

Right focus leads to right actions

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Date: 31 January 2016

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[0 : 0 0] If your Bible's with you, please turn to Colossians chapter 3. We're going to read the first 11 verses together.

So last week we took the whole chapter of chapter 2 because that's the way the chapter worked together. It was, as we said, you could look at each part individually and that would be a blessing.

But chapter 2 is a jigsaw. In other words, all the bits really need to be together to see the whole picture. Well, here in verses of chapter 3, verses 1 through to 11, it's the first half of something that Paul was saying.

And so it's a good part just to focus our heart and mind on these few words tonight. So let's pick up the reading then in chapter 3, beginning at verse 1.

Now hear God's word. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly.

[1 : 4 1] In the book, verse 1 through to 12, verse 1. Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil, desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On the account of these, the wrath of God is coming.

In these you once walked when you were living in them. But now you must put them away. Put them all away. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.

Hear then, hear there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian slave, but free.

Free. But Christ is all in all. Amen. Well, with your Bibles and with your attention on the first 11 verses, I have a title, which came as a great surprise to me.

[2 : 5 4] But the title is, Right Focus Leads to Right Actions. Okay? Right Focus Leads to Right Actions. And the reason I've not said Right Focus in Right Actions is because I want to make the point, or Paul is making the point, that if you have the right focus, then the right focus leads to the right actions.

The main theme here is about freedom and what it is to be free. Paul is saying that you're free, but you're not free to do whatever you like.

Even the best of freedom has boundaries. But you are free. And so he knows that this freedom needs explaining.

Even to a Christian who knows what it means, it's good to be reminded. What is it to be free? What does it mean to be a free Christian? So, what I want you to do is bear in mind that you may not actually know what it is to be free in Christ.

You may have a rough idea. You may have heard it before, but you may have forgotten. And you may not even actually be living in the freedom, as we saw in chapter 2, that it is possible for somebody to take us captive by the way they think Christianity ought to be.

[4 : 19] And if you don't share in these extrasensory experiences, then you've not quite made it into a full-blown godly Christian.

Having been in experiences like that, and no doubt you have, where even if your prayers don't seem to be answered like the person next to you, sometimes it can make you feel as though, is there something wrong with my relationship with God?

Is my prayers not as good as his prayers? Why is this happening? And, you know, God's got good reason for treating us differently, even though we're all equal, because he does different things with us.

God, as I said last time, isn't messing up your life. He's doing exactly what he wants to do with it. And so, you know, don't get frustrated at it, but rejoice in it.

It may mean that it's taxing your will, but nevertheless, God is a God who restores blessing and gives blessing and trust in the goodness of God.

[5 : 31] And so here we come into a passage where Paul really wants you to enjoy your freedom. And so I want you to imagine it this way. Imagine for a moment a man released from prison, and you have the opportunity to speak to this man who's just been released from prison.

You've got one question, and the question is, can you tell me what you're free from? Now that you're free, what is your freedom? And he would say, perhaps, hopefully, something like, well, I'm free from jail.

I'm free from a prison cell. I'm free from spending X amount of hours in a prison cell, and X amount of hours in a lunch hall in X amount of hours, or one hour per day, whatever it is, outside.

I'm free from all of that. I'm also free from being told what to do by prison officers. I'm also free to open my own door and lock it behind me.

I'm free from all of that. I can lock my own doors now rather than have them locked for me. I'm free from a lot of things. I'm free to go where I want, where there's no walls or boundaries.

[6 : 43] I'm free to do a lot now that I couldn't do before. And yet, now we get to a Christian, and you're told that you're free, and I ask you the same question.

What are you free to do? What are you free from? And Paul knows that this is, and you're going to, oh, actually, what am I free to do?

What am I free? What is Christian freedom? What is it to be free in Christ? Notice that's how he puts it, that we're free in this letter of Colossians, but we're free in a particular place, okay?

We're only free in a particular place, and that freedom is in Jesus. That's the only place where we're free. Well, you say, well, that doesn't sound like we're free because I can't go anywhere that I like.

Well, it's freedom within boundaries. So, what is your freedom? Now, I want you to imagine the same man that's been escaped from prison all over again, but this time I want you to imagine himself voluntarily putting himself back into prison.

