

Holding onto Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, it's great to be able to be with you today online and in a very cool church, a beautiful morning. And I want to let you know that the flowers behind me were at the funeral for Rita Baldwin that we had on Thursday.

And a great expression of thanks for her life and for what God has done for her and through her. And now she is in the heavenly places. She is with Jesus.

And we're going to talk a bit about heaven today as well as we go through this marvelous passage from Colossians 3. And I want to begin by asking you this question, what is the greatest good that you could ever ask for somebody to wish for them?

What's the best thing you could find for your friends or your loved ones, your family, the people who are in your life? When you think about this, it's a real exercise in love.

And this is what Paul is all about in this deeply loving letter to the Colossian people. Paul has likely never met the people in this church. But with all his heart, he wants what is very best for them.

[1 : 15] And that's why this is such an encouraging letter. The best that Paul can think of for them is that they will be filled with the knowledge of Jesus so that they walk in a manner that is pleasing to God.

Do you remember at the beginning of this letter that Paul prays for these people every day, constantly? And he prays that they will be changed, that they will grow, that they will mature in Jesus Christ.

His prayer, if you remember, was that they would keep on bearing fruit in every good work, that they will increase in their knowledge of God, that they be strengthened with all power to have endurance and patience to walk in Jesus in often very challenging times.

This is all prayer for change, for transformation in their life, for growth in walking with Jesus. And this is what God is calling each of you to as well this morning through this word.

You're called to be continued to be transformed every day. And no matter what your stage of life, this is true. Whether you're eight years old or whether you're speaking on a video with Will, if you're a teenager, if you're somebody who is preparing for a career, preparing for work, a new life, whether you're somebody who's been involved in a very, very busy working life for many years, if you are a full-time family life person with young kids and that upside-down life that doesn't have much time for other things, or whether you're retired, God's will and great priority for you is that you are changing in Jesus.

[3 : 09] And if you're not growing in Christ, you are spiritually dying. So the big question is, how can I be practically about this transforming work of God?

How can I take my part in being changed? Well, our part in God's transforming work in Christ, in the Christian life, can be summed up, I think, in four words that comes out in Colossians.

That is to hold fast to Christ. It can all be summed up in that, this work of change. Hold fast to Christ. It's so important, you should write it down on a piece of paper, put it in your Bible, stick it up on your fridge, put it on your steering wheel in your car, whatever it is.

This is the only way we grow together with a growth that comes from God. It is to hold fast to Jesus. That's what Jesus means when he says, I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in me.

Now, that work of holding fast to Jesus is not always easy. Life has turns to it. There's times and seasons and days in our life where it's very difficult to hold on.

[4 : 33] A number of years ago, when Alexander was 11 years old, I went to a father-son camp. And one of the things at that camp that we did was to go tubing behind a speedboat.

And of course, the driver asked us, what do you want to do? Do you want to have a nice relaxing ride? Or do you want to see if you can hold on? Well, we said, ah, we want to see if you can hold on. Well, he went for it, of course.

And everything he was doing was trying to throw us off that tube. The hardest part is when we take sharp turns to try to make us, by the inertia, be thrown right off.

You're holding with all of your might on board. And I think this is sometimes a picture of what it's like to hold on to Christ. When life throws those turns at us, it can be very, very hard to hold on.

Paul helps us with this in this passage today. He shows us how we can practically be transformed as we hold on to Jesus Christ fast.

[5 : 36] There's three parts to holding fast to Christ in Colossians 3. And I'm going to just talk about two of them in verses 1 through 11.

The first is, be familiar with your new identity in Christ, that you belong to him. And that's verses 1 through 4. And then secondly, we're going to hear about the need to put off sin, to kill sin in our life.

In verses 5 through 11. And next week, David Short has the privilege of speaking on verses 12 through 17, which is putting on Jesus Christ, these beautiful clothes of Christ.

So I want to look at that first part. Being familiar with your new identity in verses 1 through 4. Take out your Bible, look at Colossians 3, and follow along with me.

Paul says the first thing we do when we're thinking about this change in our life is to know who you are. To know the big picture of your life.

