



The Sermon

Andrew Curry

Colossians 3:5-11

"Dress Like a Christian"

July 9, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning. It's really nice to be with you. I want to ask if you'd open your Bibles the Colossians chapter 3. We're going to study this morning verses 5-11. But in order to kind of remind us of the context that those verses come out of, let's read from verse 1. Colossians chapter 3, I want to read from verse 1.

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

"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 you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must 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 knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." Let's pray.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, how wonderful it is to find ourselves in this place having already been able to praise You with our mouths. We thank You for the truths that were declared in song. We thank You, Lord, that You are a good God. We thank You, Lord, that You are the Great Creator. We thank You, Lord, that You are one who knows and is involved in every aspect of this world and every creature within it; and yet, Lord, we thank You, that though You know us full well, that You have shown us grace. We thank You that You so loved the world, that You sent Your one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

We thank You for the glorious doctrine of union with Christ, that we are not ourselves, that we are bind to Him, that we have been raised with Him, that we have died with Him, that we are hidden in Him; and we thank You, Lord, we can anticipate that day when we will appear with Him in glory. Lord, we long for that day; and yet in between, we look at our lives and we realize we are not the people that we ought to be. And so, Lord, we need Your word. We need it to work like a sharp two-edged sword, that it would find its way to pierce where we need to be pierced, and it would expose the work that still needs to be done. And we pray, Lord, that the word would feed our souls and move us forward in our walk with You.

We pray, Lord, for those who don't know You, and we ask, Lord, that today would be the day of salvation, that today You would open the eyes that have been blind to this point and help them to perceive the beauty of Jesus Christ. So Lord, we are so thankful that we find ourselves in this place at this time able to study this particular passage, and we are thankful it is a true word, and we are thankful that the Holy Spirit works through the word to transform Your people. So we pray to that end this morning through the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. [End]

Well, I have been in California the last few days at the Doctor of Ministry program at The Master's Seminary; and I love being involved, working with the students, getting to teach. But the best thing is getting to sit and listen so often to Dr. Lawson. Dr. Lawson teaches men about how to preach. He

teaches them about deep doctrine. He teaches them about the beauty of Jesus Christ. He teaches them to have confidence in the sovereignty of God working through the preaching act. But also in a tongue and cheek check, every class at some point, he manages to teach them about the power of the navy blazer, and the holiness of the white shirt, and the majesty of the straight tie. And his big point that he presses upon those pastors is nobody goes to church wanting to listen to Bozo the Clown. When they turn up at church, they want to look to the front and at least perceive that the person has something to say. So dress like it; that's his point, that the congregation has certain aspirations of the one who is speaking to them. So fit, dress to fit the occasion.

It reminds us I think of an even truer expectation God has regarding the appearance of a believer living in this world today. Now he's not so much concerned here in Colossians about white shirts and polished shoes, but he is extremely concerned about your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and those things that mark your daily living in this world. God cares about those things, those things do matter. We have a glorious gospel of full salvation for all who trust in Jesus Christ, but God cares about your holiness, God cares about your lack of holiness; and that's what this particular passage draws our attention to this morning.

The first thing I want us to remember is, "Remember the union that enables. Remember the union that enables." Verse 5 begins, "Put to death therefore," and it connects immediately everything that's going to flow out of this passage, out of this paragraph, that everything that has come in the paragraph preceding it, that there is a logical connection. The NASB uses the word "consider." The outflow that's being described here is an outflow from something. It comes from the truth and doctrine that has just been proclaimed beforehand.

In other words, here in verses 5-11 there is a particular call to pursue sanctification, this ongoing movement within the individual towards holiness, to getting rid of the sin that so easily entangles, and putting on the attitudes and the actions and the thoughts that would be pleasing to God, that this life of sanctification is meant to be at least in the life of the

believer, and we need to understand that flows out of our union with Christ that we saw in the last paragraph. And it's because, verse 1 says, "You have been raised with Christ." It is because, verse 3 says, "You have died with Christ." It is because, verse 3 also says, "You are hidden with Christ," that all of this outflow of pursuit of holy living comes.

