

Life in Christ

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[0:00] If, then, you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds 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, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing one another, and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other.

[1:18] As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

And be thankful. 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. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Well, what does it look like to grow as a Christian?

What does it look like to grow as a Christian? Paul's been saying to the Colossian church, stick with Jesus because Jesus is all you need. But what does that actually mean for how Christians grow day by day, week by week, year by year?

It seems the Colossians had come to trust Jesus, but were tempted to try and grow through human tradition and philosophical ideas, through spiritual experiences, through guilt-tripping one another and beating their bodies into submission.

[2:33] Maybe we see something of that in ourselves as we seek to try and grow as Christians. We set ourselves rules that we'll definitely keep.

We try to follow particular religious rituals. Does it work? No. Now, Paul was quick to warn about that kind of thing in chapter 2.

Have a look at the end of chapter 2, verse 23. These things, human tradition and the like, they appear wise, but they're of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

They don't work. So if not rules and rituals, how can the Colossian church grow? Now, that's really the question left hanging at the end of chapter 2.

How are they to fight sin and become more and more like Jesus their Lord? Well, Paul lays out a three-fold strategy. You can follow along on the handout that was hopefully in your service sheet.

[3:37] And no surprise for guessing, it's going to involve sticking with Jesus, because Jesus is all we need. You see, the same gospel message that saves Christians is the same gospel message that grows Christians.

And maybe we've been Christians for years and years. We're tired of trying to grow. Not sure we're doing it right. Maybe we've got to a point and then kind of plateaued.

Or maybe we've just settled. And we've got a number of pet sins that we can't fight anymore. It could be, though, we're new to following Jesus. And we're desperate to grow. But we just don't know what that looks like. Paul wants to help us. God uses this letter, wants to use this letter to help us grow.

It might be you're here and you're not a Christian. And you've heard someone say, you know, Christianity is all about Jesus. What does that actually mean? What would it look like to follow Jesus?

[4:43] Hopefully you'll get a glimpse of that this morning. So what is Paul's strategy for Christian growth? Well, firstly and primarily, we're to fix our hearts and minds on Christ.

Because he is our life. Have a look at chapter 3, verse 1 with me. 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 minds 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 who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Seek the things above. Set your mind on the things above. Well, that's clear enough. But why?

What's up there? Verse 1. Seek the things that are above. Where Christ is. Seated at the right hand of God. Paul's call to the Colossians.

[5:43] Fix your hearts and minds. Gaze upon Christ who is raised and seated at the right hand of God. But there's more going on than Paul just saying, Jesus is up in heaven, look at him.

And to get to grips with that, we're going to pause for a moment and consider the amazing Christian doctrine of union with Christ. It's the truth that someone, a Christian who puts their trust in Jesus is united to him.

Like a husband and wife are described as being one. Christ and the Christian are in union. All that I have, my sin and rebellion against God, it becomes his.

And he deals with it at the cross. And all that he has becomes mine. And so before God, in Christ, I have his moral purity and perfection.

And I get to enjoy his relationship with his father as if it were my own. Imagine Jesus, the pilot of the Christ plane.

[6:49] And Christians, his passengers. Where he goes, we go. Or take the idea that Paul uses of Christ as the head and the church as his body.

United to him. In him, we go wherever he goes. There's loads more that could be said about union with Christ, but that's something of it. Now, we often describe Christians as people who follow Jesus.

Or who have trusted Jesus. Or they're disciples of Jesus. Or believers in Jesus. And those are all good descriptions. But Paul often uses this union with Christ language. Saying we're in Christ.

Or in him. Or with him. Just flick back with me to chapter 1, verse 2. 1, 1, 8, 3. If you've lost it. Colossians 1, verse 2.

Paul says, he's writing this letter. To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. It's an odd way to phrase their address, isn't it?

[7:56] Where do they live? Well, they spend time in. They reside at. You can find them in that city.

In Colossae. But their true location. Their primary address. In Christ. It comes again in chapter 1, verse 13 and 14.

Have a look. He, God, has delivered us from the domain of darkness. And transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son. In whom.

We have redemption. The forgiveness of sins. How do I have redemption? How are my sins forgiven? In Christ. Flick over the page.

Have a look at chapter 2, verse 6 and 7 as well. The Colossians became Christians by receiving Christ. Christ. And they keep going as Christians by walking in him.

[8:54] Rooted and built up in him. We could go through the whole book like this. And we'd see we've been filled in him. Circumcised in him. Buried with him.

We've died with him. And been made alive with him. And here, back in chapter 3, verse 1. Raised with him. So notice again where Christ is.

Verse 1. Seated at the right hand of God. And if we're in Christ, where are we?

We're seated at God's right hand too. In Christ, we're seated at God's right hand. Is that not staggering? Have a look again at verse 2.

Set your minds on things that are above. Not on things that are on earth. Why? Verse 3, 4. Because you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

[9:59] Where do I live? Where is my life? In our flat? In London? In the UK? Well, sort of. But not really. My life above all else is located in Christ.