[6 : 38] So verse 1 tells us, you have been raised with Christ. His resurrection from the dead was not just an event, an incredibly powerful event, that took place three days after his crucifixion.

It actually happens to us now who believe in Jesus today. To be united to Jesus means that he raises us to his new life.

In union with him. It's the fundamental reality in our lives. It influences everything about us. Now, I've been reading a very interesting biography of Albert Einstein by Walter Isaacson.

And I just finished it. And one of the things that was striking about that book is that for Einstein, there was an experience that took place when he was four or five years old that altered his life forever.

He was sick in bed one day and his father gave him a compass. The fact that the magnetic needle behaved as if it was influenced by a hidden force field rather than through touch or contact produced a sense of wonder in him that he said motivated him throughout his whole life.

[8 : 04] Here's what he said. He said, And as a result, Einstein would develop a devotion to field theories throughout his life to describe nature.

And I think this is a helpful story for us because the truth that you are raised with Jesus is deeply hidden to the world.

Yet it is behind everything about you. You are like a compass that is oriented to him. And the risen and exalted Lord is the source of your new life.

Even though he is hidden, he influences everything about us. He alone changes us. He gives us strength by his resurrection power to become truly human, to become more and more like him.

We often make the mistake, I think, of thinking that the new life of Jesus is the result of successfully fighting against sin, of living a holy life.

[9 : 16] But Paul here says the very opposite. He said, It is the life that we have been raised to that actually is our starting place in any battle against temptation, in anything that we do to throw sin away.

It starts with this new life that we've been already brought into. We've been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved son. And so Paul teaches us two very practical things to do.

First, at the end of verse 1, he says, Seek the things that are above where Christ is. Seek the things above. He's talking about the life of heaven.

And that life is all about joyfully serving Jesus, who is Lord over all. It is a life of worshiping him with all the aspects of our life.

And it is a life of self-sacrificing love to all those who are in heaven with you. That is the mark of heaven.

[10 : 21] And we can seek these things now, these things above, not just in our church life, but also in our place of work, in our homes, in our families, in our school, in our social time.

We are practicing for heaven in a sense that we are rehearsing that life of heaven as we seek those things that are about that life.

Secondly, verse 2 tells us not only to seek the things above, but to set your minds on things that are above, not the things that are on earth.

Now, Paul is very clear, and you especially see this in Romans, that the way to experience God's transforming power in your life, that change that he alone can give, is to fill your minds with the things of Christ.

That is how we are renewed. We live in a time of continual access to the internet now, where Netflix and constant news feeds and storylines and social media fills our minds.

[11 : 31] Paul doesn't say, Paul says, don't set your mind on those things because you are going to find yourselves conformed to the values of the world. You will be shaped by what you are setting your mind on.

Instead, he says, set your minds on things above. Because as Romans 12 says, God's good transformation happens as he renews your mind so that you can discern his will, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

And so this brings to our attention a question. How are we spending our time? Do we spend it setting our mind on the things of God?

How much time do we spend doing that? How does it compare to filling your mind with the things that are on earth? What this brings to us is that the daily times of quiet spent with Jesus are precious, more so now than ever in our time of social media.

If we are to live out verse 2, those times alone with God are absolutely essential. God brings change to us and in us as we read the Bible, as we meditate in different ways on God's word, as we pray the Psalms and consider the beauty and goodness of God.

[12 : 59] When we pray for the needs of those in our lives, we are setting our minds on things that are above, and we draw on the very life of heaven.

Now, you might be saying, today, I'm not feeling much like I have been raised with Christ, or that I have the life in heaven in me.

Well, verse 3 tells us something very, very helpful. It says that we have died, and our life is hidden with Christ in God. Now, whatever does that mean?

It's a puzzling thing to read, but it says two very important things for us. First of all, we are safe in him because we are hidden in him.

In Psalm 17, David asks God, keep me as the apple of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings. You see, it's saying here that being hidden with Christ means that we are safe with him no matter what we are feeling, or no matter what danger that we might be in, what life is throwing at us.

