

# Living in Christ

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Preacher: Tom Zentz

[0:00] Thank you, John. Thank you, worship team. What an encouraging time of singing together about our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ.

! That last song we sang, is the joy of your salvation to meet your Savior face to face one day? Won't that be great? I appreciate your prayers this week. We are continuing our study in the book of Colossians.

I invite you to open up your Bibles, please, to Colossians chapter 3. If you're using the Pew Bible in front of you, it's page 984. And as you do, let me tell you a story of what happened this week. It's been a busy week at work, but the Lord has used this opportunity to speak today to talk to my co-workers about the gospel.

They asked me why I was leaving work early one day, and I said, well, I'm preparing this message. And then they asked what I was preaching on, and I said, well, Colossians chapter 3.

And immediately, the senior advisor whips out his Bible from his desk. I'm like, well, that was unexpected. He opens to the table of contents, and he says, how do you spell Colossians?

[1:12] So then he finds it, and then he starts reading. And they began asking me some questions, and I thought, wow, this is a good opportunity. The next day, the younger 20-something advisor, he says, hey, I realize I have no clue what the Bible says.

And so I asked GBT to give me a summary of Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 14. That's our passage today. And he said, oh, I'm in trouble.

This is a scary passage. How can anyone do what's expected there? Now, what would you say?

I just smiled, and I said, you're absolutely right. That's the point. We can't do what Paul instructs us to do unless we're united with Jesus Christ.

He did it perfectly. He lived perfectly. He died perfectly. And he rose again from the dead. That's good news. It was a good opportunity.

[2:24] So I do appreciate your prayers. We're continuing our study here in Colossians. Let me pray, and then we'll continue. Father, as we open your word, remind us again of your beauty, of the things that you value.

As we sang just a little bit ago, may our treasure be Christ. Help us to seek him. Help us to live the way you want us to live.

Help us to put off those things that you don't want in our lives. May we reflect Christ clearly. This morning, as we open your word, may your spirit teach us.

Help us to be obedient and believing. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Recall that Paul's writing to this small church in Colossae.

Colossae. And it's meeting in the home of Philemon. And Colossae is a little bit off the beaten path. They used to be the main road, but then they built a bypass around it a little bit north.

[3:32] And the city of Laodicea started getting all the attention. Their pastor of this small church, Epaphras, he left Colossae. He traveled about 1,600 miles away to go to Rome.

And there he's ministering to the needs of Paul while Paul's in prison. He's also giving a report on the state of the church in Colossae and Laodicea. And so Paul writes this response as a letter, and that's what we have before us.

One of the concerns that Paul's addressing is this false teaching called Gnosticism. They were teaching that you have to obtain some kind of spiritual secret knowledge. That there were these strange rites that you have to do.

That anything material, oh, is bad. And as a result of that, especially that last teaching, that made Christ insignificant.

He has a body? Oh, that's bad. And so Paul is spending his time. We just, Pastor Andrew has been leading us through chapters 1 and 2, talking about Jesus Christ. What rich truth there is about who Jesus is.

[4:45] In chapter 1, verse 15, Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. There in verse 16 of chapter 1, Jesus Christ is the creator who holds all things together.

Chapter 2, verse 3, Jesus Christ is the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Chapter 2, verse 6, Jesus Christ is our Lord.

Chapter 2, verse 9, the indwelling of the fullness of God in the flesh. That's Jesus. He's the incarnate God. Chapter 2, verse 10, Jesus is the head of all rule and authority.

Chapter 2, verse 11. He is the one who was buried in death and now resurrected to life. And then verse 12, if you believe in Jesus Christ, in him, you too have been buried with him and resurrected with him.

You have life. Chapter 2, verse 19. Jesus Christ is the head of the body, the church. And there's a whole lot more. But right now, Paul is continuing into chapter 3, building on this beautiful union that his own have with Jesus Christ.

[6:00] He talks about how we should live now based on this teaching of Jesus. His supremacy, our union with him, and our future, we'll call it a celebratory ball that's going to last for all eternity.

