How to Live

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[0:00] This morning's reading comes from Genesis 3 and how the fall on earth began, and I want to state that clearly.

The fall on earth is different than Satan's fall from desiring to be as God.
So Genesis 3, verses 1 through to 3, explains to us where it all went wrong. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.
He said to the woman, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden.
But God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.
[1:06] Let me just briefly point out just how important that is, especially for what we're coming on into Colossians. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was not a no, not never tree.

It was a no, not now. And we learn that from the book of Hebrews, that to actually know and be able to distinguish the knowledge and have the knowledge of good and evil is actually a good thing.
In fact, when Adam and Eve ate from the tree, the first thing that God says is, see, they've become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Well, that's not a bad thing. That's a good thing.
But like fire, fire is great for warming your house. It's terrible when it burns. And maturity tells you not to touch the fire.
And so when it comes to the knowledge of good and evil, it requires mature people to be able to handle that knowledge. And of course, they were immature people.
[2:03] They were yet to grow. And they touched the fire, burnt. And of course, the world is burnt along with it, metaphorically speaking, in sin.

And of course, Christ Jesus is the one who crushes Satan and seeks to deal with sin once and for all. And that is what we celebrate.
That's what we are thankful for, that lives that have been messed up by sin and rebellion are put right by Christ Jesus and put right forever.
And that is something to be thankful for. It also answers the question why we will never fall from heaven and the new heavens and the new earth when we get there.
One of the age-old questions is, well, if Satan could fall, why can't I fall when I'm in heaven? Well, it can't happen because there are four stages a person goes through.
[2:57] They go through being able not to sin. Then they go through being not able not to sin. Then they're able not to sin. And then finally, they are not able to sin.

And that is the glorified state of a believer. That the finished work of Christ means that you will be in the place where you will not be able to sin.
Now you're able not to sin sometimes, hopefully a lot of the time. But when the glorification of you completes, you will not even be able to sin.
And that's why you will never fall from heaven like Satan did. Isn't that wonderful? That's the finished work of Christ. Never can that fall happen like that ever again.
Well, we're going to come to song again. And then we'll come back to our reading and prayers for this morning. Colossians 3, chapter 3.
[4:03] And we spent some time, at least, not a huge amount of time, but some time looking on the importance of understanding who you are before we understand anything else.

More importantly, how your life is hidden in Christ Jesus. Meaning that you don't get to see who you really are. The people in the world don't get to see who you really are because your life is hidden with Christ in God.

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But you don't even get to see who you really are because your life is hidden with Christ in God. And therefore, it's possible to live a Christian life, feel like a fraud, because you're aware of certain things and you're unaware of glorious things.
And so it's entirely possible to feel like a fraud as a Christian. And that's not necessarily, that's almost an implication of what it means to have our life hidden in Christ.
We just don't get to see us as we really are. By faith, we understand in part, but we're not there yet.
Well, as we come to verse 5 through to 9, it looks as if it's addressing the issues of sins, when in fact it's actually addressing something a little different.
[5:29] So we're going to pick it up in verse 9, read through to verse 11. Now hear God's word. 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 two you once walked when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, 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 the knowledge after the image of its creator.
Here, there is no, not Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Bibarian, Scythian slave, but free, but Christ is all and in all.
Well, may God bless his word to us this morning. And I want you to pay attention to what's being said, not what's not being said.
[6:45] Now, when you go down through a list of sins, the natural assumption is to think, well, this is a passage about sin, and the message is going to be fairly straightforward, which is don't do it.

Now, that would be a fair statement. I'm not going to say that's incorrect. What I am going to say, however, is something a little bit more obvious.
It's, in fact, so obvious that we miss it. And that is why these sins even need to be mentioned in the first place. And that is because it's not obvious to people what they are to do or how they are to live.
We think we know how to live. And we've just read a passage telling us, do this, don't do that, do this, don't do that. And the imperative is, you don't know how to live.
Therefore, live this way. We tend to forget just what a radical change Christianity made to the people that it first converted, not necessarily amongst the Jewish community, who already had the word of God and God's laws and were living consistent lives as much as possible according to those laws.
[8:03] But in a Roman society where things like pedophilia was normal, homosexuality was normal, more than one wife was normal, those things which were a normal part of everyday life needed to be reformed.