[7 : 52] And you go, why would anybody do that? I want you to imagine him being tempted to go back into prison, but the way the temptation is only going to work if he voluntarily goes back in himself anyway.

So, I want you to imagine this man who's been set free, but now who voluntarily puts himself back into prison. And you say, well, that's a strange thing to imagine.

No one would do that. And Paul's writing to Christians who are doing that very thing. Paul is writing to a group of Christians that are doing that very thing.

It's strange to imagine, but that is exactly what these believers are doing to themselves. These Christians have been set free from the power of sin. Sin has no hold over their life anymore.

Sin cannot make you do what it wants you to do. It hangs over you. It lures over you. It tempts you. It hangs around, you know, pretending to be your buddy, pretending to be your friend, trying to say, hey, let's meet up and let's go out and let's...

[9 : 00] That's the way sin works. It sweet talks you into voluntarily putting yourself back into its clutches. Okay? Sin is a sweet talker and gets you to voluntarily put yourself back into its grip.

So sin hangs around. It tempts us. But we have freedom. We no longer have to obey sin's commands. We no longer have to obey what sin tells us to do.

It has no power over us whatsoever. Other than the power that we voluntarily give to it. So we go back to the man who's been released from prison. He has freedom from the prison cell and so he has freedom to go where he wants in the world.

And in the same way, you have freedom from sin and now you have freedom to not go back and live that sinful life again. That's what your freedom in Christ means.

And this is how Paul begins. He begins by saying verse 1, if then you, which is sort of an implied question, and he's not getting you to question your position in God, but he does want you to think about your relationship with God.

[10 : 17] What does, in other words, a relationship with God look like? What does it actually mean to have a relationship with Jesus Christ? What does it look like out on the surface?

How does it make you think differently and therefore, how does it make you act differently? So he's not getting you to question it to cause you to doubt or to think about it negatively. It's for you to go home and go, am I a Christian or am I not a Christian?

He doesn't want you to do that. What he does want you to do, however, is if then you have been raised with Christ, think about this. If then you have been, what does it mean?

Sit down and give it some thought. And once you have done that, he gives you six actions. So for the Christians amongst us this evening who want a to-do list, this is going to be right up your street because Christianity doesn't normally work like that.

Christianity is all about the heart, it's all about motives, it's all about desire because all of these things set up actions. You can't correct a desire with an action. You have to correct a desire with a new desire.

[11 : 23] That's the way that it works. It doesn't work the other way around. And so practical Christianity to correct a spiritual desire in Christianity, it never works that way around.

It's always the other way around. Right thoughts lead to right actions. Right actions doesn't lead you to think the right things. It doesn't work that way, naturally speaking.

So here are the six actions. Two of them have already happened, though. Here's the first four. Verse one, seek. Seek. Seek those things which are above.

Seek. Verse two, second action. Set your mind on things that are above and not on the things that are on earth.

So two, set your minds. Thirdly, verse five, put to death. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you.

[12 : 18] Go away and do that. Okay, the fourth, verse eight, put away. So put to death sins, verse five, verse eight. Put away all your sin.

And then the fifth and the sixth, which come together in verses nine and 10, are the two that have already happened. So I'll read verse nine and 10 to show you. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off.

Okay, this is what you have already done. Seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, verse 10, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.

In other words, see, these are the two things that you've definitely done. They've definitely happened to you. Okay, you were an old man and now you're a new man. Okay, you're a new person.

You've got a brand new identity. Your identity's hidden in Christ, but you're brand new. And because you're brand new, then do all these other actions.

[13 : 18] They've already happened. And so because you have this new position in Christ and you have this new identity in Christ, you're no longer a prisoner of sin, so don't live like a prisoner to sin.

That's his point. Because you are no longer under sin's command, don't live as though you're under sin's command. To give you a fairly vivid illustration of this, if you go back to the reason why the Civil War started in America and the debate whether or not it was really over the slaves in the South is highly debatable.

And now you have a constitution that is actually older than the actual states in America, which is very odd for any country. But you look at the political ramifications for it and you can understand why they're tearing down flags now and so forth and so on.