It's not separate. It's not a new call. We can only understand our call to fight sin and to pursue holiness by understanding that it is something that is attached, that is an outflow, it is connected to this glorious doctrine of union with Christ. And that idea of a change, a transformation, an outflow is something that doesn't just appear in verse 5, but it's echoed all the way through this particular paragraph.

You look at the language there in verse 7: "In these you too once walked." You once walked. In other words, at this point something has changed, something is new. If it once took place a certain way, the implication is it doesn't take place now. A change has taken place. Something different has happened. You see the same thing being stressed there in verse 8. Look at the beginning of verse 8: "But now you must. But now you must." This is the same idea, isn't it, that there's a dramatic transformation that has taken place, and it demands, because of that, a new way of living, a new way.

You see it even more explicitly in verses 9 and 10. Do you see the language there: "Put off there old self"; verse 10, "Put on the new self." It's clear, isn't it, that there was an old, former way of living that marked you, a pattern of lifestyle that was you. But now there is a new pattern, a new self, a new man, and that is what defines you. But both state in here in verses 9 and 10 that there is a massive contrast. There is a massive change that is taking place. In fact, the contrast is so stark, it's as if a different person is standing before us. You once were a completely different individual, and such a change has taken place. It's a new individual standing before us. The contrast is stark.

This doctrine of union with Christ, it's redefined everything about you. That moment you repented of your sins and put your trust in Jesus Christ, you

were united to Him, and a miracle took place in that moment: the old man died and disappeared, and the new man was born - a new individual made for new patterns, new thoughts, new words, new deeds. He was formed in that moment. This doctrine of union with Christ, it's key for our hope in this work of sanctification. It's because you have been united to Christ, that this call to live a holy life it's not just a broken aspiration, it's something real, it's something true, it's something genuine that we are to press towards. We have been changed. We were this old, broken man that continually disappointed God and deserve punishment from God. But verse 3 says that man's dead. he is no more. He is buried in the ground. But verse 1: "You have been raised with Christ. You have been raised to new life and new things.

Sometimes as Christians we get stuck on when it comes to the idea of sanctification and trying to do all these things, we know our salvation, our forgiveness is a work of God, but everything else we get stuck and thinking, "Well, I must do this, his, and this." Now it does require effort - we'll see that in this passage - but it's an effort that recognizes what God has won, an effort that recognizes the victory He has given us, an effort that recognizes the newness of our person. We can pursue sanctification, not with depression, but with hope, with hope; not because we are incredible. This is a little self-confession right now. I'm a mess, and I'm broken, but I have great hope when it comes to sanctification in my life, because I am knit together to Jesus Christ.

I don't know if they did this in the States. When I was at school and it came to kind of track and field in the elementary school, you did the three-legged race. You tied your leg to somebody, and you prayed it was somebody the same size as you, because it could go very wrong otherwise. And the object was that you had to go together. Where he went, you were going whether you wanted to or not, because you were bound together.

Well, friend, we are bound to Jesus Christ, and He knows where He's going, He knows where He's taking us, and He insists that because we are tied, we are united, we are knit, our soul is knit to Him, that we will go that direction. That's why sanctification isn't a depressing thing, it should be a

doctrine that you have great hope in. This will, this does, this has to take place, because you are united to Him. You are a new creation. You're not the same person who's broken and incapable, a prisoner to sin. That's not you anymore. Rather, here and now, you can act with confidence that God will supply the new creational ability you need to put into practice the commands He gives us.

God is not cruel. He's not miserly. He doesn't tease us with commands that we cannot keep. He has wired and saved us, so that we can obey, so that we can do these things. He calls us to a life of obedience, to particular aspects of obedience, because He has recreated us with a capability of doing these things, of following Him.

Sometimes Christians know just enough about the doctrine of sanctification to cause damage. They know that not until we reach glory will we be what we ought to be. This work of sanctification is one that continues. That polishing work is one that continues all the way through our earthly existence; and that is true. But because of that doctrine, they twist it, and they think to themselves, "Well, if I'm never going to be all holy, what's the point in trying now," and they put their feet up, and they adopt a posture of apathy towards the commands of God. That's a broken view sanctification.