And so Paul's logic is this. Fix your hearts or minds on what is above. Why? Because there Christ is. And there you are with him. He is your life.

So fix your heart and mind on him. You see, in union with the supreme Lord Jesus. United to the one who has completely rescued us from sin and death.

Our lives are utterly wrapped up in Christ. With God at his right hand. So we fix our hearts and minds on that reality.

When I was learning to drive, my mum would take me out to practice. And one evening we were driving down a narrow country road. A huge hedge on the left hand side.

[11:01] It's all fine until over the hill comes a huge lorry with bright beaming lights coming straight at us. I slightly panic, but mum really panics. And as quick as she can, she passes on to me her top tips.

She says, don't focus on the hedge and don't focus on the lorry or look at the lights. Look straight ahead. Focus on where you want to go. Fix your attention on the gap.

We've chatted about it afterwards and it worked. But we chatted about it afterwards. And she said, look, if you focus on the hedge or on the lights, you might just drift. So fix your gaze ahead where you want to go.

And Paul is trying to get the Colossians and us to do something similar. As we seek to live for Christ and grow and fight sin, he says, don't focus on things that are on earth.

Don't focus on rules or regulations or guilt tripping yourselves. Don't focus on gritted teeth. That's not the way to grow. Rather, fix your hearts and minds on Christ.

[12:07] Your life. That's the basis for Christian growth. But next on the strategy plan. And as a result of the truth of verse 1 to 4, Paul says, we're to now be who we are.

Putting to death what is dead. All the behaviours that Paul is talking about flow out of the truth of our new identity in Christ. We're like adopted children learning to live out our new life in our new family. Or like a butterfly transformed from a caterpillar now learning to use its new wings. Paul wants to show the Colossians what living there in Christ's life will look like.

And there are some things that need to go. He says, because you've died and your life is hidden with Christ. Verse 5. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you.

Sexual immorality. Impurity. Passion. Evil desire. And covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked when you were living in them.

[13:17] But now you must put them all away. Anger. Wrath. Malice.

Slander. And obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another. Seeing that you've put off the old self with its practices.

And put on the new. It's an ugly list, isn't it? Full of self-indulgent sinful behavior. And self-important attitudes and speech.

And so serious are these things that verse 6, Paul says, on account of these, the wrath of God is coming. And where they exist in the Christian's life, they need to be cut off.

Like a surgeon getting rid of a gangrenous or diseased limb. They've got to go. When I was at the University of Lincoln, I played for this hockey club.

University of Lincoln hockey club. We had this nice blue kit. It's smart and it still fits. I'm quite pleased about that. We had a set of particular rules and tactics for team life.

[14:19] We had distinctive chance and ways of doing things. But when I left, that life died. It was over.

And now I've joined a new club. I have a new team. A new hockey life. And a new kit that also fits. There's a new way of doing things, therefore.

The old University of Lincoln tactics and chants don't belong in the new club. They've got to go. Paul wants to be clear. There are certain things that don't belong in this new life in Christ either. I wonder what grabbed you most as we read through Paul's list of some of the things that need to be put to death. Have a glance over it again. And where we see them in ourselves, we need to cut them off.

By way of example, we're going to consider sexual immorality and anger together briefly. Paul says, Put to death, therefore, sexual immorality. Whether it's pornography and masturbation.

[15:31] Whether it's the pull of erotic or romantic literature and fantasy. Or the secret excitement of the inappropriate relationship at work.

Wherever sexual sin lurks, Paul says, That's not who you are anymore. Put that to death. And so the next time sexual immorality flares up within us, and that temptation comes, first and foremost, we need to fix our hearts and minds on Christ.

Christ, he is our life. And then we need to put to death what doesn't belong. And throw it away along with our old way of life.

Put to death what is dead. Or take anger. Maybe it's the fly off the handle rage when we get home and things aren't how we'd like them to be. More likely for us, I imagine it's the subtle, quiet, seething inside.

And it needs to be put to death as well. I'm told children can expose anger in their parents like nothing else. I'm sure none of you know that to be true. But maybe we struggle with it at work when things don't go our way.

[16:50] Or maybe driving our cars exposes it most. It doesn't belong. And so the next time I'm driving around and somebody else does something stupid and anger comes to me and seeks to take over, I need my heart and mind fixed on Christ.

And as I consider him above all else, as I consider all that I have in him, I realize again, I've done more, much more than drive stupidly.

And I deserve God's anger. Yet I'm seated with Christ. I've been given grace. My sin has been dealt with. God has not shown me the anger I deserve.

And like nothing else, that reality will diffuse this anger and help me put it to death. I take it we'll fail lots at this.

We'll seek to fix our hearts and minds on Christ and we'll not manage it and we'll fall into sin. We'll succumb to temptation. It's hard to grow in the Christian life.