But to get back to the point, even after slavery was always wrong, even after it was declared wrong as a government, this you can no longer...

Black people in America still naturally, naturally obeyed the commands of white people. Even though the law said you don't have to anymore, because they had lived so longer under that type of reign, under that type of oppression, that any time a black person in America saw a white person, okay, and a white person do that, they did it.

[14 : 59] They didn't have to do it. Legally, they were not bound to do it. But because they'd lived so longer underneath that, that same type of thing continued to happen for years and years.

Thankfully, no more, we hope and pray. In fact, it was Abraham Lincoln who said, it's a ridiculous rule to make up slavery based on your skin color, because anybody with a shade, with a skin color a shade lighter than yours or a shade darker than yours has to be your slave.

He understood the fallacy of the whole argument. But the point here is, is that it is absolutely possible to be released from something, but having lived so longer underneath it, it still manages to have that influence over you.

To use perhaps another illustration, you take a couple that have been married for a very long time, the husband has been abusive for a long time, and the wife just says, you know, I don't have to live underneath this anymore.

We're just going to have to separate. And so they separate. But now every time they meet, the wife or the ex-wife now feels this fear, this immediate, even though she has no reason to be, because there's nothing bounding them together ever again, just the very fact of being in the same presence with the same type of looks and the same type of voice, and right, you end up, why does that happen?

[16 : 29] Well, it happens because you live a long time under one dominion. And it takes a lot for your mind and your heart to be convinced that you're now free from that, completely free from that.

And that's what Paul is saying to these Christians. You are absolutely free in Christ. You're absolutely free in Christ. There's no way and no good reason that sin can make you do what it wants you to do.

No reason. But sin, the subtle sweet talker, can only get you to do it if you voluntarily do it. Because you're not under law. You're not under the command anymore.

You're not under its dominion. So the only way it can do it is by tempting you, by sweet talking you, right? And because we live so longer with it, because we live so long with sin, it's easy to pick up the old practices again.

Very easy. So I have a couple of points, and they're both short. That is the title of the points are short. No, the points themselves are short as well. You'll be happy to know.

[17 : 37] The first is this, to seek and to set. To seek and to set. That is to seek the things above and to set your mind on the things above. And the second point is to put to death.

That is to put to death what is earthly in you and to put away the sin. So seek and set. Right focus leads to right actions. Put to death and put away.

So let's begin with seeking and setting. Paul wants you to think about, wants you to seek the things above precisely because he does not want you to seek the things below.

Paul wants you to set your mind on the things above precisely because he does not want you to set your mind on the things below. In other words, he wants you to have a Christian life that has a proper focus.

And that is not because the things below are naturally bad, but even bad things can be distracting, but good things can be especially distracting.

[18 : 37] They can distract you to such an extent that you lose your proper focus of how to view this world. In other words, you no longer see this world as God wants you to see it.

You see it as you see it through your attachment to earthly things. So seek the things that are above. Set your mind on the things that are above and then look at the world. And then everything gets its proper focus.

To use an illustration, this is going back a few years. We met a couple. He gave his testimony and he gave two testimonies, how he came to faith, but then he gave a testimony of how he decided to honor Jesus.

And I was very interested at what he meant by this. So I said to him, well, what do you mean honor Jesus? What happened? He said that he had the opportunity to be a world-class badminton player.

We're not just talking about someone who can play badminton in a local club. We're talking about someone who was called up and called up to play in different world games around the world.

[19 : 43] And he said, I knew that it wasn't bad. Jesus didn't have anything against badminton. There's nothing wrong with playing this. However, badminton became more important than Jesus.

And so I started not attending regular worship with God's people on the day that they meet, which is a Sunday. I started not attending the prayer meetings and the Bible studies, which I used to, not because badminton is wrong, but because my focus changed.

And then he said it became a tip for tat. And he used to say, well, you know, what I'll do is I'll do this throughout the week. I'll sort of pay God back. So I'll go to this prayer meeting because I've missed this Sunday morning.

Or I'll go to that Bible study because I missed that Sunday night. And he began to realize that he was trading with God. You know, you answer my prayer and I'll do this.

