

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Hold Fast to Christ!

(Col 2:2b-3 ESV) to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“You Are Alive in Christ, So Live Like it!”

March 24, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 3

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3

Introduction-

The following was written by Trevin Wax in a book edited by Pastor Daniel Darling, entitled Real: Owing Your Christian Faith -

A few weeks ago a Facebook friend posted a clip from an ABC News interview with Lauren Drain, who grew up in the infamous Westboro Baptist Church, led by Fred Phelps. Lauren is now estranged from her family, having fled the secretive, cult-like Westboro compound.

In her late teens, she had begun to ask questions, poking around at the glaring hypocrisies she found in the ideology embraced by the movement. As with most closed religious environments, the questions led to condemnation and isolation from her family. ABC News interviewed Lauren's parents, who somehow managed to crack smiles while saying, "Lauren is dead to us."

You don't have to go to seminary to know that Westboro is far from the New Testament church model. And despite the attempts of some social commentators to link Westboro to mainstream evangelicalism, virtually all corners of Christendom have risen up in condemnation of Fred Phelps and his theologically errant organization. However, there are lessons in the

Westboro story that are helpful for Christians.

While their theology lies outside the typical orthodoxy embraced by most churches, there are practices embraced by this small movement that are embraced, at least on a smaller level, by some legalistic religious environments. I was particularly arrested by the posture of the Drain family toward their daughter. Their tactics of isolation and demonization are common tools to shut down questioning young people who might sniff out hypocrisy in a church especially when a church's practices seem to contradict the very Word of God, which is held up as the source of faith and practice. The Scripture does call for some forms of church discipline to benefit both an unrepentant church member and a congregation. But this practice can be used by manipulative leaders to silence the very important questions raised by those who seek truth. In the most extreme cases, kids are pushed from the church and isolated from their families. Often this is not to uphold some important point of doctrine or to gracefully nurture a believer back from the abyss of sin, but to punish those who don't adopt the party line.

As I watched Lauren Drain's tearful interview, I couldn't help but wonder what she thought of Jesus now. Would

she ever walk into a church again? Would she trust another spiritual leader? And would she trust the Scriptures?

Darling, Daniel (2012-07-03). *Real: Owning Your Christian Faith* (pp. 100-101). Ingram Distribution. Kindle Edition.

Someone failed to heed Paul's warning given repeatedly in Colossians 2. *See to it that no one takes you captive.* There will always be a Fred Phelps around, or an Ellen G. White, or a Joseph Smith, or...the friendly pastor or church leader at the church on the corner who is regarded as a holy, eminent saint in his church.

Let no one pass judgment on you.

Let no one disqualify you.

Do not yield to regulations about what to handle, what to taste and what to touch.

Why? Because we have Christ and Christ is all there is to have! He is the object of our faith and by His wounds we have already been healed. Christ is the Head of the church. Christ is the One who gives us life. Christ is the victor and king of all the universe. And He is ours, and we are His. Our debt has been fully wiped out. Every enemy has been disarmed. We are

forgiven and we have been made new creations by the powerful working of God.

Need? What do I need? Nothing!

The Apostle summarizes his exposure of man-made traditions and philosophies with this tremendous statement-

“These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”

Amazing! NO value! This means that wherever we see legalistic, rule-based distortions of Christianity, we can be most assured that we will find the flesh running wild! The law is the power of sin. These wolves who sneak in lead us away from Christ, and their systems are always performance based.

A Massachusetts principal has been criticized for canceling his school's Honors Night, saying it could be 'devastating' to the students who worked hard, but fell short of the grades.

MyFoxBoston.com reports that David Fabrizio, principal of Ipswich Middle School, notified parents last week of his plan to eliminate the event. "The Honors

Night, which can be a great sense of pride for the recipients' families, can also be devastating to a child who has worked extremely hard in a difficult class but who, despite growth, has not been able to maintain a high grade-point average," Fabrizio penned in his first letter to parents, the station reported.

Fabrizio also said he decided to make the change because academic success can be influenced by the amount of support a student receives at home and not all students receive the same level of emotional and academic support at home.

Some parents disagree with his philosophy. "It's been a tradition in Ipswich, and you're very proud as a parent to see your child, as well as some of the other children who made, really, some great efforts," Dave Morin, a parent, told the station.

