

How The Christian Ought To Live

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[0 : 00] We're going to look principally at chapter 3 tonight of the book of Colossians, but just by way of context, I'll start where we start in our reading in chapter 2.

And note that in verse 13, Paul said to the believers in Colossae, when you were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive in Christ, with Christ.

We have there an amazing transformation occurs in the life of every believer, and that transformation then forms their life and dictates the way their life goes forward after that.

And Paul says that to remind the believers here in Colossae, because already, as with many churches in Paul's day and in our own day, it's very easy to very quickly get sidetracked away from the core realities of what it is to be a Christian and how a Christian should live.

And in verse 16, he says to them, therefore, because you have been made a lie with Christ, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

[1 : 17] He is saying to them, don't let other people dictate how you live and look at these external things. And who are these other people?

Verse 18, do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen and his unspiritual mind puffs him up.

He's speaking there about folk who delight in false humility and they have a false form of worship.

They are worshipping angels or telling people that you ought to worship as angels worship and they are the ones who know what that kind of worship should be.

But he sums up these people by saying that kind of teacher has lost connection with the head from whom the whole body grows as God causes it to grow.

And if anyone loses connection with the head who is the Lord Jesus Christ, then they are in serious trouble. The kind of person he's speaking about there is quite possibly someone who was never truly in Christ at all, but for whom it's taken some time for their false understanding to become clear.

[2 : 41] So he's warning the believers in Colossae not to follow these false teachers, but to follow only what the word of God itself says. And he himself then goes on to tell them really how the Christian is called to live.

And I want to look tonight at three key points. The first of which is the Christian's privilege. And we see this outlined in verses 1 to 4 of chapter 3.

And this privilege is made up of four different elements. First of all, he says, first of all, I will pick out in verse 3 of chapter 3, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ.

You died with Christ, first of all. He said that back in chapter 2 and verse 20, since you died with Christ. And again in verse 3, he's saying you died with Christ.

What he's saying to each and every Christian is that you died with Christ. It was as if you were on the cross with Christ when he died.

[3 : 59] And because he died to pay the price of sin, you yourself have died to sin. And you in the past were living for sin, but now you have died to it because you died with Christ.

That's the first element in the Christian's privilege is that we actually died with Christ. But the second one, which I'll pick out in verse 1, is that each one of us has been raised with Christ.

You have been raised with Christ, Paul said. You have died to sin, but you've been raised to Christ. You have been born to a new life.

You have been born from above by the Spirit of God. And because of that, you are free from the power of death.

Every Christian has been set free from the power that death has, just as Christ himself could not be held by death because of the perfect life that he lived.

[5 : 05] That he lived and then rose again after being put in the tomb for three days. He came back to life because death simply could not hold him.

And the power that was at work in Christ to raise him from the dead is that same power that raised each and every believer from death to life with Christ.

You died with Christ. You have been raised with Christ. Thirdly, you are hidden with Christ, verse 3. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Each and every believer is united to Christ when they put their trust in him. That union is so close, it is as if we were hidden and could not be seen.

It is one which is unbreakable. A bond that cannot be broken. And a bond that holds us fast to Christ for our entire life and indeed for eternity.

[6 : 12] Most importantly, we are hidden from the devil. Jesus in speaking to the disciples said that the devil wanted to have them.

But he said, no one can snatch you out of my hand. No one, not even the devil, with all the power that he has, can take a believer away from Christ.

We are also hidden from the law. We read back in chapter 2 there about the law that stood against everyone. And condemning them because of their sin was nailed to the cross with Christ.

And that is because Christ fulfilled the law in its entirety in a way that was simply impossible for any of us to do. And because he did that, it is now as if we as believers in Christ have fulfilled the law.

So we are hidden from the consequences of the law. And more than simply being hidden in Christ, we also see that your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

[7 : 21] There's a double protection there. We are in Christ and in another layer of being in God. We are kept by the Son and the Father keeps us all the more.

The Father will keep everyone that his Son has brought to life. The Father will hold fast to them just as the Son holds fast to them.

And if we think back to Romans 8, Paul's speaking to the Romans there. And at the end of that chapter, he finishes by basically saying that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing at all can do that. So every believer is hidden with Christ and they are safe in Christ. And the fourth part of the Christian's privilege that we see here is that you will appear with him in glory. Verse 4. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. There are, I could say, several elements to this.

[8 : 32] Each of us, when we die on earth, immediately go to be with Christ in spirit, even though our bodies lie in the grave.

