

New People, New Life

Colossians 3:1-14

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In this series on gospel renewal, we are together looking at the central doctrines of the Christian life. And while I desire that each sermon stand on its own, there is inevitably, inextricably a tie with what has gone before. So I encourage you to—if you are interested—to listen to the sermons before, as we've looked together at the doctrines of justification, adoption, and sanctification. This week is the second sermon on sanctification. We're looking at this great doctrine which is often misunderstood. As we've looked at before, so are most of these doctrines. But if we miss them, as they are taught in Scripture, we are missing the central core of the gospel and what it means to live as a Christian. How does God want us to live as those who are followers of Jesus Christ? If you are not a Christian, then this is a good Sunday—as these Sundays have been—looking at the central elements, the lifeblood of being a Christian. And it is an invitation if you do not know Him, to consider what he's done for you. But as a Christian, the question is, what does it look like, then, to live now as a Christian? This passage in Colossians 3:1-14 tells us and proclaims boldly that we are both new people who live new lives. Colossians 3:1-14.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now 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, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 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 in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me?

Lord, what a stick of dynamite that you've given us this morning. What a wonderful feast, what a gift, that you through your apostle Paul would speak so definitively, clearly, and directly, but also hopeful about the truth of ourselves, that we are sinners desperate for redemption. But you do more than redeem. You take us as an artist to canvas, as a sculptor with clay, and you make us new people, instruments in the Redeemer's hands. Now, Lord, will you give us a vision for this, that we would receive and rejoice that indeed we are made new people with new lives in Christ? Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Perhaps, like us, many of you as families enjoy or have enjoyed the Wii game, the Wii station. My daughter is now fourteen years old. She doesn't play the Wii very often anymore. When we have people over who have young children, we like to use that so that we adults can talk together. Such an event happened recently. And so my daughter, who turned up her nose at playing the Wii, we had to coax her

into playing. She says okay. So she goes over next to the TV where we have the basket, the game, with the controllers. She turns on the Wii station. She picks up the controllers. And she's pushing the ones, trying to activate them. And one of them is working, the other is not at all. And of course, she wants to throw up her hands and say, we clearly can't play anymore. And I said, no, well, it's probably a battery. And so she opens up the back compartment of one of the controllers, and in that controller she notices that there is a very dead battery. It's not just that it's dead. It's begun to break out of its shell and begun to corrode the actual controller, and the controller is now no good. We take out the dead battery, this small thing—not the actual battery. I didn't want to burn my fingers. This was probably very much alive. I got it from the back room.

Such a small thing can be full of power. But we all know that very soon that which we wanted to draw from it is no longer any good. We take them out, we recycle them or throw them in the trash—whatever the case may be. But how absurd would it be if I simply went back to the trash and I took out that corroded battery, held it in my hands, played with it, and tried to put it back in the controller, banging it against the table or something, all in the hope that maybe, just maybe, through enough effort, through enough work, that dead battery will come back to life and give me all the pleasure that I once enjoyed with my Wii station? Of course it's absurd. Playing with a corroded battery will damage my skin, burn it—not to mention the fact that it's just foolish.

This is precisely what I think Paul is talking about—that to become a Christian is to enter into new life, no longer turning to things that we once relied upon which are now very much dead to us. But what's easy to do, as a Christian, is to then go back to that which we know is dead to us and to hold it in our hand, and to play with it. And, like a dead battery that is corrosive, it, too, will burn us. It will never—through however much effort we give—it will never bring back to us what we thought it once gave to us, pleasure and enjoyment. It has a very short shelf-life, and if allowed in the right circumstances, it will corrode us from the inside out. Paul is talking about, what does it mean, then, to become in Christ new people who have new lives? What does that life look like?