And his whole life became a trade. And so he decided to jack it all in. Where was the sin? Badminton? No, Badminton wasn't a sin. Badminton's a good sport for those who want to play it, I guess.

[20 : 51] You know, there's nothing wrong there. The issue was focus. The issue was his, he didn't have his mind on the things above.

He had his mind on Badminton. And then everything else lost its proper place. It didn't have any order. Badminton was first.

And then when Badminton was first, things, you have to make up your own order. What comes next? Family, children, you decide. It becomes very, very difficult. So the issue here of seeking and setting your mind on things above isn't because the things on earth are naturally bad.

It's because the things on earth can distract you and can change your focus. And you don't end up seeing the things that you need to see from God's point of view. So Paul says, verses one and two, seek the things that are above.

Like Jesus says, seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all these things will be added unto you straight from the mouth of Jesus. And then set your mind on those things which are above.

[22 : 00] And then he says, verse three, here's the reason. Here's the reason for doing that. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Verse four, when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. In other words, your life at this very moment is hid with Christ in God.

As I prayed in the prayer, Jesus at this very moment is standing before God reminding him of the cross about me. Every time the devil accuses me before God, Jesus says, died for that.

Every time there's a lie put towards God from the enemy and God, God doesn't listen because Christ, he sent, died for that, took that away, redeemed him, he's mine, his life is hidden with me.

That's what it means. That's the proper focus. So because I belong to Jesus, I am to have now the focus of Jesus in this world.

[23 : 03] We are to have then, as believers, a proper focus. And the only way to get a proper focus is to seek the things above. The only way to get a proper focus is to set your mind on the things above.

Someone once said that perception is reality. I don't really understand what that means because I probably, because I don't agree with it. Perception is a reality that you've made up.

But your perception will be whatever fills your mind. And deceptions are whatever have filled your mind. So both how you perceive the world and how you are deceived in the world, all of that takes place in the mind.

All of that takes place in your attention. All of that takes place in the area that you are focusing on. How you see things and how you are deceived by those things that you see.

And so seek the things above. Set your mind on those things above. In other words, if you're going to look at the world, look at the world through seeking the things above. Then look at the world.

[24 : 15] If you're going to look at people and you're going to look at hobbies and attractions and all of these good things, look at them by all means, but look at them through first setting your mind on the things above.

Then look at them. And what you'll begin to realize is that they'll be done and dusted and gone a long time while you are still enjoying your life in Christ.

And you'll look back, my perpetual fear is that I'll look back and think, why did I waste so much time? Why didn't I not just do it the way Jesus said?

I'm afraid of saying this to myself when the day comes. Why? So, seek your mind, seek those things above and set your mind on those things above.

And when Christ appears, and when Christ appears, you will appear with him in glory. And when that happens, there is the excitement of seeing everything as it is.

[25 : 18] Okay? I don't know if you've ever remembered those 3D pictures and someone says, you've just got to stare at it the right way and the picture would come. I mean, whoever invented those things must have been incredibly bored.

Just, just, just, I mean, think about it. How do you come up with something like that? Just, just do this. And you think, how bored are you? But there I was, sort of 45 minutes later, soon as I still can't see this unicorn or whatever it is.

And I'm having great difficulty here. Well, what Christ is basically saying is that you look at the world now and when Christ appears, you're going to, it's going to be like it really is.

Okay? And the only way you can see what it's going to be like now is not by looking at the world now, it's by setting your mind on the things above. That's the only way you're going to be able to keep your hope and focus on the future.

Secondly then, put to death. Get the right focus, then you can do the right action. Put to death and put away. Paul says, verse 5, put to death what is earthly in you.

[26 : 24] The reason is back in verse 3 because Christ died for us and then the second reason is found in verse 6 because on the account of these, the wrath of God is coming.

And so the reason for them to be as far away from your life as possible, Paul says, is because the wrath of God is coming upon these type of sins. And you don't want to be anywhere near it when it comes.

Okay? There is the saying that, you know, God loves the sinner and hates the sin. There's an element in which that is true, but it's absolutely impossible to judge the sin without the sinner.

