

Who We Are And How We Got To Be This Way - colossians 3:9-17

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[0 : 00] to each other, since you've taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which has been renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator. Here there is neither Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you are called to peace and be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen.

Thank you, Alan. Ralph moved into the pulpit here. He's got everything there. So thank you very much for leading us in worship and bringing us to this point, Ralph. A very worshipful morning. Let's pray and then we'll get to looking into the text here. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that your word is truth, that we can sing your word, that we can proclaim your word, we can read your word, we can hear your word, and that we know that your word proclaims the truth of Jesus Christ and who he is and what he has done. We ask that you would strike us anew with just the majesty of who you are and the work you have done on our behalf through Christ in your gospel. In his name we pray. Amen.

Well, we're at a part of Colossians here where Paul is getting very practical. He's getting very moving out of the deeply theological portions of his letter to this church in Colossae and he's getting very practical and today he's going to say, what do God's people look like? He's going to start to answer that question and define what it means to look like a Christian. And I know maybe you have in your head what an American looks like. I can tell, it's funny, I can see American tourists in Ireland now. I couldn't see that before. I still look like one, I'm well aware. But when we drive, it's funny because at first the roads were so narrow and we would pull over to the side and then now we're driving and someone pulls over and we go, ha, not Irish. And we drive right past them and we could tell when someone doesn't look quite like they're Irish or from another country. And that's fine that God's made us all in his image. But we could start to look at Christians and say, what do Christians look like? And this is not a new question. This was a common question in Paul's day. We have to remember, Christianity was brand new. There was Judaism, which was very old and very accepted by the Roman Empire. And people knew what it looked like to be Jewish. And then there was the Greco-Roman world and their old worship of old deities, pagan deities. And some of those had been modified a little by the Romans, but you kind of knew what that looked like. But what did a Christian look like?

And why? There's a very interesting first century letter, maybe early second century letter, where where the author is writing to a man named Diognisius. And we looked at it a couple months or a month or so ago. But the purpose of the letter from a Christian to a non-Christian, he says, is to answer the question of what Christians look like and why. He says, most excellent Diognisius, I can see that you deeply desire to learn why and how Christians worship their God and live the way they do. So it's a common question from the non-Christians to the Christians. Who are you and why? The author of this letter says, you have so carefully and earnestly asked your questions about them. He says, one, you have asked, what is it about the God they believe in and the form of religion they

observe that they are able to look down upon the world and despise death and have something forward to look forward to? And we looked at that last week, right? Christians can look forward to heaven and the things of this world grow strangely dim.

He says, you've also asked, why do Christians reject the Greek superstitions and Jewish customs alike? And we saw that a couple of weeks ago with Jewish tradition and Greek gods and how those have been rejected and should still be rejected. And he says, and now you want to know about the affection they have for each other. And that's what we're going to see this week and next week. And I point that out to tell you that, that this is common in Paul's day. Who are Christians and what do they look like and why? And this sort of mindset reflects Paul's language to the Colossians here. And so what we're going to do today is we're going to go through this passage and we're going to answer these two questions as we move through three parts of the passage. Okay. We're going to say, what type of people are Christians called to be? What should a Christian look like and why? What should Christians look like and why? Okay. And first Paul says that Christians are a people who are honest about their shortcomings, honest about our shortcomings, because we are being renewed in the image of Christ.

[6 : 30] Okay. We're honest about our shortcomings because we're being renewed in the image of Christ. Let's look at verses nine through 10. Paul simply says, do not lie to each other since you have taken off the old self with its practices and you've put on the new self, which is, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator. So first we want to note, this is a command. Okay. This is from the apostle Paul by the spirit written down in God's word to us. Do not lie to each other. It's a very real command. And we maybe want to ask why, why does Paul even need to say that? Isn't that just common sense when we just kind of assume we're not supposed to lie to each other? Well, it's, it's interesting to note that in, in the first century world, your religion did not necessarily mean you had to be a moral person. What I mean by that is you could offer a sacrifice to a Greek God. And that was that, and that, that actually didn't have to have anything to do with the way you live life.