[14 : 14] We are safe in him. This is how Paul is starting with his life of change. And the second aspect of hiddenness is that what we are in Jesus, a new creation filled with Jesus, is largely unseen.

The world doesn't see this incredible miracle that has happened inside of you as you came to believe. And in fact, we ourselves only get glimpses of what we are in Christ, this new creation.

But verse four tells us that one day when Christ, who is your life, appears, when he is revealed as he really is in all his majesty, then you will appear with him in glory.

You see, when Jesus is revealed, you will be revealed, and you will be like him. This glory belongs to you now, but you won't see it fully until you see Jesus in all his glory.

Paul says, set your mind on that day. Seek for these things. Orient your life around that day when you will be seen in all your glory.

[15 : 27] So you see, Paul starts here by saying, holding fast to Jesus means first setting your mind on his grace, seeking his life for you.

So it's in that context of grace that Paul brings us to the second aspect of holding fast to Christ. And that is throwing away your sin.

And I must say, this is so important for us because we can only face our sin. We can only throw it away as we are surrounded by the grace of Jesus Christ, as we know the power of his resurrection at work in our lives.

So look at verses 5 through 11. Paul teaches here that every Christian who is filled with Christ also has sin residing and lurking in us.

We are all prone to temptation. And we should never pretend that sin and temptation is not an issue for us. There is a good fight that each of us fights that we undertake throughout all our life.

[16 : 33] There was a very famous Puritan named John Owen in the 17th century who wrote a whole book on what it means to throw away sin. It was called The Mortification of Sin.

It's still in print. And he said that sin is always acting, it's always conceiving, it's always seducing and tempting. He said, who can say that he has ever had anything to do with God or for God which indwelling sin has not tried to corrupt?

This battle will last more or less all our days. If sin is always acting, we are in trouble if we are not always mortifying. Now that great word mortifying is a word that he uses for putting sin to death.

And it's only by the power of the Holy Spirit, John Owen says, that we can do this very serious work of killing sin. It's only as we seek Jesus and set our minds on him that this can happen.

And it is essential that we're doing this because we can't put on the things of Christ, which we're going to hear about next week in verses 12 through 17, unless we take off this clothing, this dirty clothing of sin.

[17 : 49] Imagine for a moment a woman who has been working in the garden all afternoon, maybe building a fence too, doing some digging. The work clothes are getting really dirty and suddenly you decide, you know what, I'd like to go buy a dress, go shopping for a really, really nice dress.

And she goes to this very nice dress shop, finds the perfect one for her. And she puts it on over those dirty clothes. COVID has said there's no fitting room so you've got to do it.

Well, of course, it's going to look ridiculous. How can you possibly do this? It's not going to work. And in fact, you're probably not going to be allowed in the store ever again. It makes no sense.

In the same way, it just doesn't work to put on the beautiful clothes of Christ and his way of living without taking off those dirty, mired clothes of sin.

So Paul says, throw off sin. Throw it away. And he helps us in four ways that I want to mention briefly. First of all, Paul names and exposes our sin.

[19 : 01] You know, Paul dearly loves these people in the Colossians church. He loves that he will meet them for the first time when they are going to appear with Jesus in glory one day.

And he doesn't want them to show up with dirty clothes. And so what he does is he lists sins. You see, it's very easy if we just have a vague idea of sin and no name for it to allow it to just continue in our lives.

But here, Paul is very specific. He lists what needs to be taken off. In verse 5, he names private sins. He names sexual immorality, which is all sex outside marriage.

He mentions impurity. He mentions passion, which is any strong desire that masters you, including sex. He mentions evil desire, which is an unchecked desire for physical pleasure that can lead to real evil.

And he says, he mentions covetousness, which is a desire to have what does not belong to you. He says it's idolatry. It places at the center of our attention a devotion that actually belongs to God, but is not God.

[20 : 20] And then he goes on from our private life to talk about public sin and names them in verses 8 and 9. He says, now you must put them all away. Anger. And that's that inward, sort of simmering hatred of a person.

He says, put away wrath, which is that anger working itself out and the things that we say or even do in our anger. Put away malice, wanting the very worst for somebody.

