

(3) Resurrection power in Christ

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[0 : 00] Please turn in the Bibles to Colossians chapter 3, you'll find it on page 1185. Colossians chapter 3, page 1185.

And I'm going to read from verses 1 to 14. Colossians chapter 3, verse 1. 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 earthly things. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ to his your life appears, then you also will 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.

[1 : 16] Do not lie to one another, seeing that you've 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 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. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Thanks, Simon, for reading those verses to us. Please do keep your Bibles open there on page 1185 and you might like to take that separate sheet that was given to you on the way in.

Let me pray for us again before we start. Father God, we do praise you that as the Bible is read and taught and preached, you, the living God, are speaking to us by the power of your Holy Spirit.

[2 : 48] And so we ask that you would help us to listen to you now, speak to all of us, we pray, through our minds, to motivate our hearts, to activate our wills.

We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. What difference does it make being a Christian? Do you ever get asked that question?

My friends or colleagues? I got asked that very question the other day. Straight up, someone just said, Mark, what difference does Jesus Christ make to your life?

Not just for the future in heaven, but here and now on earth. And I think their assumption behind the question was, well, it didn't make much of a difference at all.

So I think this person probably viewed being a Christian, following Jesus, something like a plane ticket. He's great for flying you off to heaven in the future, but he's not much use in the present, in the here and now.

[3 : 58] And it can be quite a common attitude to following Jesus, can it not? Yeah, great for eternal life, not much use for real life. Now, even though as Christians we wouldn't put it as starkly as that, I wonder whether at times we can be tempted to think in similar ways.

You become a Christian and in many ways life just carries on as normal. If we're teenagers, still got teen problems, teen angst, student debt, crying babies, getting ill, global warming, I mean, these things don't disappear when you become a Christian, you don't just become sort of superhuman.

Life just seems to just carry on as normal. And it could just be at times we're tempted to think, has anything really changed? Now, what difference does it make being a Christian now?

Are we just holding on to this plane ticket for heaven? Or is there something more significant going on in our lives? Something that does make a difference in the here and now?

Well, Colossians 3 has the answer. Yes, following Jesus does make a difference. All the difference in the world. And it starts by realising and appreciating the new identity that we have in Jesus Christ.

[5 : 25] So if you're joining us today after the half-term break, as Simon said, this is the third of four talks looking at the life-changing implications of our union with Christ.

In the first talk, we saw there is no condemnation for those in Christ. We are free forever from the penalty of sin. In the second talk, we saw that believers are dead to sin in Christ.

We are free completely forever from the reigning ruling power of sin. Well, if that's what Christians have been saved from, today we're going to see what Christians are saved for.

A brand new lifestyle shaped by a brand new identity. So the main thing I want us to go away with today, we're saved for this brand new lifestyle shaped by a brand new identity.

Now in verses 1-4 of Colossians 3, we are told about our new identity in Christ. And in verses 5-14, God begins to spell out through the Apostle Paul what this new lifestyle is.

[6 : 32] And it's really vital that we see that it comes up in this order. Identity first and then lifestyle. Because as I want us to see if you're looking at the handout under 3.2, it's our identity which always shapes our behaviour.

We have to understand who we are first before we can live out what God wants us to live out. Knowing who you are, where you get your identity, your self-worth from, it always works its way out in the way you live.

So let me just give you a somewhat trivial example just to show that. Think of Euro 2008 started yesterday. Football teams, each football team has 11 players, each player has his own position in the team, his own identity, his own role.

And of course it's vital they know what their identity, their position is so they know how to play. If you're the goalie, that's who you are, obviously you're going to stop the ball going into the net and you can use your hands to do so.

If you're not a goalie, you don't use your hands. And no comments about Maradona. Defenders defend, midfielders win the ball, strikers strike. You get the point depending on who you are, what your identity is, it shapes the way you act, you live.

[7 : 45] It's pretty obvious. Identity, knowing who you are, shapes behaviour. And this is not just true in the case of a sports team. This is true in the whole of life.

So we're all defined by something. We all choose to assign ourselves some identity to give us self-worth, to give us identity, to know who we are, to give us purpose, what we live for. Something that defines who we are.

And whatever that something is, it will shape the way we live. So for example, it might be a career that defines you. I'm a lawyer.

I'm a doctor. I'm an accountant. Perhaps not. You can define yourself by that. But if you do, if you identify yourself by your career, well you might find yourself talking about your job a lot.

How important your job is. How successful you are. You might pour a ton of energy and time into your career. And actually, if it defines you, this is where you get your sense of self-worth, your identity.