Fabrizio says he plans to include the honors ceremony with a previously planned end of the year assembly where students will be recognized in front of the entire student body.

Read more: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/03/20/massachusetts->

[principal-calls-off-honor-night-because-it-could-be-devastating/#ixzz2OCw4XtY8](#)

Now, we may disagree with this principle, but in a sense his position illustrates the difference between the gospel of Christ and what Paul has called “the elementary principles/spirits of the world.” These basic building blocks from which ALL the world’s religions and philosophies are constructed, tell us that *we are rewarded for our performance*. That is how it works. That is why there is an outcry over the principle’s decision.

But in Christ’s kingdom, in the realm of grace, the laborers who came to work late in the day receive the very same pay as those who worked all day long! The gospel is radically different than all of the world’s thinking and systems. Therefore we must be on guard and reject all performance-based counterfeits of Christ. They lead us into a pit every single time.

Let’s move on now and turn our attention to Colossians 3 –

(Colossians 3:1-4 ESV) ¶ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.³ For you have

died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Well, here are some very incredible facts that I will do my best to explain, though I do not understand them thoroughly I am sure.

The “if” here in verse 1 is rhetorical. Paul has already reminded us (2:12) that in fact we HAVE been raised with Christ through faith. Raised from the dead. And apparently now, *ascended with Christ*. We speak of “when we get to heaven,” but here Paul is telling us that in reality, *we are already there*.

Seek the things that are above.

Set your minds on things above.

What are these things? They are things that stand in contrast to things that are on this earth. Don’t focus yourself on things that you can handle, taste, or touch – things that are temporal and are going to perish (2:22). Don’t be earthly oriented, but heavenly-oriented because THAT is where you are now, and THAT is where your real life is. You don’t see it yet. It is hidden, but that will change when Christ comes. What you are in Him will be fully realized then for all to see. We will be glorified as He is.

This is speaking of course of the coming resurrection.

But what are these “things” we are to set our minds on and that we are to seek? Read on for the answer-

(Colossians 3:5-8 ESV) ¶ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming.⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Here Paul lists some of the earthly things in contrast to the things that are above.

- Sexual immorality
- Impurity
- Passion
- Evil desire
- Covetousness/idolatry
- Anger
- Wrath
- Malice
- Slander
- Obscene talk

Earthly things. We used to LIVE in them. These are the things that

defined us and characterized us. But no longer. That old person is dead, put to death with Christ on the cross. A new creation has come and those earthly things are not the definition of his character.

(Ephesians 2:4-6 ESV) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved--⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

In contrast, here are the things above:

(Colossians 3:9-17 ESV) Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.¹² ¶ Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you,

so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In other words, we have two kingdoms – darkness and light, evil and righteousness – opposed to each other. We have been taken out of the one, having died to it, and put into the other as citizens. These righteous things are what characterize this new kingdom of which we are now a part. Life in the kingdom of Christ is like this. So, we are called to live like who we are!

Notice this is no “list” of various performances that determine whether God accepts us. No. It is a description of our new life BECAUSE we have that new life already! And therefore THE place where this new kingdom life should be the most evident is in the local church and in the lives of its members. If this is NOT the case, then

something is horribly wrong. Listen to a portion of a blog article written recently in response to the teen boys who were convicted of abusing a 16 year old girl. It is written as a godly mother’s instructions to her soon-to-be 18 year old son:

A Steubenville doesn’t begin with football and it doesn’t begin with alcohol and it doesn’t begin with unsupervised jocks with inflated egos and shriveled morals. It begins with one woman bringing home a man-child in her arms, one mama unwrapping that blanket and what it means to raise up a man.

It begins with one mama looking into her son’s eyes for the next 18 years and showing him what it means to be a woman.

I brought you home when I was 21.

I cradled you, you crying and me crying, and the essence of me ran liquid and milky and a woman poured out of herself to keep you alive. You rooted hungry and it was the roots of a woman that nourished you. **It was a woman who gave you life, who**

was the grace of God that kept you alive, who is the mother of all the living.

I held you when fever burned your forehead. And I stroked back your hair when your stomach churned and I cleaned us both up when you vomited all over everything. I opened books for you and stoked your mind and unpacked a world before you and I laid down me to make more of you and it wasn't a sacrifice but the unexpected grace of motherhood.