Sometimes they go even further - and this is even more dangerous. They actually view God as one who, because we are not yet glorified, has left us, has put us in a stuck position, and they blame God for their life that is not yet holy and glorified. Well, both of those are dangerous ways of thinking, arrogant ways of thinking. In fact, they're blasphemous ways of thinking, For God is never the author of sin. God's salvific work is not lacking in any way. God's word declares not only have you been forgiven of your sin, not only have you been saved in that sense, but that that hold of sin in your life, that enslavement to sin has been broken through your union with Christ. God has risen you to a new life that it in which you're capable to fight, and you're capable of pursuing His pleasure.

But you look at your life and you think, "Well, I see the doctrine; but Andrew, why is there still so much sin in my life? Why is that still the case?" Well, you don't sin - or you do sin, I should say, you do sin, let's be clear about that, you do, but it's not because it has a hold on you that you can't walk away from. And you do sin, but it's not because God hasn't given you the capacity in your raised life to reject that sin and to pursue godliness. And you do sin, but it's not because God hasn't provided for you a way out in the face of temptation. He has. Rather, you sin because of you, because of you. The problem's not with God and a lack of God's work on our behalf, the problem is here, with yourself. It's not a lack of God's work in you that is the issue, but it's a lack of your working out the fullness of all that God has accomplished through your union with Christ.

In this section, Paul is saying, "Look, this is who you are, so now live it out. Do it. Put these things into practice." He's saying, "Look, the old man has died; let him be dead, let him be dead." Again, consider as dead, verse 5. Remember, the real transformation that has happened in you, and so let it now begin to mark the outside of you.

You see the same thing in Romans chapter 6, Romans chapter 6:6, "We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might no longer be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin." Verse 11, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you."

What about your ongoing battle? Listen, we're all bottling sin, but what does that look like in your life? How do you carry that out? Well, when it comes to your fight against sin, do you look to your own strength, your own power of will, your own efforts and practices to make that happen, or do you look to the fullness of the atonement? Do you look internally, striving and attempting to be what you should be in your own strength, like the

Pharisees, or do you look up, seeking to be actually what God has made you to be? That's the difference. You gain confidence through knowing that He has mirrored you to be this.

What about when you have victory over sin? When you have a victory, is it something that you pat yourself on the back for because you made all that effort, or is it something because you realize it's the outflow of your union with Christ, that you simply turn back the praise God for? He has given you victory through all He's accomplished in you in Jesus. Remember the union that enables. The second thing I want us to see from this passage is, "Remember the clothing that fits. Remember the clothing that fits."

Growing up in a pastor's home, I was used continually in sermon illustration; so now I have the opportunity to tell you one about my dad. When he was a little boy, he was asked to be part of a wedding. He was asked to be the ring bearer, and it meant he was part of the wedding party, he had to get all scrubbed up and dressed well. And so in preparation for this wedding, they bought him a white tux, and it was hanging on the hanger with the plastic all over the top to make sure it stayed pristine until the day of. But he was a little boy, and when he saw the white tux all he could think about was 007.

He went to elementary school, he had conversations with the other guys in class, and one of the other guys mentioned he had a Superman costume, to which Pastor Steven Curry replied he had a James Bond costume. And so the two thought it wise to meet and have an adventure in full garb. And so they met at the park, and well, people were spied on through the bushes, and you know, rolls down the hills took place so that they would not get caught. And there were puddles and ponds that were jumped over in an attempt to run away from the bad guys and everything else. And afterwards, he came home and he carefully hung up again and covered again in the plastic film his filthy, stain-encrusted jacket.

Now you know how this story is going. There was a lot of shouting in that home that evening. But here's where it gets important. He was part of a



wedding, and those clothes were unfit. And so even though Steven Curry had done wrong, his father went out and bought a new jacket without stain, without wrinkle, without any blemish, so that the boy, the repentant boy, could walk up the aisle at the wedding and look the part and fulfill the role that he had been given. The boy never changed, but the jacket had to be fit for the occasion.