[8 : 46] Actually, it will become your number one priority in your life. Your identity shapes behaviour. It might be your relationships that define you. I'm a wife.

I'm a father. I'm a son. I'm a daughter. I'm a great friend. And if this is where your identity is what defines you, again, all your energy will be poured into that.

You want to be the best spouse, best parent, best friend you can be. Because this is who you are. And you might find yourself comparing yourselves to others. You might wonder if you're as good as a mum as so-and-so.

You might get jealous of other people and the way they are in their relationships. Or if it's the opinion of others that define you. He's such a great bloke.

She's such a friendly neighbour. He's such good fun. She's so wise. Again, this is your identity. You'll do everything you can to maintain your reputation. You'll play up to this identity in social situations, wanting to impress people, caring what they think of you.

[9 : 51] You and I, we always live out some kind of identity. Now, of course, we're complex individuals. It doesn't just have to be one of those things. It could be a mixture. It might be none of those three apply to you.

But one that I think applies to all of us is what I call a performance identity. Because we live in a world where we're constantly told to find our identity, who we are, and how well we do, how well we perform, how successful we are, how well others think of us.

So from a young age, parents are happy with us when we're good, but they get angry with us when we're naughty. And we think, well, I'm loved if I perform well.

At school, universities accept us when we perform well, reject us if we don't make the grades. What do we think? I'm accepted if I perform well. In our careers, we're rewarded for meeting performance targets, sacked if we perform badly.

What are we told? I'm rewarded if I perform well. With our friends, we're respected if we say the right words, wear the right clothes, do the right things. If we don't, we can be ostracised, left out.

[11 : 01] What are we being told? I'm included if I perform well. Now this is the worldly air we've been breathing from the moment we're born. And so I wouldn't be surprised if all of us, to some extent or another, are seeking identities in our performance, fearing failure, wanting success, caring what people think, people pleasing, comparing ourselves.

Whatever it is, in life, we all find our identity in something. And that something will shape the way we live. Identity shapes behaviour.

Now, what's all this got to do with Colossians chapter 3? Well, it is this. In verses 1 to 4, Paul says, if we're a Christian, there has been a dramatic change in our identity, who we are, where we find our self-worth, our identity.

We're going to see that we've died to all these things I mentioned before, died to having our identity in any worldly things. Now we have an identity in Christ. And this new identity will radically shape and change the way we live here and now.

So, have a look at verse 3. Talking to Christians, for you have died. And your life is hidden with Christ in God.

[12 : 31] It's an incredible statement. The Bible's teaching us here that if you believe in the Lord Jesus, in one sense, the moment you trusted in him, you died.

your old self died. The old you, the old Mark Jackson, this worldly identity, has died with Christ.

And now, your and our life is hidden with Christ in God. Our identity, it's totally bound up with him. By the fact that we belong to God, that we're loved by the creator of the universe.

Christ is your life now. He's the one who determines who we are, how we feel. Your identity has to be found in him. And so, you're not first and foremost a lawyer, an accountant, a doctor.

You're first and foremost a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. You're not first and foremost a husband, mother, daughter, son, friend. You are first and foremost a child of God.

[13 : 34] And because this is who you now are in Christ, it means your sense of identity, your sense of self, well, it no longer comes from anything in this world. We've died to that.

Now, our identity comes from Christ and who you are in him. Now, what do we mean by that? How does that work?

Well, it's just what we've been seeing the past couple of weeks. But if we're a Christian, we're united to Christ by faith. Because we're united to him, connected to him, intimately at one with him, well, his life is now our life.

What's happened to him has happened to us. His identity is our identity. So, we look at Jesus Christ, loved by God eternally. Well, we're loved by God eternally, because we're united to him.

For Jesus, he is dead to sin, dead to all the worldly things. We used to find our identity. We are. We're dead to it. Jesus is accepted by God.

[14 : 37] We're accepted by God. If Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, secure eternally, then we are too. Because we're united to him. I mean, look how Paul puts it in verse 1.

If then you've been raised with Christ. That if then is more since. Since you've been raised with Christ, this is true of you. Verse 4, when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

So this is who we are now, spiritually speaking. We're raised with Christ, we're loved by God, we're heavenly citizens. One day we'll appear with him in glory. Christ is our life now.

We are new people in him. Brand new identity in Christ. Now let me apply this to this performance identity I was speaking of before.

if this is who we are as Christians, well it means we no longer need to be approved by others, nor accepted by others, nor find our security in these things.

[15 : 50] Because we already have it all in Christ. It's just the wonder of the gospel, isn't it? When God says to us, look, I love you, not because you perform well, but I love you even when you don't perform well.