And so the list that is mentioned are common practices amongst the people that they now have to turn away from. And therefore, these sins which we think are obvious are not actually that obvious.
And therefore, what Paul is teaching them is how to live because nobody knows how to. So what looks like a list of sins that you're told to keep away from is actually direction on how to live life.
Now, we assume, because we've done it for a long time, that we know how to do it. Paul doesn't make that assumption. And he doesn't make that assumption for one very simple reason, and that is because he's speaking to people who have been born again in Christ Jesus.
And like anyone born for the first time, they have to learn how to live. And therefore, anyone born for a second time in Christ Jesus, they have to learn how to live.
[9:32] And the danger, of course, is to take those old practices, thinking that they are acceptable, and bring them across into the new life, and think, I know how to do it because I've been doing it for so long.

And yet, this is the very thing that Paul was saying, don't do. Leave those old practices behind. What you used to do, don't do. Excuse me. It's a tickle.
Anymore. Anymore. So, hang on, it's gone right into my eye. You know when it goes, it'll go. Simply put then, Jesus taught us how to live in this world by living in this world.
We do have scripture. We do have the image of Christ through what we read. But for these early Christians, for these early disciples, they learned how to live in this world by looking at how God did it.

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Jesus lived in this world, and by living in this world, he teaches us how to live in this world. And Jesus, though not having any of the difficulties that we have with sin, because there is no sin found in him, and he committed no sin, is able to sympathize.
[10:51] And remember, sympathy is biblical. Empathy is worldly. And I've made that distinction before. It's such an important distinction, but I don't have time to go into it now.

So, Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, but he's not weak like us. Because weak people can't help weak people.
You need someone stronger. This is why God put men and women together in the beginning. The woman is given strengths that the man doesn't have. It would make no sense to put equal people together, because if they were equal, then I can do everything the other person can do.
The fact that God put unequal people together with different strengths is how God does things. So, giving us Christ is not just an example.
He is the one who enables us now to live the life that we are called to live. So, what Paul does here, if I can just sort of break down the whole section of chapter 3, is that he starts with the individual and the social setting.
[12:01] He then moves on to the covenant setting, that is church life. And we use the word covenant to explain that there is a covenant bond between God's people, not just fellowship.

In other words, that our gathering is part of an oath. It's part of a covenant. The Lord's table is Jesus saying, look, I'm not going to drink or eat of this again until a day I drink that anew with you in the kingdom of God.
In other words, you are going to be together, and we're going to celebrate this one more time, or again, at a later date, but once I get you there.
And so, all of God's people live within this now covenant community. It's an Old Testament language, I understand, but most of your Bible is Old Testament.
And we're told to, it's not irrelevant, it's to form our understanding of the New Testament, and the New Testament is to shape our understanding of the promises of the Old Testament, because everything is yes and amen in Christ Jesus.
[13:10] So, Paul moves from the individual to the church, and then, of course, he moves into the household by speaking of husbands, wives, even down to masters and slaves, so forth, within a community.

And we tend to forget that back in the day when Paul was speaking, the house was a place of being, it was the place where you would be productive.
The home was never considered to be a place of rest like it is now. You go out to work, and you come home to rest, and therefore the home is a place where I don't do anything.
Everyone else out there does it. But biblically speaking, the early church would have never been, understood it that way. They would have understood that the house is the place where you care, you look after, you educate children, you look after your grandparents, your great-grandparents.
It's that community within, all because we are now learning how to live, not as individuals, but as a church and in the home. Because none of us know how to do it.
[14:18] And that's what Paul was essentially teaching in this chapter. So, we go back to the one person who did it properly, and that is Jesus.

Jesus lived in this world, showed us how to live in this world by living in this world. And Jesus is the person that we have to go back to for everything.
Again, it seems so obvious, but it's not often done. So, what Paul is teaching us here is how to live. Now, why is he teaching us that?
Well, let's begin with this first section on what it means to learn how to live in verses 9 through to 11. I want you to understand and imagine, or perhaps not imagine, it's a reality, that sin not only destroys the way a person lives and can actually destroy a person's life in some measure, but sin actually destroys the knowledge of how to live.
So, sin destroys life. It ruins things. Everything it comes in contact with, it ruins. And by ruining one thing, it spreads, and then a person's life can be ruined through addiction, through a number of different means, a life can be ruined.
[15:45] But what we are meant to understand in addition to that is that sin also destroys the knowledge of how to live. Sin destroys your knowledge of how to live.