Friends, Paul is saying in a far more eloquent way that there are certain things that are fit for your appearance. There are certain dirty characteristics that need to come off, and there are certain pure, holy characteristics that need to be put on, not because it fundamentally changes who you are. You've been raised with Christ, you died with Christ, you're hidden with Christ – that's all true. But now and the externals there are certain changes that need to be brought because of who you are, because of the station and office that you hold. You need to dress appropriately. So take off what is dirty. Take off what is dirty.

In this section, Paul urges those who are regenerate, verse 5, to "put to death"; in verse 8, "put them all away"; and verse 9, "put off." There are certain aspects of your life, there's certain aspects of sin that continue to mark and be part and parcel of your daily living; but they shouldn't be. And Paul is saying here that it's going to take work to purge them out. It's going to take work to scrub out that stain. It's not going to go away right away.

I remember we moved into a short-term rental for a small season. It was a church house. It was owned by another church, and they kindly let us move in there for a little while. Well Ian, I don't know what he had done, my son. He wrote on the drain pipe of the church property, "Curry was here." Now that's bad any time. It's particularly bad when you're another local pastor staying as a guest in the house. I scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed with every type of magic eraser possible to get that stain off. Why? Because it was inappropriate. It needed to come off. And it took effort. It took work. There was a lot of rubs before that thing came off.

But Paul is saying there's certain sins that the mark of them is going to take effort, it's going to take work, it's going to take a lot of rubbing to get that stain off, to get that stain off. The New Living Translation, I don't quote it very often at all, but I think it gets to the heart of what's going on here in verse 5. It says, "So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you." There's certain traits and stains from the old life that haven't yet gone away; and that type of clothing is unfit, you can't wear that now that you're in Christ. So stop lounging around the house in those sinful practices.

And particularly, Paul notes two vice lists – one in verse 5, one and verse 8 – two lists of the types of sins that people get caught in. It's not exhaustive, it's an example, but I think he chooses these particular examples because they are stubborn stains that, in particular, you have to scrub, scrub, scrub in order to see removed. And the first one is there in verse 5. He says, "sexual immorality, impurity, passion" – or sometimes translated lust – "evil desire." This list is a list of sexual wrongs. It reminds us that there is a battle to be waged, in particular, for purity in the bedroom. It reminds us that Satan and his tactics, in particular, loves to go after sexual temptation, sexual temptation. Satan knows what he's doing, and he presses, in particular, so often on this particular category of sin.

The end of verse 5 moves past the action to the motivations. You see how it ends: "and covetousness, which is idolatry." Now the whole thing is joined together, but these sexual sins, at the heart of them there is a motivation of covetousness. Whatever the sexual sin happens to be that is affecting one's life, it is coming from a heart that longs and wants for something it shouldn't, a heart that is not content with what it has, whether that's a longing and discontentment with your spouse, or whether that's a discontentment with a season of singleness that you may be in at this moment, or whether that's something else. The issue that Paul is driving at is that this deep longing, this deep hungering that exists within you, when it is not addressed it leads to all these sins.

And actually in what he says next, he says it's even worse than that. "The covetousness," – he says, verse 5 – "which is idolatry." In other words, these particular types of sexual sins have a way of being so raised in

longing and significance in our mind that what takes place is we put them on the throne. We know what the Lord God our King says, but all of a sudden that longing and desire sits on the throne of God instead. We come not so much controlled by God and His commands, but controlled by our carnal desire; and in that sense, that's idolatry. We've replaced the authority of God with the authority of our sexual desires, our wild sexual impulses, and we obey them too often, as if they sat on the throne that is on high.

Well, that's not fit for the child of God. As Galatians 5:24 says, "And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." In fact, this particular sin is so gross in the eyes of God that we would replace His throne and rule over our life with our sexual cravings. Look at what verse 6 says: "On account of these the wrath of God is coming." The world has so mistreated God that instead of honoring the gift of sexuality that He has created as something that is good, they have so magnified it and placed it on the throne of their wicked hearts, they have put a twisted lust-filled and moral version of it on the throne of their hearts, and for that reason God's wrath is coming, it's coming.