We'll call this message living in Christ. There are three main points that we'll examine this morning. The first is in Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 4.

And I'm calling this seeking the heavenly. Follow along as I read this passage, please. Chapter 3, verses 1 through 4. 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 and not on things that are of the 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.

What we see here is really a call to action. Well, there's two actions. These Greek verbs, seek and set.

[7:11] There are two, we'll call them present imperatives. And that just means that these are commands that require continual obedience. Number one, and I'm just going to have you put all three, they're up there.

Seek the things that are above. Number two, set your minds on things that are above. And the third one, I'm just wording it this way, it says not.

But stop setting your mind on things that are on the earth. And what Paul's commanding is this. Keep on seeking.

Keep on setting your minds on things that are above. And keep on refusing to dwell on the things of the earth. The earth is no longer your home, so stop thinking about it.

Make Christ and heaven your constant pursuit. Keep on diligently seeking, and not just seeking, but longing for, Jesus Christ.

[8:16] It reminds me of Jesus' own words in Matthew 6, verse 33, where he says, Seek the first, the kingdom of God. That first means of all preeminence, seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And all these things will be added to you. And then of Abraham in Hebrews 11, it says, For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Robert Gromacki says that this seeking, it deals with the will and the active pursuit while setting our minds on something is more about what we're thinking about.

Imagine that you're going on the big dream vacation next year. Don't imagine it too much or you get lost, but imagine it. You spend time looking up the details about, you know, the location and the things to do once you get there.

You buy your tickets. You plan your itinerary. You get acquainted with the culture, with the language. You get your passports. You learn the rules of the land and so on.

[9:24] Well, this is like the seeking aspect. You want this and you're preparing for it. But there's more. And now you begin to imagine what it's going to be like once you get there.

All the fun, the relaxation, the new experiences, the coffee, which is good. The sights you encounter, the time to rest and enjoy maybe a good book or two.

This is the longing aspect. And you keep on thinking about it and you keep on dreaming about it. Well, Paul wants his hearers right here in this letter to do the same thing, but for Christ and for heaven.

Christ triumphed at the cross. But there's still an eternity of celebration of the victory of the Lamb, our groom. Make sure that you have your blood-bought ticket.

Get acquainted with the values and the culture and learn more about the king of this realm. He has rules that he's established. But go ahead also and just dream about what it's going to be like when you get there.

[10:38] That's good. Imagine the sights and smells. You ever think about the smells of heaven? All the unbelievable experiences. Your glorified self is just going to, it's going to be great, isn't it?

It's going to be wonderful. Wonderful. I'm sure the coffee will be good there too. But really, the main thing is our treasure, Jesus Christ. He's the one we're going to see face to face.

That's good. Well, this call to action does have a basis, and I'm labeling this as call to faith. Paul doesn't just say that you have to do this or this without giving his reason.

And so I want you to know what he's asking them to believe. Number one, raised with Christ. They have been raised with Christ. This word right at the very front of your verse in chapter 3, verse 1.

If. This is not a word that allows for any other possibility. This is a word that's probably best translated since. Or you could read it this way. If you have been raised with Christ, and you have.

[11:46] This is drawing back from chapter 2, verse 12. Where it says, In which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead.

And then in chapter 2, verse 13. And you, God, has made alive together with him. So Paul says to the church in Rome almost the same thing. In chapter 6 of Romans, he says this in verse 4.

We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into death. In order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

And then in verse 5. For if we have been united with him, there's that union. If we've been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Believe this. Not just know it. Believe it. Secondly, believe this. Christ is alive in heaven. That verse said, Things above where Christ is.

[12:56] We don't serve a dead Savior. He's a living Savior. He's not just a famous person that's buried somewhere. Jesus Christ is the rightful King of kings and Lord of lords.

Amen? He's not dead. He is alive. No one, nothing, could stop his perfect plan and his sovereign will from being accomplished.

Believe this. Believe it. Think about him. Think about that. Thirdly, Christ is at the right hand of God. It says here, Things above where Christ is.