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So, the moment you're born, you have to be taught by parents. And if you're taught by parents who don't know how to live, who don't know what a person is, then they're unable to train these little people to be people.
They skill them, and they educate them in terms of, and the way that it normally goes is you want to be a doctor, well, you're going to have to get math, you're going to have to get science, you're going to have to get, but you can be a doctor and abort little children because you have never learned how to be a person.
So, you can be well educated, you can be well skilled, but if you haven't learned how to be a person, you can be a highly qualified surgeon and abort children in the womb.
And that's not because education has not been present, that's not because the parents haven't been good parents, it's because the sin destroys the knowledge of how to live and what a person is and what a person is for.
[17:02] And because sin destroys that knowledge, we then have a world that tries to make up, well, this looks right, let's try this.

And then we have a society based on what people think is good, fair, right, just. And that can change over time and you only have to look around the world at different societies to see that that is the case.
People in other countries don't believe what you believe in this country. Families in the East and in the Far East don't believe what you believe in your family.
And that's because that people have had to guess at what forms culture and society. No one knows for sure. And that's not to take away of cultural differences, but it is to highlight the fact that sin destroys the knowledge of how to live.
It destroys the knowledge of what a person is and what a person is for. So an example would be this, that we think that before we're saved we know how to sleep, we know how to eat, and we know how to work.
[18:09] And we think we know how to do those things because we've done them for so long. And then we get converted and think, well, I'll just carry on as I were. But the only reason you would do that is if you truly believe that the Bible doesn't actually teach about sleeping, eating, and working.

But the Bible does teach about sleeping, eating, and working. It tells us to go to bed early and rise up early. It tells us to eat, but don't be gluttonous.
It tells us to work and don't be lazy. Consider the ant, oh, you sluggard. So God's word reforms everything, sleeping, eating, working.
Why? Because sin destroys the knowledge of how to live. Sin destroys the knowledge of how to be a person. And so what you have is the word of God re-educating everything.
Absolutely everything. Because the world may get close, and in God's common grace, he protects the knowledge from being destroyed entirely.
[19:17] But there's a big difference between working in a God-glorifying way and working to meet your own selfish needs.

And we understand the difference. We understand how one act of work can be done to glorify God and another can be done to promote your own agenda. We understand that.
But the connection that we're being asked to make in this section here is you need to know how to learn how to live because you don't know how to do it.
It just so happens here that Paul doesn't choose sleeping, eating, and working. He goes right after the sin, some of the most common and big sins of the day because they just so happen to be the issues.
If you had a church that couldn't be bothered to work, you can guarantee, which he does in Thessalonians, by the way, you know, if he doesn't work, he doesn't get anything to eat. It's fairly simple. So Paul goes after the sins of his day because these are the sins that people need to understand are wrong.
[20:22] That's not how you live. And so Paul points out the obvious because it's not actually that obvious. And the list that he points out all seem to revolve around personal things regarding relationship, or regarding the breaking down of a relationship.

So you have sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, which is idolatry. He then moves on to anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk with your mouth.

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Sins that break, they're sort of, the context of these sins are very much relational. You know, they can upset your wife, they can upset your husband, they can tear a family apart, they can get you into trouble in ways that you shouldn't be getting yourselves into trouble through covetousness, wanting what other people have, wanting them not to have it.
And so the imperative here is not actually what you think it is, and that is, here's a list of sins to stay away from. The list of sins is simply a demonstration of what is earthly in you, verse 9.
The imperative, that is, what you are to do, is put to death what is earthly in you. That's what you're meant to do. Now, what follows from this is I have to be able to tell the difference between what is earthly in me and what isn't.
[21:55] Because if I can't tell the difference between what is earthly in me and what isn't, how am I going to put those things to death? If my wife sends me into the garage and says to me, throw out everything you don't want, it's not going to take me very long.