We're going to look at, this morning, a second sermon on sanctification. Because if we get this wrong, many Christians will live in houses and lives full of dead batteries, looking for life in the wrong things. Because if we're honest, a lot of Christians that I meet—and even if I am honest to you and before you— isn't it true that for many of us who profess Christ, we hear the passage that says we are dead to sin but alive to Christ, but oftentimes many days, we feel in our bodies and our desires a lot more tingly liveliness, and yet in our spirit we feel very dead to Christ? Why is that? How do we address that? How do we deal with that? How do we live lives full of power, dead to sin, but alive to Christ, putting on these virtues? Well, that's what Paul means to tell us. So let's look together. You'll see in the outline, it is both, one, hidden in Christ, two, new life in Christ. Hidden in Christ, and new life in Christ. And here we're going to look at the two equally important, vital aspects of sanctification. They're both here.

The first is this being hidden in Christ that we hear of in verses one through four. It's important, because Paul is trying to talk to them because they, as a church, are trying to live godly lives, but through the wrong means. They're trying to apply human regulations in the hopes that they can put to death the old desires, the old ways of living. And so they're turning to human regulations of don't touch this, don't eat that, don't drink this, don't drink that—in the hopes that that will keep them and protect them, keep them safe. But Paul says, no, that is not what will keep you safe—in fact, that is foolishness. Those are manmade rules which will not issue forth true righteousness, new life. In fact, what you're doing is you're simply putting yourself back under a law. It's a false law that does not lead us to Christ but, rather, leads us to greater dependence on self.

So Paul says, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ." Now, here's what he does. He goes right back to Good Friday. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." So he's using Good Friday and Easter Sunday,

the death on Calvary and resurrection, as the lens through which he's going to look at sanctification. How is that so? That is because sanctification has both a definitive and objective reality, and an experiential one. So when he says here "hidden in Christ," he's saying definitively, definitely, absolutely, irrevocably, if you have faith in Jesus Christ, you are sanctified.

How is that so? You might be looking at me with furrowed brow. Perhaps you've not heard this before. Maybe you're wondering if I've gone off my theological rocker. Let me tell you what the Scriptures say. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" [1 Corinthians 1:2-3]. Again, later on in that same letter, Paul would say this: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." And then this truth. "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" [1 Corinthians 6:9-11].

Paul is saying there, as he is saying here, as he says in Galatians, as he says in Ephesians, as he says in Philippians—if you have been raised with Christ, you are in Christ. You are hidden in Him. He is the Rock of our salvation. So Christ, in his death, enabled us, as we've looked at a number of weeks ago—we are justified, made righteous, declared righteous before God through the blood and life of another. But that foundation of justification also says definitively that now, Christ who has been raised on the third day, if we are hidden in him, in his death, justified, and we are hidden in him in his resurrection, we can say with all the breath that we have that by faith, we are sanctified, set apart, holy, precious, in the sight of God. Because, why? We are hidden in Him.

Now, I'm not a scientist. I'm certainly not a biologist. But do you know, there has been found one living organism—and the only one that has been found that actually lives encased in rock? They're called autoendoliths, and they're found at the farthest edges of human capacity through technology and robotics to actually go to the parts of the sea floor where methane gas is escaping. And where this methane gas is being released, there are also vast mountains. And in these mountains, as they discovered by taking samples, they found deep inside this rock living organisms that are hidden in that rock. But, interestingly, not only are they hidden in the rock—they remain able to live there, because they gain life from the gas that is then turned into bicarbonate—I know a scientist and a biologist is going to tell me I'm wrong about this. Sorry, there you go. I was an English major. I'm doing the best I can. So they take that, and they're able to live off whatever it is they're able to live off of. And, at the same time, they then become a mechanism that not only lives off the rock—they are also able to create it. So their source is the rock, and they're able to create. They live inside the rock. They are hidden. They are naked to the human eye. Were we not able to go down and actually get samples, you and I wouldn't know that there are these organisms hidden in the rock that somehow, by God's amazing structure of the planet, has enabled these things not only to live off of it, but able to create it.