At the right hand of God. He is on the throne. He's active and sovereignly at work. Believe it. This may have been a rough week for you, pastor.

I don't know. It's not a surprise to God. God's never shocked or surprised. Believe it.

[13:59] Well, if you have, by faith, cried out to God. You've asked him to forgive you of all your sins. You believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took your death penalty, dying on the cross in your place.

That three days later, he conquered death by rising victoriously from the grave. And now he's ascended into heaven where he's seated at the right hand of God. If you believe that, I have good news for you.

Together with Christ, you are also, in being united with him, buried with him, and risen with him, you have life.

That's great news. But not only that. You have something more. That perfect life that Jesus lived, we call it a righteous life. That was placed on you as well.

You have that in Christ. And that's what my 20-year-old something advisor friend didn't know. Christ has done it. And in him, we are counted as having lived that perfect life as well.

[15:07] Wow. Fourthly, you have died and your life is hidden with Christ. Ian McNaughton says it this way. This meaning is that Christians are clothed in Christ's righteousness and hidden from the wrath of God.

Being accepted in Christ. Believe it. So not only is Christ's death my death, his resurrection my resurrection, but his righteousness is my righteousness.

That's amazing, isn't it? Wow. Believe it. Well, fifthly, Christ is coming again in glory. Maranatha. That's our word.

For those of you who are fairly new here, it means, what does it mean, church? Our Lord's coming. Our Lord is coming, right? Believe it.

Well, then we move on to our next section here, beginning at verse 5. And I call this second one, it's a cool title, but it's called Slaying the Earthly. I like that better than Put to Death. But Slaying the Earthly. Follow along as I read, starting at verse 5.

[16:11] 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. And these too, you 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.

Look again at Paul's call to action. Number one, he says, put to death what is earthly. Five self-indulgent sins of the flesh are listed here.

They are those that we are to put to death or to slay. Again, I like slaying. It's a cooler word. This image of slaying, I can imagine drawing the sword and wielding it and slaying dragons and ogres.

[17:18] And that's what Paul says. Wield your sword and slay these things in your life. First of all, he says, slay sexual immorality. This is our word that comes from the Greek word pornea.

We have the word pornography that comes from that word. It's referring to sexual relationships outside of God's design for marriage. And in case you're thinking, oh, I'm good on that point.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5. In verse 28, But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Now, guys, that expression with her, that's extremely close to the expression in Colossians, with him, of Christ.

It's this image of Christ. Christ is our groom, isn't he? Saying no to Christ and turning away and finding somebody else.

[18:23] I wasn't thinking about it until this morning and it was disgusting. But it's like if I see my wife out kissing another man. Isn't that?

That's horrible. But that's the picture we're looking at here. Paul says, slay that in your life. That should never be part of your life. Christ is your life.

Impurity is the second one mentioned here. And this is just moral filth of all kinds. It reeks right down to our hearts and minds. And Paul says, slay it.

Stop wallowing in it. And then he says, passion and evil desire. These are very similar, but evil desire is this unbridled craving for evil things within your heart.

And passion is more like acting it out. Using others to gratify yourself. See, these are not becoming of the kingdom of Christ. They reflect the natural debauchery of the old kingdom from which you were rescued.

[19:33] Don't go back there. Paul says, slay them. Put them to death. And this fifth one is covetousness, which is idolatry.

Now this is not just about having things. It's more about that insatiable desire to have more and more and more. It's placing worth on things rather than where our treasure is.

And who's our treasure? It's Jesus. But what this covetousness, it takes our affections off of Jesus. And it places on material things.

Things that burn and will be destroyed. It's therefore idolatrous. Jesus said this about covetousness in Matthew chapter 6. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[20:44] Paul says, slay this worship of stuff in your life. Treasure Christ and the things that are above that are already ours in Christ. Jesus wants your heart.

Secondly, put them all away. In chapter 3, verses 8 and 9, he says this, But now you must put them all away.

Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another. Well, this sounds a lot like Paul's teaching to the church in Ephesus in chapter 4.