Okay? I'm going to be back in and say, can I have a, I'm finished, coffee time. But if she says, throw out everything I don't want, boy, it's going to take me days.
And this is because when you identify you're making distinctions. So, Paul is saying here, put to death what is earthly in you.
And then he gives a list of things that are earthly desires. Because they don't know how to identify those things as earthly desires that are within them.
It seems obvious that they should, it seems obvious to us because we've had the Bible for so long. But not, it's not actually even that obvious to Christians now unless they are taught what is earthly in you.
[23:03] And then he spells out these earthly desires that just so happen to be within these young Christians. Let me give you an example of the type of careful and perhaps not so careful distinctions we make.

We all know that Strictly will soon be back on and we know that there are going to be men dancing around with men and women dancing around with women. And for some Christians this is just a step too far.
I can't watch the program. I've got nothing against that. I've got nothing against you not watching the program before that happened or whatever. I'm not going to bind your conscience in any way. my issue is I want it to reflect Paul's issue is that is how we actually make those distinctions in the first place.
Like put to death what is earthly in you. So my concern is not the conclusions we arrive at though partly perhaps it's more to do with the fact of how you arrive at those conclusions.
[24:11] So I've said before that one of the things that sin destroys is definition of the knowledge of how to live. And therefore when a man is attracted to a man what sin does is it interprets that as attraction when in fact it is temptation.

And it's temptation because biblically it's wrong. It is not what God designed a man for. And so when a man is attracted to a man sexually and all other kinds of ways he how can that how can attraction be wrong?
How can attraction be wrong? So that feeling of attraction is not seen as an earthly desire. But this is because the sin interprets that as an attraction rather than a temptation.
Instead of him seeing himself as being tempted to do something that is inconsistent with the way God made him he now feels attracted and how can attraction be wrong? wrong. The same thing happens when one person marries another person that they shouldn't on the basis that they're in love.
But I love him. But biblically you can't marry him. But I love her. Okay but biblically you can't marry her. But I'm in love. And they never consider that love for the other person to be part of their earthly desire because it's love.
[25:36] How can love be wrong? But this is because the love has not been reformed. Just like your sleeping hasn't been reformed, your working hasn't been reformed, your eating hasn't been reformed.

You're still operating and distinguishing these on the old principles. And so what looks to be obvious is not obvious. And so one of the reasons why Christians sin, I don't want this to come across wrong, it's not just because they're sinful, we're all sinful.

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But why does one Christian sin more than another Christian when they're not in one sense any more sinful than them? So why does it happen?
It's because they are unable to spot and deal with earthly desires. So they look at things like love and attraction which are normally positive attributes, positive blessings and virtues, but because sin corrupts everything, they never consider that their love for another person has been corrupted by sin.
They never consider that their attraction for the same sex is something that has been corrupted by sin. And so what they need is the knowledge of how to spot what is earthly in them.
[27:02] So this goes way deeper than just don't sin. this gets down to the level of are you even able to spot when love is actually leading you down a sinful path?

When attraction is actually leading you into sin? So what Paul does here is that he's not going after the sins that the people are committing. He's teaching them put to death what is earthly in you and then gives them a list of the common sins of the day because they are unable to spot it for themselves.
So how can you as a Christian be kept safe and live wisely? Well, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Now you need to become mature like Hebrew says, growing up into the will of God, being able to discern the difference between good and evil.
You need the maturity of that knowledge so that you can put to death what is earthly in you. So instead of this just being a matter of desire, instead of this just being a matter of I can't help it, this is just the way I feel, it also comes down to you being able to identify that what you feel, though amazing, may actually be wrong.
That the love you feel for another person, though amazing, how can love be wrong, could actually be wrong. That the attraction you feel towards another person, that orientation, that pulling, though the feeling is perhaps even euphoric, is actually wrong.
[28:47] Why? Because sin doesn't just destroy life, it destroys the knowledge of how to live. And so Jesus shows us how to live by living.