Slander. And obscene talk from your mouth, which are the words, the things that we say with the mouth that we bless God with. words that will shock or tear down or demean humanity.

He says, you've got to put them all away and don't lie to one another. Jesus is the truth. The father of lies, Satan, is the one who deceives.

You cannot be about that. With your mouth, you tell the truth and there is no room for lies before the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 25] So why does Paul name these sins? They're not the only ones. It would be a very big list if he did. But I think he names these sins because they were the ones that were widely practiced in the culture of Colossae.

And so these people in the church could rationalize their sin. It was a normal part of their life before they came to Christ. Very easy to fall into that sin as well.

It was very important for him to name it because then they could actually throw it off. Now Paul secondly tells us what it means to throw things off.

He says to be ruthless to sin. Ruthless with it because it's the way that leads you away from Jesus and into the way of death. And that's why he says put to death in verse 5 sin.

Put it to death. Death is a very strong word. And in verse 8 he says put it all away. Now the thing to remember with this as he's doing this very serious work of killing sin is that being tempted is not sin.

[22 : 40] What you do with your temptation is all important. When you nurture and you cherish the thoughts of being gratified by sin this leads to giving in and acting on that sin I really liked what one commentator said.

He said investigate the lifelines of whatever sins are defeating you personally and cut them off without pity. It is a ruthless work that Paul is calling us to and it is not easy.

And that brings us thirdly to the help that we have in throwing away sin. Paul says that all sin is in the presence of God.

We don't ever commit sin whether it's privately or with another person you don't ever commit sin alone. All sin is in the presence of God.

Verse 6 says that it is under God's wrath. And the marvelous thing about this it's a very sobering thing to hear that all of our sin is under God's wrath.

[23 : 49] But the wonderful thing about this is that sin loses its power when we consciously bring our sin to the cross of Jesus where he bore the wrath of sin on himself.

In fact I know that the most powerful and helpful ministries that help people be free from the addiction of sin in their life and to be healed of the hurt that sin causes are the ministries that focus on that exactly on bringing our sin to the cross of Jesus knowing that it is not alone that we experience this sin.

And finally Paul reminds us that sin is inconsistent with who we are in Christ. Look at verse 9 and 10 and he says you have put off the old self with its practices and then verse 10 you've put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

You see sin is completely out of step with that new self that God has created in you. Remember who you are as temptation comes to you.

Again you're not alone in continuing to put off the old self every day because verse 10 tells us you are continuing to be renewed in the knowledge of Jesus.

[25 : 17] That's a wonderful part of the verse because it's saying that the Holy Spirit is renewing you. We can't do any of this putting off of sin without his work in us.

Ask God to continue to renew you each day even as he is doing. Ask him to help you to put away sin. And I want to close by saying that you will look very very different when you put away sin.

And the world will not necessarily like that. It will put pressure against you because of it. The world may ridicule you or say it is unrealistic.

A number of those sins that were listed are actually celebrated in our world. And certainly much of it is practiced widely. reality. But you should never be embarrassed by that difference that the world may take notice of.

It is evidence that you belong to Jesus Christ. That he is doing this incredible transforming work in your life. And that can draw people to ask about that difference.

[26 : 28] It testifies to Jesus. The best testimony of what happens when God changes and transforms us in this way is in that last verse of our passage today.

In verse 11, look at that. It is saying that all racial, political, religious, and cultural barriers crumble.

They actually crumble. They're not relevant because Jesus is everything to that community. It's a vision that the world desperately wants and needs.

To have these cultures and differences and racial differences completely done away with, that is a picture of the life of heaven.

It's what it looks like to put on Christ in our life. It's what happens when we hold fast to Jesus, the author of our salvation.

[27 : 29] This is the way to transformation. This is the way to being changed into the image of Jesus. Next week, we're going to see what that beautiful change looks like.

Today, may God give you the immense resurrection power of Jesus to continue to walk in a way that is pleasing to him.

To him belongs all honor and glory, blessing and praise forever and ever. Amen. Amen.