time with this.

First of all we are entertaining ourselves to death. How do we have a heavenly mindset, how do we focus on the things above when we have these shiny screens in our pockets literally begging for our attention. They are designed to give us a dopamine response when they ding and vibrate and send us notifications. Beckoning us to turn them on so that we can be distracted by whatever news, or sport, or reminder, or text, or whatever it is. And that is just one screen. There are screens everywhere. Giant distracting screens. Screens all over the place giving us constant access to sports, music, movies, news, talking heads, entertainment, all at the touch of a finger.

And just beyond the fake world of screens is the real world, the world we are usually trying to avoid or escape by staring at a screen. Our world is full of challenges. Every day a new disaster, a new hardship. Our lives our full of hard work, busy activities, emergencies, and brokenness. The world promises to give us meaning and value and joy but more often than not delivers heartache and disappointment instead. Sometimes it feels like all we can do just to put one foot in front of the other and hope we make it mostly in one piece.

Paul reminds us to take our focus off all of those things. All the work and worry and stress and busy, off of all the distractions, and set our minds on things above. To focus on Christ, on heavenly things on spiritual things, on the things that matter the most. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says "but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

I'm not saying it's going to be easy, I'm just repeating what Paul tells us we need to do.

Step one is understanding our identity as resurrected Christ followers. Step two is setting our minds and our focus on things above, on spiritual things, now we are ready for step three, take off our old self.

Let's read Verses 5-11. (READ).

Paul organized these earthly vices into two groups for us. First he said to put to death the sins of desire. These first five sins are all related to selfish desires and self satisfaction. Sexual immorality, impurity and passion. Some translations say immorality and lust. These three are related to sexual sin. The Greco/Roman cultural was a highly sexualized culture. You don't need me to tell you that our culture in the U.S. has become just as sexualized. The Greek word Paul uses here is pornea for sexual immorality. It is a blanket term that covers adultery, pornography, prostitution, incest, molestation, homosexuality and any other form of sex outside the context of marriage. Paul says, as resurrected followers of Christ, it is time to put these things to death in us.

This is a huge problem in our culture and a huge challenge for the church. If you are struggling in the area of sexual purity you are not

alone. We have resources to help you and we have an amazing support and accountability team in celebrate recovery. Don't just hide in this and hope the struggle goes away on it's own. It won't. Ask for help.

The other sins Paul mentions in this first group are evil desire and covetousness or greed. Wanting what you shouldn't want and seeking wealth above all else are both huge problems in our culture. Desiring wealth or status more than desiring God is a form of idolatry because it puts money before God.

Paul tells us to put off the second set of sin, the sins of disunity. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, do not lie. All of these are behaviors that break down our relationships and destroy the unity of the body. Anger, wrath and malice are the way we treat each other and handle our emotions. Slander, filthy language and lying are ways we speak to and about each other. As the body of Christ, there is no room for this kind of behavior.

Here is something that I realized while I was wrestling through this text this week. It's probably obvious to all of you but it was a good reminder to me. Putting off our old self and our worldly habits and behaviors requires that we keep our minds focused on Jesus and the things that are important to him. Likewise, keeping our minds focused on Jesus requires that we put to death our old self and our old habits. Each requires the other. We simply cannot live in the flesh, in the world, and focus on Jesus at the same time. We can't do it. We pretend that we can, we try, but it never works.

Let me say it this way. It's impossible to focus on Christ and fly off in a fit of rage at the same time. Likewise, it is impossible to watch pornography

and be focused on pursuing Christ at the same time. We can't be slandering people and lying to others and speaking the truth in love at the same time. You see what I mean? Jesus said we cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve God and money at the same time. We must choose who or what we are going to worship and submit to. Seeking Christ enables us to put our old self to death and as we put off our old self, we are better able to seek Christ.

[Transition]

The final exhortation in this passage is to live the sanctified life that Jesus called us to. This means we begin to put on our new self, the one that is rooted in the transforming work of the holy Spirit.

Paul says in verse 10: "We have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Our new identity, our resurrection identity is being renewed into the image of Christ.