But when Christ comes back, as Paul is referring to here, he will bring all his holy ones with him. And it's not just Christ and the angels that Scripture is talking about, but it is each and every believer who has died in Christ is brought back to this earth, not least so that their spirit can be reunited with their body.

But in so doing, we will appear with him on that glorious day. And more than that, we will be shown to be in Christ. There will be that clear separation between those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ on the last day.

And everyone on that last day will see those who are in Christ and they will see them glorious alongside Christ himself.

It's just a quite amazing privilege that we have as Christians to have all these different elements come together and constitute that privilege that we have of being in Christ and of being secure with him, having died with him, being raised with him, being hidden with him, and that promise of appearing with him in the future.

[10 : 01] The Christian's privilege. The second point I want to talk on tonight is that of the Christian's duty. When we're in such a privileged position, Paul then goes on to exhort us that there is a particular duty and a line we ought to be following as believers.

And the first part of that is simply having a holy direction. Verse 1 of chapter 3, You have been raised with Christ, therefore set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your hearts on things above. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Speaking to that vast crowd in front of him, he was challenging people to have the right kind of treasure in their life. They could have any amount of money they wanted, and that would certainly show where their heart was.

Just as we could see in the life of Zacchaeus, when he lived for money, and he stored it up in his house, and he had great wealth. And yet, ultimately, he recognised that he had the wrong kind of treasure.

[11 : 23] Christ tells us, or Paul tells us here, that we should set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Our treasure is to be in heaven. And more than that, our treasure is to be Christ himself. Anyone who has died with Christ, and who has been raised with Christ to new life, will have Christ as their treasure.

And the challenge for each and every believer, as these believers in Colossae were finding, was keeping Christ as the number one treasure. And it's always so easy to get diverted in our Christian lives, and in our ordinary lives, for the things of day-to-day life to take over from the reality of the calling, which God has before us.

Set your hearts on things above, and set them on Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God.

And it's wonderful here, when we think of Christ as being seated at the right hand of God.

The book of Hebrews tells us quite clearly that Christ was acting as a high priest. And because his sacrifice was once and forever, he was far greater than all the other priests, and the high priests that served in the temple.

[12 : 44] And the writers, the Hebrews, simply told, said to his readers, because we have a great high priest. And because Christ is seated, he's not like any other priest who spent his day on his feet, offering sacrifices in the temple, and doing all the work of a priest to help all those people who came each and every day, bringing their animals to be sacrificed.

But Christ has completed the work of sacrifice. Therefore, he's seated at the right hand of God. No more sacrifices needed. He has done everything that needs to be done.

But by being seated at the right hand of God, he is able to intercede on our behalf. And he is there continually, praying for his people by the throne of God.

And each and every one of us who are believers today should take that into our own hearts and rejoice that even though we fail so often, even though we sin so often, despite our best efforts to live a holy life, yet Christ is always praying for us, continually on our behalf, that we might remain faithful to him.

Paul also tells his people, set your minds on things above and not on earthly things.

[14 : 14] Our life in Christ isn't simply a life of emotion. It's a life that is based on truth. And we need to engage our minds in that. We need to set our minds and our hearts upon Christ so that our whole inner being works as one.

And our minds inevitably are drawn to Scripture and to everything that it teaches us about Christ. So whenever we enter into God's word, in a sense, we are entering into heaven because we are seeing God's revelation before us.

And that should draw us into praise as we have our hearts and minds set on Christ, our perfect Savior. In addition to having a holy direction to our lives, in verses 5 to 9, Paul says, there must be a holy slaying, a holy putting to death of everything that does not belong in the Christian's life.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. And in verse 9, do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge of its creator.

Other things in verse 8, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. He's saying all of these things simply have to go.

[15 : 50] And he says, therefore, put to death, therefore, because that arises from the position that the Christian has with Christ. Christ is holy, so we must be holy.

God says in Scripture, be holy because I am holy. Hebrews 12 and 14 says, without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

every Christian is already holy on earth and they will be holy in heaven. If there is no hint of holiness in the life of someone who is professing faith in Christ, then we can reasonably have doubts as to whether they are in Christ.

Because if Christ has come into your life, then your life should be reflecting something of the life in Christ himself. All of those things that are mentioned there in those verses are the things that cause corruption within us, that cause the whole of human fabric and society to break down.

There's a whole litany of sins there. And in verse 6, Paul says, because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

[17:14] So he's saying to the believers in Colossae that they are very much in Christ. They have been raised with Christ. They're holy like Christ.