[17:59] But there is much grace for our failures. And if we're trusting Jesus, we're already seated in Christ. Our place on the team is secure.

So we confess our sin. We remember who we are and we go again. I say to grow, we fix our hearts and minds on Christ above where our life is.

And we put to death what is dead. And thirdly, we're to be who we now are, putting on Christ-likeness. You see, Paul's plan doesn't leave us putting off, cutting off old behavior.

There's a beauty to be embraced and put on. Notice again, all he's about to say flows out of a new identity. Verse 12, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, be who you now are.

Put on. Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Meekness. And patience. Bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you.

[19:12] So you also must forgive. And above all, he's put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. It's like I need to learn to work out.

I need to work out and learn how my new hockey team functions and plays. I'm in. But I need to get to grips with what characterizes them. And primarily, my job is to listen to and follow the lead of my captain.

And Paul's saying here, fix your hearts and minds on your captain and copy his ways. Again, I wonder what grabbed you in the list. It's interesting that it's all corporate.

It's all about how we relate together as a church. It seems Paul knows that we'll annoy and frustrate and hurt each other. Hence the need for putting on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and

patience.

And hence the need to bear with one another. Quick to forgive and put on love. Where others hurt us, it might be right that we mention it to them in humility and talk to them about it.

[20:28] But above all, it definitely will be right that we forgive them. Just as God has forgiven us. And the devil would love it if the church were full of infighting.

But verse 15, we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, to which indeed you were called, in one body. Jesus' death has brought us peace with God and therefore with each other.

So there's no place in the church family for civil war. We grow together, fixing our hearts and minds on Christ as one body, bearing with one another and putting on love.

And as we do verse 16, have a look at what Paul says. 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.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. This talk of the word of Christ dwelling in us richly is central to all our growth.

[21:45] if we are to fix our hearts and minds on Christ our life, we'll need to know who he is and what he's done. And if we're to put to death our sin, those things which Christ hates in us, we're going to need to know what that is.

And if we're to put on his likeness and grow in Christ's likeness, we'll need to know how he behaves and what he does. And so we'll need to open our Bibles and read of him.

So as the word of Christ dwells in me richly, the end of verse 10 happens. Have a look. This new self, this in Christ Jake, is renewed in knowledge after the image of his creator.

As I open and read and ponder Christ in all of the Bible, God reshapes my mind and I'm made to think more and more like Jesus.

And then my behavior follows. So what might it look like for us to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly? For sure, being at church and getting to growth group will help as well as regular daily Bible reading.

[23:07] Though never just for the sake of it. Dwelling richly gives a sense of deep pondering and real consideration, doesn't it? Taking time to really think it through.

Maybe we could listen to God's word on the way to work. Perhaps we could read a psalm as we give thanks over dinner. in a couple of weeks Andy will tell us more about a family advent reading resource he and Alice have put together.

Using that could be a great way of applying Colossians 3 verse 16. I've been thinking recently too, at the end of the service, a reflection on myself I hope more than anybody else.

At the end of the service I close the Bible and I put it on the chair and I have no intention of picking it up again until next week. I wonder if we took our Bibles to the TQ, if we might be more likely to open them again with each other.

Then we could teach each other things that we didn't understand. We could encourage each other that bit quicker with our highlights from the passage. And on occasion it might make it easier when we need to admonish, when we need to warn somebody of something.

[24:23] And maybe you notice me speaking maliciously. I hope you might come to me and say look Jake, my brother, please can we sit down and just have a quick look at Colossians 3.

Show me what Paul says here and tell me, Jake, that's not you anymore. You're in Christ. Put away those malicious words. And then pray with me and encourage me to fix my mind and heart on Christ.

With love, doing that, we do each other such good. And we do each other such good as we sing together as well. As we encourage each other to believe the truths that we're singing by belting them out loud and clear for all to see and hear.

And the singing doesn't have to stop at the end of church. Let the word of Christ dwell richly as you listen to great Christian music at home or in the car and sing praise with thankfulness in your hearts. be who you now are.

Christ's people putting on his likeness. So how will the Colossians grow? How can we fight sin and become more and more like our captain?

[25:40] If we've been Christians for years and given up or settled with little pet sins, here's an opportunity to get going again. If we've been following Jesus for a short time, here's Paul's strategy for fighting sin and growing.

This is what the day-by-day Christian life looks like. We help each other to fix our hearts and minds on Christ above. He is our life. And we help each other be the people we now are, putting to death what is dead and putting on the likeness of Christ.

And as that happens, we'll be a beautiful, growing church ready to take on Paul's charge of verse 17. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let's pray. Our Father, it's hard to grow in the Christian life.

It's hard to fight our sin and become more like Jesus. Jesus. And we pray, please, that the reality of our identity in Christ, that we've been raised with him, that we've died and our life is hidden with Christ in God.

[26:58] Please, with that reality, help us to grow, spur us on to put to death what is dead and put on Christ's likeness. Please help us this week, we pray, for your glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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