As long as you went to the temple and you gave some sort of offering or sacrifice, you could go do whatever you want. And in fact, if you read the Greek literature, you'll see that even the Greek gods themselves are constantly lying. They're lying to each other and they're lying to the people.

And you can read in the, the Iliad and the Odyssey, how Zeus, he plays tricks on people. He says, Oh, I'll do this for this person, but really this is what I'm doing. I'm going to trick them. I'll lie to them. And so Paul has to say, you can't be like that. Do not lie to each other.

And maybe we say, well, that was, that was the Colossians problem. We don't lie anymore today. Come on. Psychology today says in the States, I'm sure the Irish are more sanctified in the States. People lie two and a half to three times per day, more than we brush our teeth. One article said, I found that to be funny. Either we have really bad breath or we lie a lot in the States, but it says two to two and a half to three times per day. Half a lie is a whole lie. So we'll say three times per day. And so lying was a problem in Colossae back then. And it's a problem still today.

[8 : 40] Well, why do we lie? Psychologists say in general, we lie to obtain protection. We want to protect ourselves. We want to protect our interests. Primarily, we want to protect our image. We want others to think well of us. And yet we all know that we do things, have done things and constantly do things that would cause them to think less of us. Therefore, we lie to cover it up in order to avoid suffering a lack of a loss of respect. We cover up our lives or we lie about things we haven't done in order to make ourselves look better. But in general, we're promoting our own image when we lie. So to sum it up, I would say we lie because of pride and perceived control. Those would be the root issues, the root reasons why. Pride and perceived control. Now what Christianity says is when it comes to God, we have nothing to be proud of. And we have no control. We don't bring anything to the table, so to speak, when it comes to God. We can't stand up and say,

God, look how incredible I am. We're not. We are beautiful in His image, but we've distorted that. And we cannot control God. We can't make Him do what we want. But we can try to control others. We can try to protect our image, and thus we lie. Scripture says we are born into sin, and we perpetuate sin. And we can't tell God what we'll do about it, or even what we think He should do about it. So pride and self-control, pride and perceived control are at the root. And so what does God do about it? Now I would argue, if you look in your scripture here at verse 9, that the text is actually more God-centered than the translation gives it credit for. Okay, I would argue the literal translation from Greek should say this, your old selves have been disarmed or stripped off you.

Okay, and we'll keep going with that in a little bit here. But your old selves have been stripped away or disarmed. It's the same word that Paul used in Colossians 2.15, where he says God disarmed the rulers and authorities, or stripped away their power. Same word Paul's using. But what he's done is he's changed it from an active verb to a passive verb. And we'll keep going with that in a little bit, but it should say, I would argue that the literal translation would sound more like, do not lie to each other since your old selves have been disarmed and stripped off you. God's work, past tense. Okay, so we're going to have to really focus on the acting agent of these verbs and the time when they occur. And what Paul says is, God's work, past tense, this is your left, past tense. So here's my timeline, past, present, future. And in the past, God did the acting on the object, which is us, that he stripped off our old self. We received his work passively.

Then he says, and your new selves have been put on. Again, God's work, past tense. And then you are being renewed. Still God's work. Present tense. In the image of our creator.

So we have three verbs, all of which are showing God at work. In the past, he has stripped off our old self. In the past, he has put on our new self. And now in the present, he is renewing us in his image.

[12:59] Okay, you tracking with me? I know it's very technical, but I think it's going to be very important. It's worth the work here. All of the action is being done by God, and we are merely the recipients.

Remember, we said we lie because of pride and perceived control. But Christianity says, when it comes to God, you have been made new. You have nothing to be proud of. It was his work. And you are being renewed. Present tense. Christianity says, you are not nearly as in control as you think. Therefore, we can just be honest about who we are and what God is doing. We do not need to lie to one another about who we are or what God is doing. That need was crucified at the cross.

And now we can be honest. This is what happened in the past. My old self was stripped away. In the past, a new self was put on me. And right here in the present, I am being renewed.