And therefore, they have nothing to do with those things for which the wrath of God is coming. And believers often look out and ask themselves, why has God's wrath not already come when there is so much evil in the world?

Why does God take so long in dealing with the amount of evil that is there? God is quite honest and open in his scriptures. And he talks about peoples and nations storing up wrath for a time for him to judge in the future.

In dealing with certain nations, he said, their sin has not yet reached its full measure. And a key element in scripture is that God has his people that he is calling into his kingdom.

And the elect are still being called in. Each and every time the gospel is preached, God is speaking to people. And he has a people. And each and every one of them will come to Christ before the end of time.

[18:30] That day may be a great distance away. But as Paul said in writing to the Corinthians, he reminded them that today is the day of salvation.

Today is the word that scripture uses. Tomorrow is the word that the devil uses. He always wants you to put off a decision until tomorrow. But if Christ is speaking to you today, your responsibility is to respond and today to come to Christ.

For the believer, this putting to death is an active process. It's an ongoing thing. Put to death. It's not something that you do once and is forever finished with.

Each and every day when we get up and as we walk through that day, we have to think about putting to death all the sins that trouble us and not to give them any oxygen, not to give them any life.

In verse eight, where Paul says that we must rid ourselves of all things such as anger, rage, malice, slander, etc. There's really powerful language in there.

[19:42] There's no easy and simple thing for a Christian to do. There is work to be done actively in terms of putting to death sin and ridding ourselves of all the things that God does not want us to have in our lives.

The question then arises for many Christians, well, if I do indeed have these sins in my life, how is it that I am saved?

Am I really saved at all? Because I still have a problem with these sins or with particular sins that always trouble me. And the reality is none of us will be free from sin in this life.

But as we were speaking a short time ago about the direction that our lives have, if the direction of a life is one of holiness, then even if we are diverted from it, we can come back to that direction again.

If you think of a compass, it always points towards magnetic north and it will not deviate from that unless you do something like take a magnet and put it by the side of the compass and then you can cause that compass needle to divert away from its proper and true reading.

[21:03] But once you take that magnet away, the needle will return to true north once again. And that, I think, is a good picture of sin in the believer.

So often we allow things of this world, we allow elements of corruption to cause us to sin and to drag us away from the direction we know we ought to be going.

But once we repent of that sin, we are able once again to take that holy direction towards Christ. And it doesn't matter in one sense, and I say in one sense, how serious a sin is that you have committed as a believer.

If you repent of it, you can and will be accepted by God once again. The history of Christianity is full of people who have done terrible things.

Think of Peter himself denying Christ and yet ultimately being called back to serve Christ and showing how much he loved Christ even though he had denied him.

[22 : 12] So if Peter can do that, any sin that we do is forgivable as well. And that compass needle can point to Christ again.

So it's an active process that we need to be involved in of putting sin to death. The third element we have here is that of a holy clothing we see in verse 12.

Paul says, therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Having told them to get rid of all these bad and terrible things in their lives, all these sins that drag them down and that are dishonouring to God, he comes to the very positive side of the Christian life of clothing yourself with these characteristics that represent God.

We see in verse 9, it says, you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in the image of God.

[23 : 30] In the image of God. So we've already put off the old self, we've put on a new self. And what Paul is saying here is, go and act like the Christian that you already are.

There is a new self and you're to clothe yourself with all these attributes that belong to a Christian. Notice there's a big contrast there between the challenge and the calling of the Christian in this situation to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

There's a big contrast between that and the false teachers that Paul was warning against in chapter 2 and verse 18 whom he described as having an unspiritual mind that puffs him up with idle notions. False humility being puffed up in the absolute contrast to the reality of what it is to be a Christian. and here we have that big contrast and the thing that shows up false teachers because their focus is on the external.

They want people to see what they look like whereas the believer the focus is on the internal and putting sin to death and of putting on characteristics that truly represent Christ.

[24 : 57] These false teachers were in reality wolves in sheep's clothing. they were trying to look like they were believers and godly teachers but they were far from it and they were exposing external rules in verse 21 of chapter 2 do not handle do not taste do not touch that is really the clothing of unbelief when you start to get involved in those things because it's not trusting in the grace of God and Paul sums them up in verse 23 of chapter 2 by saying they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

They've got no value whatsoever but the one thing that does have value is in following Christ himself and trusting him. So we are to clothe ourselves with these characteristics and therefore we are to cultivate these characteristics which is very much one of a compassionate heart and if we look at those things compassion kindness humility gentleness and patience we can almost sum them up as having a compassionate heart and we can just think of that in relation to having our hearts set on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God as we saw in verse 1 it's a heart that matches the place where our hearts need to be and again it's the absolute opposite of being puffed up and proud in who we are and what we claim to have done.