You remember back in Genesis, Genesis chapter 6, it was this sexual immorality, in particular, of that generation that provoked God to send the flood to destroy the world. Well, what Paul is saying is the ongoing sexual obsession and twistedness of our society has provoked God to send wrath once more. It is coming. And unless, as verse 4 said, you are attached to Christ, you will appear with Christ in glory, this wrath will fall on you. And the point is God cares about this area of life. God is angered by this area of life. It provokes His judgment. So if He feels that way towards the world, why is it still in your life, Christian? How dare you entertain it! How dare you accept it in your life! This is a serious thing.

That's why verse 7 says, "It's what you once did." It shouldn't be there anymore. Stop it! Stop doing it! That's not the new you. That's not what you were made for. And so this type of behavior, it provokes the wrath of God. It is no place in the life of one who is united to Christ. It has no place in your life. So this first vice list, it notes the battle that many have with sexual sin.

The second one in verse 8 notes another battle. Look at verse 8: "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth." And here's another list, and it's unified as well. This is a list that is unified by the mouth. These are sins of the mouth, and in particular, sins of the mouth that we use to hurt other people. We use our minds to hurl abuse at someone as an expression of anger or wrath. We actually go out of our way to talk about someone, to undermine them, to break them down. That's what malice is. Or maybe with less intention, we slander them; we simply can't help ourselves. But gossip in the background, and tear down of hearts; or even just crude and inappropriate, obscene talk. They're all sins of the mouth, sins of the mouth, and in particular, sins of the mouth that hurt other people around us.

Now you may think, "Well, I get verse 5, sexual sin, that's really bad. But my sins, verse 8, I know is wrong, but it doesn't feel as bad to me." That's because you don't understand the mouth, you don't understand the mouth. What did God give you a mouth for? What was your mouth made for? Well, Romans 10:9 says, "You confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord." This is an instrument for worship.

You see that spelled out so clearly in James 3:9. What's the issue here? James 3:9 says concerning the tongue, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." Why does God care so much about your mouth? Because He has made it for better things. How dare we use our mouth to cut and tear chunks out of other people, when He has made it for the building up of the brethren, the worship of God Himself.

You see that idea stressed in verse 9 as well: "Do not lie to one another." God cares about the one another's. He cares about how this tool is used in relationship with other people. If part of the issue in verse 5 was that these sexual sins, at the heart of them there is a usurping of God's throne, it's an issue of idolatry. We do not love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; that's what's going on there. And verse 8, the issue at

the heart of it is what we do to others. We don't love our neighbor as ourself with this instrument. God has given it to us to do much good, and we use it as a weapon to attack and hurt those who we have been called to love. That is unfit for you, Christian. That is something that needs to be purged from your life. That is not in keeping with someone who is to be found in Christ. Take off what is dirty. You need to see your sin as a broken mess that has no place in your life.

I remember years ago seeing a comedy clip of a scenario where there was in the skit a counselor, and the counselor was fed up with counseling and hearing everybody's problems, and talking and talking and talking. And so he changed; and whenever people came into the office he simply said two words: "Stop it. Stop it." So they would come in and they would say, "Look, I keep washing my hands continually," and he'd go, "Stop it." "Oh, I can't help myself. I keep swearing, swearing, swearing!" "Stop it." "I check all the locks in the house before I go to bed, and I have to do it ten times before I'm able to climb into the covers." "Stop it." You got the idea. "Stop it."

Now there is a place to talk over our struggles and to seek to understand maybe some of the reasons certain issues are at the front and center of our life. But what Paul is saying here is, "Those things you used to do, stop it. Stop." If you're taking notes, capital letters: "STOP IT!" That's Paul's big point: "They are not who you are. They are not who you are."

Now friends, our culture tries to weaken and water down sin: "You don't sin: I do that because of the way I was brought up, I do that because of a bad experience that once happened to me, I do that because of whatever it happens to be." That explains away sin.

Now I don't want to minimize hurt that has been caused in the past. Those things may create a predisposition to certain types of sins, they may be more of a struggle for some than others. But let's call it what it is: it's sin. And when it comes to something that is sin, what Paul is saying is, "Stop it. It's not fit. It's not appropriate. You are an altogether new creation. You

can't do that anymore. It's like wearing the muddy jacket to the wedding; it's not fit for purpose. Stop it. Stop it."