In Ephesians 4:21-24 Paul says it this way. "assuming that you have heard about Christ and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Just as Christ is the image of God, the exact likeness of the Father in the flesh, so are we being transformed into the image of Christ our creator and Lord. We call this sanctification and it is a lifelong process. We partner with the Spirit, we abide in Christ, we invest in our relationship with Jesus and through this we grow and are transformed. Sometimes this is slow, agonizingly slow, and sometimes God grows us in huge

amounts over a short season. Sometimes God allows our difficult circumstances to draw us closer to him and grow our faith, sometimes it's the slow, day to day walk with Jesus that allows us to grow in imperceptible amounts. But He is doing it, he is renewing us, and we will never be the same.

Not only are we as individuals being renewed in the image of God but we corporately as the church are being renewed. Paul reminds us that if we have a Christ focused mindset, the common divisions in our culture and in our church will be torn down and removed. The church is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free but Christ is all and in all. These were ethnic and cultural divisions that had no place in the church. Jew or Greek, huge social division. Barbarian or Scythian, these were cultural groups that were scorned by the Greeks. Slave or free defined the rank or position in society. None of these apply in the church where Christ is all and in all.

I wonder what would be contemporary parallels for American culture? What are some of the major dividing points in our society that don't belong in the church? I thought of a few. Black or white? This is a huge division in our culture right now. Conservative or liberal. Just watch the news, these two ideologies define us and divide us. Gas or Battery. How about this, citizen or illegal alien. Within the church, charismatic or traditional.

Paul is reminding us that these divisions, these ways of seeing others come from our old self and old mindset. Our new self, our renewed identity, sets these divisions aside and focuses on Christ and what he is doing. We can't be ticked off at our neighbor over the flag they fly on their front porch and focused on how to love them the way Christ loves

them at the same time. Either we live in the old self or live in the new self. Not both.

Let's review real quick.

Step one: Understand our resurrection identity.

Step two: Put our focus and attention on Christ and heavenly things.

Step three: Put to death our old self and our earthly desires.

Step four: Walk in the sanctifying work of the Spirit, both in our personal life and in the church.

So how do we start? Maybe you are looking at this passage and the list of sins that Paul calls out and you are thinking "gosh, I struggle with all of them." Maybe you know there are other areas of your life where you are living in the flesh and not in the spirit. Not every sin is on this list but you know what you are struggling with. How do we begin this taking off of the old and putting on the new?

Twenty years ago, (scary to say that) I took one and only one counseling class in Seminary. I probably should have taken all of the counseling classes but it is too late now. I really only remember one thing from that class it is called the Stop/Start method. First you identify a behavior or mindset that you are struggling with. Maybe it is negative self-talk, maybe anger, maybe fear of conflict, maybe lying, whatever it is. You identify it and you define it and you acknowledge when you behave in this way and you practice stopping. You flex your no muscle. But that's not enough. Just saying no to bad behavior is not going to work, you have to replace it with a new attitude or thought process or action that is healthy. You have to start doing something healthy instead.

For example, I am going to stop avoiding conflict and shutting down when things get difficult and I am going to start expressing my feelings and needs in an honest and direct way. I'm going to stop yelling at bad drivers on the road, and start praying for them instead.

I wasn't sure if this method is still used in counseling, its been 20 years. But lo and behold, Thursday morning I was listening to K-love on the radio and they had a guest marriage counselor who said: "broken relationships can begin healing when we stop doing things that push the other away, and start doing things that draw us closer together." Aha. It's still true.

We can grow in our faith and in our walk and in our identity in Christ when we stop focusing on the world around us and start focusing on Christ. We can be renewed in our mind when we stop pursuing our old desires and start pursuing Christ desires.

So what is your stop/start this morning? What is that one area in your life that the Spirit is poking you about? What is an old part of you that God is asking you to take off, to put to death in order for him to breath new life into you in a new way? Your homework this week is to spend time prayerfully considering what God is asking you to stop, and what he is asking you to start, and then ask him for help. He promises to equip you and strengthen you and help you to grow into his image by the power of his Spirit.

In order to be the people that God has intended us to be, we have to put off our old self. Next week Doug is going to talk about what it looks like to put on our new selves in his image. Its going to be exciting. Let's pray.