I accept you even though you do muck up, even though you do fall short, even though you are sinful by nature. I love you because you're in Christ, sin is paid for. His righteousness is yours, you're safe, you're accepted, you're loved, your future's secure.

This is the gospel. Not that we need to get some sort of good performance record, to give to God or to get it from others, but rather, out of sheer love, God gives us a perfect performance record in Christ.

That's what it means to be a Christian, saved by grace, raised with Christ, loved by God. As verse 12 puts it, God's chosen ones, holy, beloved, this is who you and I are, fundamentally, this is our identity.

And it's this new identity in Christ, says Paul, which changes everything, not just for the future in heaven, but here and now. So, let me give you a scenario.

[17 : 09] A guy goes into work, his identity is bound up in the fact that he's the boss of the firm, he considers himself, he's the man, he's important, people look up to him, high expectations for him, he's worked hard to get there, he's proud of who he is, his identity is all bound up in those things.

Junior employee comes up to him, just says, can I just have a quick word, some of us just finding you're a bit aggressive and intimidating in meetings, just wanted to bring that up, and suddenly this guy just reacts, massively, and gets really angry, and just thinks, what on earth does this guy think, how dare he speak to me like that, what's he doing pointing out my faults, I'm not thinking there's some sort of hierarchy here, it's just a junior, and the boss can't take the crit, his identity is now at stake, and rather than sort of seeing this as a helpful way of getting the team working, or being more united, he sees it as a sort of disloyalty from this junior member of staff, I'm not sure if you ever feel that, if you're high up in your firm, what now if we replay it and the boss remembers he's a Christian, not just being a Christian on Sunday, but a Christian through the week, and at his office as well, what if he remembers his identities in Christ, that, you know, he's full of moral failure, that he's sinful, he knows he's saved by grace, precious in

God's sight, he knows that any position of authority he has is a gift from God, that he himself has a boss in heaven, well, and that person hears the feedback, what does he say?

Yep, sounds like something I'd do, my wife fixed me up on that quite a bit, I'm sorry, no, with God's help, I'll watch it going forward, thanks for raising it, so he knows he's a sinner, so he's not threatened by feedback, people criticising, he can apologise, he knows his forgiveness in Christ, but he also knows his new identity, being aggressive, intimidating, that's not part of him, he wants to get rid of it, he's grateful for this person pointing it out.

Now with the two, I mean, which response do you think is more attractive? Which response do you think brings more glory to God? what difference does it make being a Christian? All the difference, it changes everything.

[19 : 29] Our new identity in Christ, it shapes this new lifestyle in Christ. Now for us it may well be in the area of receiving criticism, we need to remember our identity.

I don't think I've ever met anyone who likes criticism, even if it's sort of gentle, loving, constructive criticism. But if you find yourself in this position, getting wound up by someone just pointing something out, disagreeing with it, justifying yourself, getting annoyed of the person for bringing it up, taking it personally, well, just take a step back, remember who you are in Christ.

You're no longer someone who finds their identity in being right, always right. You don't get yourself worse from now, not making mistakes, being better than others, being perfect.

You've been rescued from this, Jesus has died for you. You're dead to that old person. You have a new identity, you're trusting in Jesus. You know you're sinful, criticising you, it's fair game, it's pretty easy, but you know you're forgiven, accepted, loved, by God, in Christ.

It's your identity, so you don't need to get angry, worried, fearful, having your thoughts pointed out, you're not defined by them anymore. Now if it's not criticism, there's a whole plethora of other areas, which you might still be living out your old performance identity, and you need to work this through for yourself.

[21 : 05] I've put some questions on the back for you to go away with and think through. Don't need to turn to it now. But, you know, a few of them could be things like the pressure in Dulwich to compare yourselves with others, your parenting skills, your patience with the kids, how well you bake the cakes for scallywags, the puddings you bring along, comparing them to other people, how hospitable you are, how tidy your home is, do you worry about that when people come around, how well are you doing?

It could be your performing at church, how well, you know, thinking about the way you pray, the words you use, how many people you invite to talks, how many Christian activities can you be involved in?

You're worried about people thinking, well, how godly are you? How are you viewed by others? How are you performing Christianly? Now, the list is endless. But when you find yourselves doing this, being wound up, getting worried, getting fearful, comparing yourself, getting quite a tizz about it, it could be you're struggling from this.

And Paul says, look, remember who you are. You're a Christian. You're a child of God. He loves you, even when you don't perform well.