This is what he says in verse 25. Therefore, having put away falsehood. Verse 29, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths. In verse 31, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

We won't take time to go through that whole list, but I want you to notice that each one of them is a window into a heart that is not in tune, not in love with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21:54] The anger and the wrath that are mentioned in this list, this is the uncontrolled, seething hatred. And then you have the sudden frenzied outburst.

That's the wrath part. This is not the anger and wrath that's used to describe our Lord. Paul says, you must put these kinds of things away.

Put them off, all of them. Thirdly, put off the old self and the practices.

There in verse 9. Seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices. Paul says this in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 22.

Notice that this former manner of life, what happens, what's it still doing?

[22:58] It has a corrupting nature about it. The old self corrupts us. It pulls us back to sin's defilement and bondage.

It lies to us that all the brokenness that we had before, it wasn't so bad. The hurt and the rebellion, it wasn't that important. That old life, it really wasn't that bad.

What a lie. That's a horrible lie. Don't go back there. Paul says, don't do that. Put that away from you. Paul wants the church there in Colossae to believe something else.

And so we go into our next point, call to faith. And notice in chapter 3, verse 6, it says this. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Wow. MacArthur called this wrath God's constant and invariable reaction against sin. I would change it a little to say God is not indifferent to sin.

[23:58] And his wrath, his righteousness, his constant and invariable action against sin is coming. What's happened, God's not just responding.

God's character demands that he judge sin. Remember Paul's message to the Romans in chapter 1? He says this in verse 18.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Verse 32.

And though they know God's righteous decrees, that those who practice such things deserve to die. Listen to how bold this is. They not only do them, but they give approval to those who practice them.

Wow. This sounds so harsh and scary. It is for those who are not united with Christ. He is the light of the world.

[25:02] And I thought about this this past week, especially when it deals with this subject of God's wrath. God's wrath against sin is like an unstoppable property of light to overcome darkness.

It just can't help it. It has to. God's holiness demands that sin be confronted and vanquished. And just as the light in the darkness, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it, nothing can prevent the radiance of God's righteousness from prevailing over the shadows of sin.

God's glory, his holiness, his justice are compelled to conquer sin and darkness. God's glory, his holiness. And that's what the cross and the great rescue is all about.

I look back in chapter, you're there in Colossians, you should go back to chapter 1, verse 12, and look at this. giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints.

What does your Bible say? In light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[26:30] The gospel, effective now in your life, God pierced the darkness of the kingdom of Satan.

He rescued you and me. And he delivered us into the kingdom of his Son. That's amazing. Well, let's move on to this next point. They're in verses 10 through 14.

This third point, slipping on the Christly. Chapter 3, verses 10 through 14. And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Here there is not Greek or 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, compassionate hearts, 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.

[27:43] What's our call to action here? First, to put on the new self. Now, the Greek verbs translated put on and put off, they indicate once and for all actions.

That means when we trusted in Christ as our Lord and Savior, our old self was buried once and for all. And the new self was put on once and for all.

We were dressing for the occasion, and that change of garments was accomplished at our salvation. The old filthy rags, they were removed. Praise the Lord, right? The robe of Christ's righteousness was then placed upon us.

Wow. You've seen those store signs that said, no shirt, no service? Heaven's requirement is infinitely stricter.

Jesus said, unless a man be born again, he what? Cannot enter the kingdom of God. However, the word renewed there in verse 10 of Colossians, it is a present participle, and that just means that we are constantly being renewed or changed into the image of our creator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[29:05] We call this sanctification. So how does this transformation come about? In Colossians 3, verse 10, it says, it is by knowledge, which is kind of cool because what Paul is doing is he's, remember the Gnostic teaching he's trying to battle?

They said, oh, you've got to have some kind of secret knowledge, so Paul's throwing it out there. You know what? How are you sanctified? It's by knowledge. It's a little bit ironic that he says that. The Gnostic knowledge, however, can never change a person. Look what Paul says to the church in Philippians 3, verse 10, When we know Christ more, we become like him.

This knowledge of the incarnate word of God, it comes through the written word of God. And then secondly, he says, put on then.