Paul goes on a bit further in verse 14 and says we must put on love and it's a really interesting phrase that over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect humility in perfect unity we live in a society that would imagine that it's actually not possible to put on love because we think of love as something that happens between two people they fall in love with one another but the reality is in scripture love is something much more dynamic than that because here Paul says put on love it's you're making an active choice are you going to love or are you going to hate are you going to love a person or are you going to have nothing to do with them and one of the great challenges in scripture is where Paul says husbands love your wives now in our own society today the assumption would be that you ought to love your wife yes but that's because you've fallen in love with her and if you fall out of love with your wife well you know there's nothing that can be done but in contrast

Paul was speaking into a pagan society when men treated their wives as little more than slaves and treated them terribly but he was saying love your wives it's a direction and a commitment and if you think of two people who are married and say one of them becomes seriously ill and their life changes radically if the other walks out on them what would you say to yourself you would say well did they really love their husband or their wife but if they spend 20 years caring for someone who is incapable of caring for themselves you would just look at that person and say what love they had for

their husband or their wife because they were willing to do that that is the kind of active love that Paul is talking there it's a choice that we make but it's also a choice that is reflected and coming out of the heart that one has which is set on

Christ who is seated at the right hand of God and who is praying for us so no matter how hard we find it to love if we know that Christ is interceding for us we can persevere and continue to love in all circumstances if we look back at verse 12 there Paul says therefore as God's chosen people holy and dearly loved clothe yourselves with compassion kindness humility gentleness and patience we see there the foundation for our love you are chosen holy and dearly loved if God dearly loves us if Christ dearly loves us despite the wretchedness of us in our sin and having had nothing nothing in us whatsoever to make God love us and save us other than

[30 : 12] God's pure free choice to save wretched rebels then if that kind of love has been given to us can we not have a love that is active and is shown in our lives and is demonstrated in the world the love of Christ is something amazing and it's amazing to see it expressed in Christian lives so that was the Christian's duty our second point the final point and briefly is the Christian's discipline or the Christian's way of life and thinking of this heading I was struggling on this when I preached the sermon first in my own congregation I was trying to think of a word that encapsulates what Paul wants people to do but I've settled on Christian discipline because there is discipline here but it is a godly and a joyful discipline verses 15 and 16 first of all Paul says let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you are called to peace he says let there is still an element of duty here but it's passive there is no resistance to Christ working in our lives the resistance to Christ working in our lives is always caused by indwelling sin but if we put sin to death and we actively seek to live by

God's word it's that much easier to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts and his peace is a peace that is above all other things the peace of Christ is in our heart and secondly he says let the word of Christ dwell in you richly so we have the peace of Christ in our hearts and he says the word of Christ must dwell in us and the word of Christ principally dwells in our minds as we meditate upon that word as we memorise it take it into our minds and that influences our hearts it's a wonderful thing to be able to meditate upon scripture and Paul calls each and every one of us to do that here that the word might dwell in us richly the word does dwell in every believer unfortunately too often and for too long it dwells in us in an impoverished kind of a manner because we're like beggars standing by a mountain of treasure and we're only taking one coin at a time whereas God tells us to take armfuls of the riches that he has of his kingdom let us focus our hearts and our minds upon God's word let us get it into our minds let us meditate upon it that it may dwell richly within us as believers and finally he says that the praises of Christ should also be on our lips he says as you sing psalms hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God inevitably when we think upon Christ when we have a heart set on him when we have his word dwelling within us the praises of Christ must come upon our lips do you sing praise to God in this building do you sing praise to God in your home if you don't sing praise to

God you need to ask yourself where is the word of God in my life and I think as believers we're often impoverished because we don't sing even though many of us are poor singers I always remember my own father he loved singing at home he would sing psalms constantly but in his case it truly was a joyful noise he was completely tone deaf but that didn't matter to my dad because he was praising God's name and it doesn't matter how bad your voice is your call to sing the praises of Christ let them come from your lips so we see there the Christian's privilege the Christian's duty and the Christian's discipline it's a wonderful calling that we have and if we would put into practice many of these things that we see in

Colossians chapter 3 our own lives would be so much richer for it and I pray that God would enable each and every one of us to do so let's pray to