Right? You can't do it. When God judges sin, he judges the sinner along with it. That's the whole point of the cross.

Christ takes their sins upon himself. Why? Because in order to deal with sin, it must be dealt with in a person. Sin cannot, sin is not out there. It's in, it's in people's lives.

[27 : 28] And so put, put it away, put it to death because on the account of these, the wrath of God is coming. And what this points to is that, as we said last week, there is a way to follow Jesus.

And there is a way not to follow Jesus. And we shouldn't be embarrassed or we shouldn't be taken back by the conviction that we might feel from God's word that says, you're not living it the way God said.

I mean, how many times have you read God's word and you think, man, that's not me. I'm so far from this. So there is a way to live the Christian life and because there is a way to live it, there is on the flip side a way not to live it.

And so when Paul comes up with these actions, put to death, put away, you know, just get rid of, he's not given us actions that we can't do. He's given us actions that we can do because remember, we've died to sin.

We have the power in Christ over them. They can no longer exercise any power. They can't make us do what they want us to do. But as I said this morning and I'll say again tonight, sin is serious but sin is subtle.

[28 : 49] Sin is serious but sin is subtle. Sin tells you that you can do it because you can be forgiven afterwards. Sin tells you that you can sin because you can repent later.

sin reminds you that God is graceful so why not just do it one more time. Sin is an absolute master at getting you to do what it wants you to do.

But here's the conviction. The only way it can get you to do it is if you enter into it voluntarily because you are no longer under its dominion.

You're no longer under its power. Okay? The person who sins whether we like to hear it or not, we sin voluntarily.

Shocking, isn't it? It wasn't me. It was my desire. Right? Right? No, Paul says that when you sin sin has no power. You can put it to death.

[29 : 59] You have the power in you in Christ to put it away. You can do that. And so when you don't it's because sin is sort of subtly sweet talking you in just this one more time.

In fact, I've always said that there's such a thing as a goodbye sin. I don't know if I know this because I've had a lot of practice in sinning or I know this because, you know, the only reason Solomon, I think, was so wise is because he was so stupid as well.

When you think about it, I mean, the wisest man on earth made some of the biggest follies that you could ever think about and I think that in writing about those follies there is an inherent wisdom in them.

Right? But you could have been guarded from them as well. I've always thought for a long time that there is such a thing as a goodbye sin and that's the sin that says to you, go on one more time.

And the reason why it lets you to think that, the reason why it sort of convinces you just one more time is because it'll leave you alone for a month or two months or even six months, maybe even a year and then it comes back and because you've forgotten about it and your guard's not up against it and you're not bang, it's got you and you're back to square one, you commit it on the trot and then it says to you again just one more time.

[31 : 22] Sin lets you say goodbye because at some point it's going to say hello again. It never goes away. John Owen makes these points wonderfully well.

Sin hides its awfulness from us. Can't hide it from God but it hides it from us. sin doesn't allow us to see sin as it is. It doesn't allow us to see sin as God sees it.

Sin even hides its power over you in God's will, in our will, sorry. John Owen said this, that sin hides itself in hopes of pardon shall hide it.

Future repentance shall hide it. This is brilliant, this next one. He says, desperate resolution shall hide it. This time God it will be really different. Because I know I can say that after I've done it, I will really plead that after I've committed this sin I will really, really be sorry.

Pleasures and profits can hide it. In fact, I like to think of sin as the wolf dressed his grandma in the little red riding hood. Oh grandma, oh grandma, where are you?

[32 : 34] Where are you? So put it to death. Recognize it and put it to death. Put away those sins because those sins lead to further problems.

He goes on to say, verse 8, put away and the sins that he's mentioning here are social sins. Anger is a social sin. Wrath, that is anger, you know, another form of is a social sin.

Malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth. Well, they're social sins. There are personal sins, okay, where I sin in the room on my own and you don't know it or I sin out and about and you don't know it but then there are social sins, the sins that I commit in a society.

You know, and Paul's saying, put to death and put away. Get rid of them all. And the reason for this, verse 9 and 10, because you've been converted, because you've put off the old self and you have put on a new self.