And then because a vacuum is an unnatural thing, he doesn't simply say, "Take off the dirty," he says, "Put on the clean. Put on the clean." Look at verse 10: "and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator." Paul says there's a new pattern of life that we are to put on, and very simply, "it's a life," it says, "after the image of its Creator."

Where do we find our new life? In Jesus: raised with Him, died with Him, hidden with Him. What we're being told here is that we have been raised to a new life that reflects Jesus. We've been remade in Him. So rather than live a life according to your natural cravings and the broken patterns of life that once marked you, Paul says, "Put on a new pattern of life that reflects Jesus." You are to honor God as He honored His Father. You are to be kind to other people, as He was kind to others. You are to use your words to build up and to proclaim truth, for He used His words to build up and to proclaim truth. You are to be marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, fearfulness, and self-control; for all those qualities are true of the life of our Lord and Savior.

Now I know that sounds like a tall order, and maybe you're thinking, "Yes, I get it. But Andrew, what does that look like in Dallas, in my job and my home? What does it mean to live and look like Christ there?" You see the way the text talks about growing in this. There in verse 10 it says, "We are to put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge, being renewed in knowledge." There's this idea of progressive understanding, of getting over time more and more what this looks like. That's why sanctification takes time. It starts with the renewing of the mind, with understanding.

And as we study the word and understand our Savior better, and as we celebrate and find our delight in Him, and as we pray through the various aspects of our life, there is an increased understanding about how Jesus' priorities would be worked out in that situation. So that's what happens.

How do you work out what you're meant to do here in Dallas? You learn about Jesus, you learn about His priorities, you pray through these issues; and through that, there is a renewal and knowledge, a renewal and understanding of what exactly it means to reflect Him here. It's a lifetime work, but it's a work that we are called to, and it's a work that we can do to know Him better each day, that we may reflect Him better in this world. Now do you see, there's an assumption all the way through this paragraph, and this is a very obvious thing – the Irish man always points out the obvious, okay. This is the obvious thing, that you don't stay the same. Christians don't stay the same.

It's very easy to call yourself a Christian, isn't it? It's very easy, especially in a place like Texas to call yourself a Christian. And actually, a lot of people who maybe call themselves Christians in this particular state, they don't expect anything to come along with that. It's a label it you get to choose for yourself. But God, He declares a Christian is one who changes. The proof of your union with Christ is seen in the direction that your life is going. Are the old patterns of sin over time being ridded out? Are they being fought with? Are they being addressed? Is Christlike behavior, Christlike thinking, is starting to become your thinking? Is that behavior starting to mark your life?

No Christian, no true Christian stands still. Now don't get me wrong; it's wobbly, there's a lot of bumps on the road. Our Christian growth, if we were the chart it out, it doesn't go like this, it goes like this here. But you notice the overall trajectory; it's up. You can have bad days, bad seasons even. And thankfully, that's why we have brethren to come alongside us and to encourage us, and to work and to press us on to love and good deeds. We have God's word and that ongoing conviction of the Holy Spirit; thanks be to God. But if you're not different in 2030 than you are in 2023, there's something missing, there's something wrong.

Friends, if you've been a Christian for a long time, where were you ten years ago in your walk with the Lord, and where are you today? It's a hard one, because you see, growth as a Christian, it actually involves us seeing more of our sin, and hating it, and being broken by the fact that it has

infected all areas of our life and thinking. And yet at the same time, we should be able to say, "I am so thankful I am not what I once was." As John Newton has said famously, "I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world, but still, I am not what I used to be; and by the grace of God, I am what I am." It's a work of grace in your life, but it is a work that insists on taking place in your life.

The mature Christian is one of purposeful forward march, and our fight with sin, and our pursuit of Jesus, friend, if you have never moved forward in your walk with the Lord, I have serious questions, and I say it in love: it's whether you know Him at all. And I don't say that to belittle you, I say it because you need to have dealings with God. There is no progress and sanctification without first having union with Christ. Do you know the Lord, and is His change being wrought in your life? True Christians grow.