And you've got a whole list here. You can put the whole list up there. There you go. We don't have time to develop each one of those. But I want you to note this, that every single one of those up there on the screen, these are Christly qualities.

[30:32] They are the gems of your new wardrobe. Wear them well and radiate the character of Christ to one another, and then also to a lost world, the people that you know who don't know him yet.

However, these garments, these are impossible for you to fit in without the help of the Holy Spirit. Listen to Paul's words in Galatians chapter 5.

It says, But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh.

For these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you were led by the Spirit, you were not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident.

Look at the similarity. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like

these.

[31:44] I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But, that's a great word, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against these, there is no law. There's nothing you have to do to get these. You can't do it. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Wow. Well, the third point.

Put on love above all. There in verse 14, And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

You could well argue that this is the chief characteristic of Christ, our Savior. John writes in 1 John 4, verse 16, So we've come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

[32:59] God is love. And whoever abides in love abides in God. And God abides in him. So if you say no to love, you're saying no to God.

I don't want you. Paul says here, This garment of love rises above them all, and you must adorn yourselves with it.

I know, as you're thinking, Well, I have no problem with that. I'm a loving person. Are you loving when the person driving in front of you just cuts you off? Are you loving when the person that you're standing in line, and the person walks in front of you and cuts in line?

We struggle with it sometimes. Put on the garment of love. Think of it this way. What if you were to wear all those other garments besides love?

You wear all the other ones, but you decide, You know what? I'm not going to wear this one of love. No. Now, Paul actually wrote about that.

[34:09] To the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 13. I don't have it up on the screen, but he said, You know, if I do all these things, and I have not love, it's what? It's worthless.

It's of no value. It's meaningless. It's also treacherous to the values of the kingdom, by the way. Love is said to bind all the virtues together.

It's the most compelling of all the virtues. You who are trying to win lost loved ones in your family, maybe your neighborhood, maybe people at work, just don't tell them about God's love.

Adorn yourself with the love of Christ and show them that love. You who are doubting and maybe troubled by life circumstances, things are just really rough.

Paul says, Adorn yourself with the love of Christ. Remind yourself and think about how much he loves you. Reflect again and again on this heavenly characteristic.

[35:18] Well, this brings us to this section's call to faith. They're in verse 11. And I put it this way. Your past doesn't prevent you from dressing appropriately.

The ball, that is the heavenly ball, the eternal celebration in heaven. It's all about Christ anyway, isn't it? It's not about you. The focus will be on Jesus Christ there and then in the kingdom.

For all eternity, it's going to be quite a celebration. And Paul's just saying this. If that is true, and it is, then focus your here and now on Jesus Christ and those heavenly things.

And then secondly, believe this. God loves you. He's chosen you to attend this ball. And he did it from before the foundation of the world.

I guess I'd ask the question, are you dressed for that celebration? Are you dreaming about the marriage of the Lamb? And dreaming about our groom?

[36:34] Are you imagining what heaven will be like? Are you living Christly now in preparation for that day? Wow.

That's Paul's message. That's our message. And I would ask you this. If Jesus Christ were to come back now, I mean right now, what's your heart like?

What is there in your heart that you need to say, God, I've got to give this to you. This shouldn't be here. This needs to change.

You know, you don't have to wait until you get home. You can ask the Lord Jesus Christ and His Spirit, help me now. God, help me to change now.

Let's pray. Father, as we sang earlier, it will be our joy, the joy of our salvation to see you face to face. And there are some here who don't know the Lord Jesus.

[37:42] My prayer is that they would yield to the Spirit's prompting and this wooing. And Lord, that they would recognize their need for Jesus, believe that He died their death and rose again for them.

There are some who are struggling with sin. It's just overwhelmed them. God, I pray today they might turn to you and say, Lord, forgive me again.

Wash me. Help me to wear these clothes of righteousness the way you want me to. May it glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. We love you, Father.

We love you, Lord. We look forward to the day that we will see you again. Thank you, Spirit, for your work today. In Jesus' name, amen.