[14:07] All of this is God's work. And I can just be honest about that reality. I don't need to lie to others about who I am. It's interesting to note that biblically, lying is not just considered to be the act of making a false statement.

Biblically, lying is to deny the truth as represented by God Himself. You can read Romans 1 and 2 and see that. That lying is to deny the truth.

Or to deny what God has done and what He is doing. To deny those truths is to lie. To deny these truths is to lie to one another. And so as a Christian, I can boldly proclaim, I'm not perfect.

But I'm getting better. I'm becoming more Christ-like. Because of what God has done and is doing. He stripped off my old self. He put on my new self. And He's renewing me in His image. And He's stripped off your old self.

[15:15] And He's put on your new self. And He's renewing you in His image, day by day, week by week, year by year. And we can be honest about that reality.

And what Paul's doing is he's starting to talk about the difference between justification, past tense, what legally happened, and sanctification, present tense, what is going on.

Wednesday night, we will dig into that much more deeply than we are today. Paul's laying the foundation. Wednesday night, we'll really sink our teeth into it. But we've got to start wrestling with these terms.

They're good terms to know. Justification, God did it, past tense. Sanctification, ongoing, present work. So that's the first thing Paul says is, as Christians, we are people who are honest about our shortcomings.

Because we are being renewed in the image of Christ. Secondly, Paul says we are defined by love and forgiveness. Because we are loved and forgiven.

[16:20] Look with me at verses 11 through 14. He says in verse 11, Here, that is in the church, There is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Scythian or barbarian, slave or free.

But Christ is all and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, look at this word now, clothe yourselves. We'll come back to that. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Verse 13, Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love which binds them

all together in perfect unity.

I don't know if you caught it, but Paul did something very clever there. In verse 12, he said, Clothe yourselves. He used the exact same word as he used in verse 10.

And duo is the Greek word. Actively, it's to clothe yourself. Passively, it's to have someone clothe you. So verse 10, Paul said, Past tense, passively, God has clothed us.

[17:39] And in verse 12, he says, Present tense now, actively, put your clothes on. That's very interesting what he did. It's very clever. It's beautiful Greek. Paul is extremely intelligent.

Hard for me to keep up with sometimes. Verse 10, God clothes you. Verse 12, put your clothes on. I can see little kids going, What are you talking about? God clothed me, therefore I need to put my clothes on.

Yes, that's exactly what he says. So what should I put on then? Exactly what he clothes you with. Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Gentleness.

Patience. Bearing with each other and forgiving one another. Put it on. I thought God put it on me.

He did. So put it on. It's exactly what Paul just said. You say, what does a Christian look like?

What does a Christian in Ireland look like? What does a Christian in Kosovo look like? Or anywhere else in the world? Paul says they look exactly like God made them to look like. And they look like the clothing that they put on.

[18:39] Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Gentleness. And patience. Forgiving each other. And loving each other. You say, well, why?

Why do Christians look like this? Because that's exactly how God has treated us. It's exactly what he's done for us and is doing in us.

Verse 12. Don't miss that. As God's chosen people. Holy and dearly loved. How come I can be loving?

Because I've been dearly loved. How can I be holy? Because I've been made holy. And then at the end of verse 13. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

He's saying Christians are defined by love and forgiveness because we are loved and forgiven.

Notice his illustration he uses in verse 11.

[19:40] In the church there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised. Barbarian or Scythian, slave or free. But Christ is in all, is all and is in all.

It's important to note that each of those are opposites. They're actually enemies. Hey, Gentile, Jew, circumcised, uncircumcised. The Gentiles and the Jewish mind are inhabiting the Jews' land.

The Jews and the Gentiles' mind can be a bit of a problem. They're natural enemies. Brought together in one body.

Barbarian is to be slave. Scythian is to be Roman. Again, they're natural enemies. At the Colossae, we're at the edge of the Roman borders. And so to be in a church with natural enemies would be normal for these people.

Paul says all that stuff's gone now. Remember verse 9? It's been stripped off. It's not who you are. You're Christians. You're all now equally one people in Christ.