You're a different person now. You're not the prisoner anymore. So don't live like a prisoner anymore. There's been a definite change in your life and so don't live like the prisoner.

- [33 : 52] Live like the free man. let me try and illustrate where we're going with this. Imagine for a moment you're going out somewhere nice. I'm assuming that you've probably been somewhere where you've got dressed up to go and I guess it's the same for most people.
- If you're going to be dressed up, if you're going to go somewhere nice, you're going to put on something that's at least tidy to be able to go there. And where are you going here?
- Well, your life is hidden with Christ in God and when Christ appears, you're going to appear with him in glory. Okay, you are going to the place and that place, according to Psalm 109 and Psalm 110, has a dress code.
- It has a brand new dress code. Now, Christ clothes you in righteousness, that's the dress code for it, and so you have put off the old dress code, which there is no admittance into glory, and you've put on the new dress code, you're clothed in Christ's righteousness, and that gets you in.
- And so, even before you go out for, say, the nice meal, okay, let's say you've come home from work or you've come home, you take your clothes off. You don't go out in what you wear. This isn't suitable for that.
- [35 : 06] You understand that. Okay, you get dressed for winter, you get dressed for summer, people have a wardrobe that works like that, a winter wardrobe, or so I'm told, and that's how it works.
- You, you, you, all the women are like this, sort of nudging their husbands like, yeah, it's just, well, I don't know.
- But you get dressed for the occasion. But you can only get dressed for the occasion if you have first got undressed from your previous, from your previous thing, your whatever it is.
- And that's what Paul's saying here, that you used to have the wrong dress code to get into glory. And through conversion, you have been stripped of all of that, and you have been given a brand new dress code, which is your life is hidden in Christ.
- It says, like I said, some 109, some 110, elsewhere in Hebrews and Romans, the righteousness of Christ is your new dress code. And so now that you're all nice, don't go out and play in the mud.
- [36 : 13] Okay? Now that you're all nice, now that you're all dressed up, ready to go to God, don't go out and mess it all up. Rather, set your mind on the things above, seek the things above, and that will naturally lead to you doing the right things.
- Right focus leads to right actions. Right focus leads to right actions. So in conclusion, when we really take time to look after our life and we look after our life in this way, we need to remember why we're doing it.
- Because the life that we have is not our own, but belongs to Jesus. Our life is hidden in Christ. Our life is for Jesus. And so when we receive these instructions, it's very similar to receiving instructions when we look after somebody else's property.
- property. Okay? You can have it, but don't do this with that, don't do that with it. You know, feed it twice a day if it's a goldfish or something. Okay?
- Do whatever. You get the instructions because you're looking after somebody else's property. And so when we receive the instructions here to live this kind of life, it's because this life is for somebody else.
- [37 : 36] So when it says seek the things above, set your mind on the things above, put to death what is earthly in you, put away all these type of sins. The reason these instructions are given to us is not just because we can do them and we ought to do them, but the reason that we ought to do them is because the life that we have is for him.

We're looking after it for God. So God gives us this life, this brand new life, and then he says this is how I want you to look after it. Because, as we hear, the life is not our own, but it's actually for God.

And so Christians for a long time really want to belong to God, we really want to know what it is to really belong, and then when we find out we're like, hey, hang on a minute, I didn't realise this would take up so much time of my life.

But your life is the very thing that belongs to God. God wants all of you. I mean, how can that be a bad thing? For God to want all of you?

Amen. So without the right focus, without our minds being really, really healthy, having a healthy mind, a spiritually healthy mind, and a practically healthy mind, we are blind.

[38 : 54] And sin will give, take every opportunity of that blindness. right focus leads to right actions because the life that we're looking after is not our own, but belongs to Jesus.

As it says here, that when Christ finally appears, you will also appear with him in glory. And everything that you have been set in your mind on, and everything that you have been seeking, will then appear to be true.

It won't just be true as you set your mind on, it will actually be the physical reality. You've got to remember that the new heavens and the new earth, that everything about glory is more real than this.

Far more real than this. So everything that you seek here and set your minds on but cannot touch, one day you will. Because it won't just be real, it will be real in your very presence.

So right focus leads to right actions, leads us to being in the right place. Amen.