And this is what Paul is doing here. So when he moves on then to put off the old self, in other words, before you can put something new on, you need to take those old things off.
Now I'm assuming that whenever you get dressed to go out, if you go out, I don't go out, I only get dressed up for a Sunday, and this isn't even getting dressed up, but you know, this is the best you're ever going to get.
I'm assuming that being good, sensible people, you wash, and you don't put on the work clothes that you wore for doing the garden the previous day, or whatever it may have been.
You understand that before you put on something beautiful, and lovely, and tailored, and made for you, that you take off the old rags, and dirt, and that.
[30:00] And that's what Paul is saying here. This should be simple, but I understand that because sin destroys the knowledge of how to live, I now have to tell you how to live. So take it off, get rid of it, and now put on these things.

So he's not in one sense telling us not to sin, though it's obvious that he's telling us not to sin. Rather, he's telling us to identify what is earthliness, to take it off, and then to put on the virtues of Christ.
Why? Because you have already died in Christ. You've already gone through a death and resurrection. And this is why he says put to death.
He's referring back to the fact that you yourself have already gone through a death and resurrection. There's no need for you to go back and drag that into your new future and spoil it. Because there is nothing in the past with all of its old practices that doesn't need reforming. Many of them follow through sleeping, eating, going out, friendships, but every single one of them needs reforming.
[31:14] every single one of them needs reforming. There is a God-given way in wisdom for everything to be understood. Sin has touched everything, and God's grace and the knowledge of God's grace in the gospel needs to permeate everything with what is good.

We need to know how to live. So with this, we will conclude. the reasons why Christians can get themselves into trouble, a whole world of trouble with sin, is not just because they're sinning, they sin, but it's actually because they have not yet learned how to live, how to distinguish what is earthly in them from what is godly.

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And that, when it comes to things like murder, that type of distinction is the same type of distinction between black and white. white, what Paul wants to get you to be is he wants you to be filled up with the knowledge of Christ so much that you're able to distinguish the difference between white and off-white, that you're able to make those small and important distinctions because then you won't fall for attraction when attraction is actually temptation.
You won't fall for love when love is just an expression of you not wanting to be alone for the rest of your life. life. Okay? They can all be interpreted in other ways but we take the one that makes us feel the best and that's because there's an earthly, there's earthly desires within us that can actually make us feel good.
They have to go. We're to put to death because we have died and rose with Christ. So with this I'll finish. Christians are enabled by God to say no to sin.
[33:08] That's what grace does. That's what grace does. The grace of God teaches a Christian to say no to sin. That even if we didn't have a pastor teaching us, that even if we didn't have the word of God teaching us, we would still have God's grace.

And God's grace does not lead us into antinomianism. It doesn't lead us into the place where we can say, well it doesn't matter because I'm living under grace. grace. The very grace that God gives us teaches us inwardly to say no to sin.
It changes our desires. Now the reason we need to learn in addition to all of that is because this is the way God has designed us to grow up and to pay attention.
Now I want to finish with this because this isn't really a matter of pointing out your sins and telling you not to do them anymore. It's rather for us to grow up into Christ, to become mature, to put on Christ, to put off the old self and to put on Christ and walk.
And here's why. Paul finishes here in verses 11 by saying look there are no distinctions between any of us. Every single one of our backgrounds is sinful.
[34:26] The gospel doesn't regard, is no regard or a background. We were all sinful before we came to Christ. We all committed sin.

None of us were any worse than anyone else and none of us were any better than anyone else. We were all sinful. Now the world does make distinctions and perhaps rightly so in some context.
But in Christ there are no distinctions. Christians. Because our background according to Christ is the same. And our foreground, the future that we move into, is also the same.
And what is it? Well we go back to verse three. That you need to understand that one of the reasons why you are to put to death what is earthly in you and live now in the glory of Christ is because your life is hidden with Christ in God.
You don't get to see who you really are. The world doesn't get to see who you really are. You are kept safe as God's prized possession. Beautiful. Never to be spoiled by the world.
[35:31] And the reason we're to spot these things down here is so that we would reflect what is true of us in the future now. God wants us to reflect what is true of us in the future though we can only know it in part now down here.

And so what God would want us to do is consider yourself as hidden with Christ in God, perfect in him and therefore, and therefore put to death what is earthly in you because it's not who you are anymore.
Amen. Amen.

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