[20:52] Chosen, holy, dearly loved, and forgiven. That's why we have to understand that as Christians, love and forgiveness, love and forgiveness are our greatest apologetic.

You can know theology. You can know scientific facts. You can have all kinds of words to say. But if we cannot love and forgive other people, we cannot show people what it looks like to be a Christian. Does Jesus say in John 13, 35? He says, By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. If you love one another.

He doesn't say because you can make great arguments. He doesn't say because of anything else, but because you can love one another. And you say, Well, how could I love this way? Because that's how we've been loved.

How can I forgive? Because we've been forgiven. For what does Jesus say as they nail Him to the cross? Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.

[21:57] See, Christianity, it teaches that Christ entered into our suffering and He suffered on a greater scale than we could ever imagine. And yet in the midst of that suffering, in the fallen world, He loved us and forgave us.

See, only in Christianity does this God enter into our suffering and love us and forgive us in ways that we never deserved or could ever imagine.

This is why Christians look different than other people. Because we are different than other people.

We have been loved. We have been forgiven. Which is why Paul can say that a group of people who were once naturally enemies can now be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, loving and forgiving with each other.

D.A. Carson says it very well. He says, The church itself is not made up of natural friends. But the church is made up of natural enemies.

[23 : 08] And we see that in verse 11, don't we? He says, What binds the church together is not common education. It's not common race. It's not common income levels. It's not common politics.

It's not common nationality. It's not common accents. It's not common jobs. It's nothing of the sort. What binds the church together is that we have been saved by Jesus Christ.

And we owe Him a common allegiance. And in this light, the church is a band of natural enemies who love and forgive one another for Jesus' sake.

Everything we do is because of what has been done on our behalf. We are people who can be honest about our shortcomings because God has done work on us and is doing work in us.

He's renewing us. We are people who are defined by love and forgiveness because we are loved and forgiven. And then third, Paul says, Christians are a people who are responsive to God's Word in worship because we are at peace with God through Christ.

[24 : 25] And in this part, we're going to round out this sermon with this part and then we'll bring it into next week as well. But we are responsive to God's Word in worship because we are at peace with God through Christ.

Look, if you will, with me at verses 15-17. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace and be thankful.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Paul says Christians are a people who are responsive to God's Word in worship because we are at peace with God through Christ.

Now it's interesting to note what Paul says is worship can be deed, word, and or song. All three can be worship. They're forms of worship. And I would say worship properly defined is this.

[25 : 35] Worship is our response to having obtained to some degree something that we deeply desire. Worship is our response to having obtained to some degree something we deeply desire.

And that response can be done via word, deed, or song. So if you want to think of an illustration, you can think of men at a sporting event.

And you can all go home today and turn on any telly. Telly? Did I say it right? We would say TV. I don't know why. Telly. And you can watch men and women worship today. I guarantee you, find a sporting event and you will see worship.

I watched the rugby. I'm just learning rugby. And I'm sorry, Rob. I'll have to tell you. Yep. But Rob told me watch Australia versus New Zealand. Apparently it's some sort of little rivalry.

And I saw people worship yesterday. A lot of them were Australian. New Zealanders worshiped at times. But I saw a lot of Australians worship.

[26 : 41] And in the States right now, they're gearing up for American football, which I learned yesterday. We just stole rugby and made a couple of odd changes. But if you go to an American football stadium or if you watch a rugby match or hurling or football, you will see a group of people obtain to some degree something they deeply desire.

Yesterday it was the, correct me if I say it, the Aussies. Is that right? The Aussies were obtaining something they deeply desired, which was to beat New Zealand. And every time they obtained to some degree that thing that they desired, you saw a response in word, deed, and singing.

You can see it all over the screen. And I've been in those stadiums and I've had my team that I wanted to obtain that victory. And when they do, boy, guys who are so quiet during the singing at church are chest bumping and just high-fiving and knocking each other over and drinks are raised in the air and they're singing and there's words and there's a celebration.

Because something that was deeply desired was obtained to some degree and the response was worship. So as Christians, our lives are a response to what we have obtained.