We talked about life being much more than you can see, so you knew that a woman is always more more than you can see. I kept trying to be at peace in my own body so that you would always see women as more than a body. And **I always told you that I've only ever met beautiful people. Ugly is only a state of soul.**

In 8 short weeks from today, you'll blow out your candles and look up across the table and [that baby I brought home at 21 will be 18](#). I don't

know how that happened. I got a lot wrong. [And there'll be a mother in Steubenville](#) who will be shattered that her teen son's behind bars and how in the world did that happen. We're all getting a lot wrong.

Like that night I was 19 and I saw it in my rear view mirror, how a 20-something man reached over and started fondling a terrified 14 year-old sleeping girl. How he shrugged his shoulders when we confronted him, like he was brushing away an annoying fly. How there were girls that whispered that he'd grabbed them too in the dark of a car when he drove them home from youth group, how there were all these shy and ashamed girls who were violated and forced and indifferently robbed.

I want to tell you, son — we were all church kids. There was no alcohol. There were no parties. There were no football teams.

There were young men who opened their Bibles and didn't value the worth of a God-

fashioned woman made for glory, young men who sang worship songs and satiated their lust by ripping off the dignity of a sacred human being, young men who said women were the weaker vessel meant let's drink them dry and be merry.

We went to the church elders.

A handful of us girls with one teenage boy who knew what he saw and wasn't afraid, we went to the elders and sat there with our hands literally shaking and our mouths impossibly dry and we tried to find words for what should never have to be said. My cheeks and throat burned.

And I have never told anyone what happened next, but after Steubenville, **to stay silent is to let perpetrators perpetuate.**

We were looked in the eye, Son, and what we were told, those words tried to shatter God —

“Boys will be boys.”

Son. **When the prevailing thinking is boys will be boys — girls will be garbage.**

*And that is **never** the heart of God.*

<http://www.aholyexperience.com/2013/03/after-steubenville-what-our-sons-needs-to-know-about-manhood/>

What has gone wrong in a local church like that? Where people claim to belong to the Kingdom of Christ, claim to be the people Paul is talking to. People whose life is hidden with Christ above? People who allegedly have died to this earthly kingdom of evil? And yet the prevailing atmosphere and philosophy is, “boys will be boys” and, I suppose we should add, “well, teen girls will be teen girls, you know”?

Seek the things that are above. Set your minds on the things above, not on things that are on earth. This means that we don't get all caught up in false systems about what foods we must or must not eat; traditions added by human beings about marriage; and it also means that we reject thinking and behaviors that characterize the fallen, earthly, sinful man.

Now, let's see if we can really pin down this battle specifically. Because this whole issue is indeed a battle, and it is no mere saying “Ok, sure, I won't

do that anymore, and I will do the good stuff Paul lists here. I won't lie anymore. I will tell the truth. I won't be angry anymore. I will stop sexual immorality right this moment and never look at pornography again. It isn't that easy, is it?

First of all, this battle is going to be waged *by the Spirit*.

(Romans 8:9-14 ESV) ¶ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.¹² ¶ So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

And you see that all of the philosophies and traditions Paul has warned us about are devoid of the

Spirit. That is why they are powerless to “stop the indulgences of the flesh.”

How does the Spirit wage this battle? With the Word. Truth. He applies it to us and renews our minds and thinking. You see the thing here in Colossians:

(Colossians 3:1-2 ESV) ¶ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

See it? Understand you have been raised with Christ, that you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Your life, the new YOU, is going to one day burst on the scene when Christ comes in His glory. So live like that new man, now! We need to get our thinking straightened out, and it is the Spirit who does this. We cooperate. He leads us, and we follow. He shows us evil, and we reject it. He shows us Christ, and we follow Him.

So put to death, by the Spirit, what is earthly in you. We still have leftovers in us. But we reject these things. Understand that the wrath of God is coming because of evil, and we once were objects of His wrath, but no more. SO, put these things away!

And this battle, as we have said, is primarily fought *in our mind*. This is the problem with man 's traditions and legalism. It only addresses the external man and actions. Christ begins with our hearts and minds so that we increasingly see His truth and love it and love His righteousness and hate evil.

“...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.” (vs 10)

So what is vital in this battle is our thinking. Not the food we eat or the clothes we wear or the things we do. Oh, those things will come into play, BUT THEY ARE NOT PRIMARY. THEY ARE NOT THE FIRST THINGS. They come after. Legalism has the cart before the horse. In Christ we do BECAUSE, not IN ORDER TO.