You're accepted by him. You're dead to this old way of living. You're dead to this old identity. That's not the way you're living now. You're living for God now. And if we find our self-worth, our identity in him, we're freed up.

[22 : 38] We don't need to strive and work hard to seek our self-esteem in these other things, in these Christian acts and doing them, being better than others and worried what people think about us. That's not what it's about. Because we know what God thinks of us, even though he knows how wretched we are by nature.

Christian identity shapes Christian behaviour. Now I hope you can see now why Paul starts verses 1-4 with this focus on identity before he moves on to the lifestyle in verses 5-14.

So we said at the start it's only as we understand our identity, who we are, what we're living for, our identity is that it flows out into our lifestyle. So we then will be motivated rightly and able to live this way.

And actually as we move on to verses 5-14, Paul, he's about to give some really specific commands here on how to live as Christians and here it covers the whole of life, not just in this area of criticism performance, the whole of it, but even as he does so, can you see that he can't help but remind us again of our new identities?

So in verse 5, you have that therefore, put to death therefore, given what I've just said in verses 1-4, that you're dead to your old identity, you're dead to it, so put it to death. Put to death all the things that flow out of that old identity, sexual morality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talks, lies.

[24 : 14] Put them to death. It's not who you are anymore. Verses 9-10, do not lie to one another. Why? Seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Your old self is dead. You've got a new self now. You're being changed daily into the likeness of Christ. So put to death anything that's got nothing to do with him.

Verse 12, put on then, he moves from putting to death to what to put on, but before he moves to it, again, put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

This is who you are, you're children of God now. So live as children of God, with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. Can you see, the Bible is constantly motivating us to live out who we are.

To live out who we are in Christ, what God has done for us, what God has made us. You're also from dead, you're a new person. Live it out. See, the Bible never says to us, just stop it.

[25 : 30] Just stop lying. Just stop lusting. Stop being greedy. Don't be proud. That is useless. You will never change someone by saying that.

And I'm sure every parent here will vouch for that. And yet, so often, don't we pastor people in that way? That's wrong, just stop it. We fall into the very trap that the Colossian false teachers were doing, thinking that godly behaviour, real change had come about by these simple commands.

21, verse 21, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. This is what they were saying, to be godly. Or in today's terms, don't do it, just stop it. That's not the gospel way of change.

It's going to take something much more radical than that. And the Bible, it just never barks out these commands in solitary like this. God always goes deeper to the heart, to the identity behind the behaviour.

And the Bible passes us by saying, look, do you know who you are now? Do you know who your identity is? It's in Christ now. Not all these old worldly things. We're raised to a new identity in Christ.

[26 : 36] And only then, once it's clear of who you are in Christ, what God has done for you, only then does it say, right, stop it. Because this is who you are. So stop lying.

God knows you in your worst, and he still loves you.

In Christ, you're free now to tell the truth. Stop being greedy. Money, possessions, they don't define you. God's rescued you from that.

Your life is hidden with Christ now. In whom, chapter 2, verse 3, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. stop being proud.

I mean, what have you got to be proud of? You're a sinner. It's God who saved you. God is at work in you now. Every instance of spiritual growth now is only because of his grace.

[27 : 37] You've got nothing to be proud of. So stop it and boast in God. Be proud in him. Christian identity shapes Christian behavior.

And Paul is saying to us, just remember who you are now. Remember your identity in Christ. Because if you're anything like me, it's so easy to forget.

We forget what an astonishing change happened the moment we became Christian. we forget that we're new people now, united to Christ, at one with him.

Dead to sin, raised with him. We forget that being raised with him, we're safe, we're secure, we're forgiven, we're loved. We forget we're dead, these old identities.

It's so easy to forget. And Paul says, as we read out in the New Testament, we keep reminded, this is who you are now. This is what God has done for you in Christ. Remember it. This is who you are.

[28 : 39] Live it. A brand new lifestyle shaped by a brand new identity. What difference does it make being a Christian? All the difference in the world.

And it starts now. Right here, right now. Do you not know who you are? Let's pray together. Father God, we do thank and praise you so much and fresh this morning for what you have done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Forgiving us, loving us with this unconditional love, accepting us, bringing us into your family. We are now your children. Praise you for the way that you have rescued us and freed us up from seeking our identities in a worldly of things.

And so we pray, Father God, you'd help us to remember who we now are in Christ, what it means to call ourselves a Christian, that dramatic change that happened the moment we trusted in you. And knowing this, knowing what you've done for us, knowing who we are now in Christ, please would you motivate us and help us to live it out and be the people you call us to be.

For Jesus sake, Amen.