Through Christ, we have obtained something that we instinctively, deeply desire and that is to be at peace with God. And because we see in God's Word which proclaims the message of salvation

which proclaims that we have been put back into a relationship of peace with God.

[28 : 25] As we see that and we hear that and that sinks in, that need for that to have been obtained results in worship, in lives of worship, in word, deed, and song.

Christians are more responsive to God's Word and worship. Because in God's Word we see that we are at peace with God through Christ Jesus.

So what does a Christian look like? Why? And why? What does a Christian look like and why? Well, it looks like someone who's honest about their shortcomings. There's nothing quite like having a Christian just be completely honest about who they are.

It's striking. It grabs your attention. Why can they be so honest about their shortcomings? Because they recognize they are being renewed. They are being renewed in the image of their Creator.

A Christian looks like someone who is loving and forgiving. Why? Why can they be so loving? Why can they be so forgiving with each other? Oh, because we've been so deeply loved and forgiven. A Christian looks like someone celebrating with all of life.

[29 : 40] living a life of worship in word, deed, and song because they're at peace with God through Christ. So to apply that to our lives now, I would just simply ask, is this your desire?

Is your desire to look like this? And if so, why? Do I want these things to describe my life? Do you want these things to describe your life?

If someone were to say, what does, and they were to say your name, what does this person look like? Would you want these things to be how you're described? And why?

So if you don't want these things to describe your life, I think it's worth asking, why wouldn't you want that to describe you? And going to the other end of the extreme and saying, what's the opposite? The opposite would be someone who is deceitful, who hates others, holds grudges, and falsely worships false gods.

And I'd be willing to bet that most of us, we don't want that to describe our lives. You wouldn't want someone to say, hey, what's Alan like? Oh, he's this horrible, deceitful person.

[30 : 55] He hates people. He holds a grudge. And he's always just falsely worshiping false gods like rugby teams. No, we don't want that to define us. Most people don't.

But why? Why would we want these things to define us? Why would we want someone to say, this person looks like this? And I would say it's one of two things, either self-righteousness or righteous response.

See, self-righteousness says, I want to look this way so that, and it starts in the present, and it goes towards the future. I want to look this way so that God will accept me in the future.

I want to be an honest, loving, forgiving, worshipful person so that when I die, God will accept me. That's self-righteousness.

That won't get you anywhere with God. That's to completely miss how holy and righteous He is. But a righteous response says, I want to look this way because that's what my Savior looks like.

[32 : 10] I want to look this way because that's how God has dressed me. I want to look this way because of what He has done for me, in me, and through me.

And that's what makes Christianity different from every other religion out there. The Grindys talked about the number of Muslims that they have to minister to, and that's every other religion that has got that same idea.

I'm going to get better here in the present so that in the future I can be accepted. And Christianity is the only religion that says, you've been made new.

Your old self's been stripped off. A new you's been put on. God is renewing you. Therefore, respond in righteousness.

Respond as who you are because of the work God has done through Christ Jesus. And because of what God has done, we can say whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we can do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[33 : 16] giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Whatever we do, and we'll look more at that next week, whatever we do, whether it's here in Karagline or it's overseas, whether it's at work or at home, whether it's with children or adults, whatever we do, we can do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Let's pray. Father, we thank You so much for the work You have done.

Lord, we often take for granted all that You have done. We recognize that at times we are guilty of thinking that You haven't done enough and maybe we need to add to what You've done.

Would You remind us over and over again today and this week and this month, Lord, of all that You have done in the past and all that You are doing even today.

And yet, with that in mind, Lord, would You cause us to respond in righteousness? Would You remind us that You have made us new? You have put new clothes on us and would You remind us that now we need to put on our clothes?

[34 : 33] would You have done us? Would You deeply stir in our hearts the desire to respond to what You have done and what You are doing?

Lord, would You continue to renew us so that all of our lives would look like worship in word and deed and song? Would we rejoice in who You are? Would we rejoice in what You've done?

Would we call others to come and taste and see everything that has been done through Jesus Christ? Would You lead us into lives of worship for Your glory and for Jesus' sake.

Amen.