Look at verse 11 again –

“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all in all.”

This means then that in the Kingdom of God, of which we are now members, *there is only ONE new man!* One nationality. Babel is gone. No more social divisions and classes.

(Galatians 3:28 ESV) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And therefore we must reflect this truth in our lives now! So if our church is a mixed bag, as all churches are in some ways, we are not to show partiality.

(Colossians 3:12-14 ESV) ¶ Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Think of it! We have never experienced ANYTHING like it in this world, but in the church this is how we are to live. Racism? Gone! Social snobbery? Gone!

(James 2:1-7 ESV) ¶ My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly,

and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet,"⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

In two weeks we will take a look at these verses:

(Colossians 3:18-22 ESV) ¶ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. [4:1 gives instruction to the slaves' master]

But in Christ's kingdom, that kingdom which is above and not of this fallen world, that kingdom which EXISTS now and which is coming –

"Thy kingdom come..."

...in that kingdom of which we are citizens and in which our REAL life exists, these distinctions will not exist. Men and women will not be at odds with one another so that, as now, husbands will not need to be instructed to love their wives (though apparently there will not be any, at least, ongoing marriages there) and not be harsh with them. Wives won't need to be instructed to submit to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord, because EVERYTHING will be fitting in the Lord then! It won't be confusing and all muddled up like it is now in this sinful world.

But for now, these relationships:

- Husbands and Wives
- Children and Parents
- Slaves and Masters (perhaps employees and employers)

need to function in the peace of Christ, all of us wearing the love of Christ and displaying great thankfulness. We must live now as citizens of the kingdom above.

And THAT is what Paul means when he tells us to *seek the things that are above...set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*. If you are a Christian, then you are not an earthling anymore! Don't live like one.

(Philippians 3:19-1 ESV) Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. 4:1 ¶ Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Conclusion

All of this fight, this renewing of our minds by the Spirit and the Word, means that *the Christian needs to do a lot of thinking*. WE must cooperate with the Spirit –

(Phi 2:12-13 ESV) ¹² ¶ Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

How do you “work out your salvation?” Well, in many ways it means *thinking*. Thinking about God's Word. Thinking about what He is showing us about ourselves. Thinking about the ways that our *thinking is wrong and has even been wrong for a very long time*.

And it also means entering into fellowship and openness with others. Coming out of hiding into the light. Being willing to face the strongholds in our lives and not being too proud or ashamed to put it out there so that God, working through His Spirit and His Word and His people, will renew our thinking.

Be certain it is the light, however, that you are stepping out into. The kind of people Paul warns us against here in Colossians are NOT the kind of people to be trusted. Many people parade as Christians, but they are not. Watch out for the kind of people who lord it over others, who put themselves out there as the most holy and eminent saints on a

level above others, always wanting to teach, but never willing to be the one asking for help and confessing their own flaws.

This past week I was thinking, after someone mentioned these things to me, that most all the people who regularly interact with us on our blog have been horridly treated not only by people, but by their own churches when they asked for help. Humanly speaking, I cannot fathom how they would want to have anything to do with other human beings or the church or even Christ – as He has been so distorted by evil counterfeits to them.

And yet what do we find. These people come and interact and they thrive and they are helped by the interaction with other believers. Why? Because a Christian is like a plant. He or she by the nature of who Christ has made him, seeks the light. A plant will grow to the light because that light is its life. And so it is with Christ for us:

John 1:4-5 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (5) The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

So, if that light is not found in a local entity that claims to be a Christian church, the Christian will go and grow elsewhere, even if it be a cyber church!

And that is a very plain evidence that Christ has done and is doing a very great work in them.

Seek the things that are above. Set your minds on them, not on the things that are on this earth. *Set your mind on them.* Even though they are hidden from view, you see them by faith. You see this new life that is one day going to be fully revealed – by faith. Embrace it and live it now. See the old for what it is and reject it, replacing it with Christ's truth. And don't let anyone rob you of this-

- Let no one delude you and shift you off the hope of the gospel
- Let no one pass judgment on you
- Let no one tell you that you are disqualified before God
- Do not submit to anyone's worldly, earthly regulations that parade as being from Christ

Instead, do this:

Colossians 3:16-17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (17) And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.