In Christ, through his death and his resurrection, we are hidden in the Rock. And when we are hidden in the Rock, we live off of Christ and his grace. And by that grace, we are able, then, to live life. This is important for Paul, because, he says, "set your hearts on things above." Live where Christ is seated, living off of the Rock. And he is at the right hand of God. He is victorious over sin and death—the cross—in the resurrection, victorious over death. "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Not turning, again, to those things which used to provide life. They are now dead to us, of no more use, corrosive if held again. Set your mind on things above, where Christ is seated, who is the source of all life, who is life himself, who is the Rock in whom we are hidden. For we died, and your life is now hidden in Christ, in God. There is a definitive, decisive work of Christ for our sanctification.

But secondly, there is new life in Christ, this passage tells us. In verses five and following, he unpacks it for us. So here, Paul moves from definitive sanctification to experiential sanctification—how you and I experience sanctification, how you and I experience becoming increasingly more holy, increasingly becoming more and more Christ-like. That is what is meant to happen. Let me say it again. We were redeemed in Christ, but he does not leave us the same. He means to make us new people who live very different lives, very new lives.

I was reminded of exactly this picture. Many of us stop with the first point. We got the definitive sanctification. Christ has done this for me. But what does the rest of life look like? Is it just simply waiting for Christ to return? Am I simply to wait for Christ to return, to eternal life, to look more and more like Christ? I was reminded of this by going to the grocery store. I don't like the grocery store very much, mostly because it's a minefield for people like me who mess things up. And there are too many numbers. I'm going to get the wrong item, and then I'm going to have to go back to the grocery store—and there you go. But I like the self checkout lane, except when I have to look up an item, and there are people waiting behind me. Have you ever had that happen?

And so here I am, and these nice people are waiting behind me, and I start. Inside, I'm sweating, because it says I need to look up an item. And when it's saying you need to look up an item, you need to look up the barcode. So I have these apples. They look like all the other apples. And so I look on the side of the apple, and then I've got to go through the alphabetical thing. And I'm, like, going through it. I have a total confession to make. Sometimes I just go for the first apple. I don't know if it's a Braeburn. I don't know if it's a Gala. I don't know if it's a Honeycrisp. I don't know. It's an apple. Because I know something about the scanner. The scanner doesn't know the difference between a bottle of coke and an apple. It only knows the barcode. The scanner can't change the item. It can only swipe the barcode and tell me what I owe.

Many Christians believe that's what God does. God simply scans us. Oh, safe and saved. Ready for eternity. And the rest is just waiting for him to return. God knows the difference between life that is lived in death and life that is life after death. What does life after resurrection look like? Because I can say to you, if you are a Christian this morning, you have died, and you have been raised to life. Now what? He tells us. First, killing idolatry. Secondly, new wardrobe.

Killing idolatry. He tells us here of a series of things that characterize the lives that we used to live, he says. And he lists, in all, twelve things. Twelve ways of life. The first five, he uses to characterize the former life. And that former life he calls, "sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." Now, that phrase, "which is idolatry"—is he referring simply to greed, or is he referring to the whole group? Well, in the Greek, he's referring to the whole group. All are forms of idolatry. And then he goes on to a second group of seven, when he says, "Rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other." And then the seventh is racism, in verse eleven. These seven actions can characterize a Christian—can still be that which is a part of one's way of living.

What is interesting about these things is this—he calls the first set idolatry, but not the second set. Does that mean that Paul doesn't think the second set is a form of idolatry? Well, rage itself or anger is not an idol, but oftentimes we get angry and rage when our idols are cut off from us. So they are intricately connected to the first set. They go hand in hand. They never travel alone. They always travel in gangs. And what he's saying here to us needs to be very clear. Verse five, first three words: "Put to death." He's saying here, these sins are not like the pizza delivery boy who comes to the door, knocks on the door, and we say, "Who is it?" "Pizza delivery." "Oh, no, I really shouldn't have any pizza." "No, no, no—it's really good pizza." "What kind is it?" "It's pepperoni." Okay. Open the door. "How much is it?" "Oh, it's only \$7 for two pies." "I don't know. I don't think I should. Why don't you come in and sit on the couch and we'll talk about it?" The smell of the pizza fills your nostrils, your salivary gland start to crank, and you remember, oh, that pizza was so good. And you go from being tempted to stuffing your face.