Now even in the text here, we see the steps that are involved in growth. Now what does it mean to throw off the sin that so easily entangles? Well, I think we get a clue in this particular paragraph. First of all, you've got to recognize sin for what it is. If you're ever going to have victory over sin, you've got to recognize sin for what it is. This text clearly calls it out. You can't water it down, as we said earlier. You can't pretend it's something other than it is. You can't explain it away with your past and background or whatever it happens to be. Sin is sin, and we need to recognize that.

You'll never fight sin in your life if you don't first see it for what it is. Recognize sin, and call it what it is. And then, secondly, recognize that sin is not a neutral thing; it is an attack on God, and an attack on others. Sometimes I think, especially as Christians, there are certain sins that we are more inclined to hold on to, because we think it doesn't hurt anybody: "I know it's not right, but it's only me being affected."

There's no such thing. There's no such thing as neutral sin or sin that only affects you. Sin always has a way of affecting others around us. But even more than that, it is an attack on God. Remember all those sexual sins. What's that at the heart of them? It's idolatry. It's idolatry, and it provokes



the Lord to wrath. Every sin is a form of idolatry. But we put our desires, our inclinations, our want over and above what the Lord says.

So recognize your sin. Recognize it is not neutral, it is an attack against God and others. And then, thirdly, and this is a step I think too often we miss: recognize that as a Christian your identity is in Christ, and you have been raised to your new life. In other words, there is a capability. It's not about you fighting alone, it's about you living out what He has made you. And the reason I say that is if it is just you fighting, it's for a cycle, and it's hopeless; because who am I? But if actually God has made me to be a new creation, if He has raised me to a new life, if He has given me the capability of obeying Him, there is great hope in this battle with sin. So recognize that your identity is in Christ and you've been raised in Him to a new life.

And then, fourthly, stop it, stop it, because it's not you, it's not you. We could go further and say, fifthly, start it, start it, because you have been made for things. You've been made to live like Christ, for that's who you are through union. All those ideas are sitting in this particular paragraph, but the main point is very simply in 5-10, that as a Christian, you are a new person. Those old, dirty practices need to be thrown aside, and new beautiful practices that reflect Jesus are to be worn in their place.

I don't know if you've ever experienced the annoying situation where a dirty, smelly teenager has a shower, and then they go back and they put on the dirty, smelly clothes they were wearing before the shower. It's so counterproductive. It doesn't deal with the issue. After the shower, after you've been cleansed, you need to put on clean clothes, fresh-smelling clothes. And it's the same spiritually. You have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, so put on clothes that are appropriate, clean ones. That's what we're called to.

Remember that union enables, remember the clothing that fits, and lastly, remember the identity that consumes, remember the identity that consumes. At first reading, when you come to verse 11, it kind of comes a little out of

the blue. It's not what we expect to read when we're talking about putting off, putting on sanctification. But let's look at it carefully. Look at verse 11: "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and all."

Here Paul highlights eight different groups, eight divergent groups that are named here that would have been at odds within society. You had the Greek. The Greeks were influenced by Gnostic thought, and they thought they had received some higher understanding of how this world works, and they looked down on everybody else as lower, unlearned, beneath them. And they knew the Jews. The Jews were all throughout the Roman Empire; but everywhere they went in their cities, they gathered together into little quarters by themselves, because everybody else, they were sinful, dirty messes. And so there was this self-protection, withdrawal and separation.

And then you have the same idea, and then the next description of the circumcised and the uncircumcised. There was in that religion the circumcised, those who were trusting in the promises that God had given, and those who would receive the blessings of those promises. And then the uncircumcised; they were outside of it, they were fit only for hell. They were not recipients of God's blessing.

And then you had the barbarian. He was a foreigner. He was someone who came from outside of the Roman Empire, outside of Greek culture, outside of civilization, and he would have been looked on by society around Colossae as dangerous and as intellectually undeveloped.

The Scythian was another type of foreigner, primarily that came from the east, and so he would have been associated with a lot of the Babylonian Medo-Persian kind of situations that had such a significant affect in that part of the world. They were associated with bloodlust and violence.

And then you've got the slave and the free; again, another contrast that drove the whole economic scene and the whole social structure within that

particular civilization. They were around each other all the time; but the two never engaged, the two were never in any situation of life as equals.

And so what you have in these eight names are really all the divisions that were familiar to the society in Colossae. All the religious division, the social division, the economic division, the ethnic division of that society. And you think of verse 11 being read in our particular context: "Here there is not secularists and religious, Reformed and Armenian, Black, Asian, illegal immigrant or citizen." You can see how it's provoking, isn't it, for that first culture that received these words. But here, the mention of all the divisions that are out there in society, and they're kind of a little nervous: "We don't want that in here. It's out there."

And then they hear the wonderful words that follow. With all of those divisions that marks society, the glory of the gospel is, verse 11, "but Christ is all, and in all." The power of union with Christ so consumes and swallows up our old identity that that goes. All those markers and distinctives disappears. For now that I am united with Christ, everything is Christ. Yeah, everything is Christ, and it unifies me to all other brothers and sisters within the church. In other words, I am not a White, brown-haired, brown-eyed Irish man that has married somehow some American woman. No, I'm a Christian, identity as in Christ. And that so overwhelms everything else at all; everything else disappears.

And the amazing – everything's amazing about the doctrine of union with Christ. A spillover blessing of the doctrine of union with Christ is not only am I united to Him and my identity is consumed with Him; for every brother and sister that is also united to Christ, their identity is the same. What am I? I'm an in Christ person. What is my sister? She is an in Christ person. What is my brother? He is an in Christ person. And so now, all of those divisions that mark the world and media and society wrestle of, "How do we deal with this? Do we do positive discrimination? What do we do? How do we sort this all out?"

Not in the church. We are in Christ, and that all-consuming identity binds us not just to Him, but binds us to each other. I have been risen with Christ. I have died with Christ. I am hidden in Christ. And if you are trusting in Him, you have also. And that is where our identity is found. And that's why, though we may not share the same appearance, or the same accent, or the same background, we have all in common, because the all-consuming shaper of our new identity is common ground. That's the glory of the gospel.

I remember last week talking to an individual from the church, and they were sharing with me what brought them to Trinity. They'd been attending another church, and it had gone very woke, and all the services in that church just talked about division, "Our divisions, our divisions, our divisions," and, "What are we going to do about our divisions?" and, "How are we going to sort out our divisions in society?"

And then they came to Trinity. And you know what they heard at Trinity? The word of God in Jesus Christ and the glory of the gospel. And that brings people together. Do you know what was funny? They told me that compared to that old church, Trinity is way more diverse. But it's never talked about, because it shouldn't be talked about, because what brings us together, the reason every tribe, kindred, and tongue will worship the Lamb is because the Lamb brings us together. He's our focus. He's our unifier. Remember the union that enables. Remember the clothing that fits. Remember the identity that consumes.

Christian, the message today is simple: you are a new man in Christ, so dressed like a man, not by going out and buying a navy blazer and white shirt – though I would love you all to do that some week and to just be sitting there for Dr. Lawson, give him a giggle. No, dress like a Christian by taking off all those stinking garments of sin that Christ's victory has broken, and there's no reason for you still to be wearing them, and put on in their place holy, Christlike robes that have been bought for us through His victory at the cross. Dress like a Christian. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are so thankful, so thankful for Jesus Christ, so thankful that not only have we been forgiven, but how He has ensured this process of sanctification, the renewing of our mind, the throwing off and rubbing out that sin that marked our old existence, and the ability to pursue a holy, Christlike lifestyle. We pray, Lord, that You would give us both the determination and the grace to press forward in putting off that which would hinder, that which is wrong, that which is ugly in Your sight, and to put on that Christlike behavior that delights You.

Lord, we are so thankful that our hope is not in our ourselves, but is in understanding more the victory that has been brought for us, that You have given us an ability to fight sin, that You have made us a new creation, that You have raised us with Christ; and we ask, Lord, for the grace to live like it. So help us, we pray, Lord. And where we fall, give us the grace to stand up quickly and to press on, knowing that "He who is in you is greater than he that is in the world," and having the confidence that though we will struggle, that our hope is in You, that You have assured us that that which You have begun, You will indeed bring to completion. For it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. [End]

Let me dismiss you with a benediction from Scripture: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Amen.