Why do I bring up that weird metaphor? It's because putting to death isn't putting up with, hanging around with—maybe we'll get rid of it next week, maybe if it's just a little part of my life that'll be okay. No. He's saying, "Put to death." Very definitive. Can't argue with it. Must be done. Kill it, as if your life depended on it. And he says, "Whatever belongs to your earthly nature." I want to be clear. Paul is not saying that the body is dirty, or that created things are bad. But as we've talked about here before, sin is always a thief. All these things take that from which God has called good and turns it in on itself, and we begin to feed on it, and we make it a selfish source of power that actually, for the Christian, is now dead. In fact, it's corrosive. And when we take hold of it, it will corrode us. Paul says, may it not be. Put to death.

Now, if you're astute, you might recognize—does that mean we're called to sinless living? Sinless perfection? Absolutely not. Nowhere in Scriptures does it say that we are able to live sinlessly. This is why I used the illustration last week of guerilla warfare in Afghanistan. Though the Taliban is no longer in charge in Afghanistan, it can still cause a lot of havoc. Though there's a new government, a new era—Lord willing—they are still waiting in the countrysides, in the urban decay, and they love to attack with roadside bombs and all kinds of death-wreaking havoc. Let me be clear. Though we are called to put to death these things, it doesn't mean they still don't show up in the neighborhood. It still doesn't mean we don't have to go to battle. We very much do. But if you are inviting them into your home, inviting them into your eyes, inviting them into your mind, inviting them into your heart, you need to hear today that in Christ Jesus who has raised you from the dead, you must put these things to death. Find someone to whom you can confess. Find someone to whom you can be transparent and honest that these things you've allowed to take over your life. Every one of us makes choices. Are we choosing to invite these dead things back into our life?

So the next thing is to put on a new wardrobe. He tells us here. He gives this list. It's a common list. Paul uses it in other places, particularly in the Book of Galatians. But here, he says this new wardrobe: "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." And then this phrase: "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Okay. So we like the word "love." And so love is the chief among all of these. Well, what is love? Love is purposeful, self-giving, without the expectation of anything in return. And by practicing that, these other things are the things that hang out with love.

But there's this curious word. "Over all these virtues put on love." This new wardrobe? This new wardrobe is a new way of living. It's a new way of practicing. They are new habits. Virtue is something which is to be taken up and practiced in life, to put into new habits. Much like the person who has given for our country, who works in the military, who sacrifices their life, who goes into a war zone to keep those armies that are trying to take control back over again—what do they have to learn? They have to learn new kinds of warfare. They are given new weapons. They are given new training. Understanding urban warfare versus out in the dunes somewhere, or out in the jungle somewhere. The same is the case for the Christian. These are the new clothes, the new wardrobe, for the Christian, principally characterized by love. But this word "virtues" means that you and I don't wait for them to happen to us. They must be put into practice.

So the question would be, is there someone in your life to whom you can practice, for example, purposeful self-giving, without the expectation of anything in return? But here's the reality. Oftentimes our feelings will not catch up to this new way of life. And sometimes, if we don't feel it, we feel as though the obedience is wrong. But you know, feelings are always a lagging indicator of what's actually happening. The heart rate is a poor indicator of physical exertion. It takes fifteen to thirty seconds for the heart rate to catch up to your activity. It's a poor indicator. Feelings are often a poor indicator of what obedience looks like.

But when we begin to practice purposeful self-giving, without anything in return, purposeful forgiveness, recognizing that it is modeled on how we've been forgiven, purposeful compassion,

purposeful gentleness—those are things to be practiced, because the Word tells us. The Word guides us. The Word instructs. And as we give ourselves to this new training, Christ is being formed in us. Let me say as clearly as I can, the grace of the gospel is absolutely unmerited, absolutely free. But grace is never without effort. Sanctification, while also definitive, is also experiential. We are a work in progress. God, through Christ, intends to work through our hands, our feet, our minds, our hearts, our character, to form Christ in us.

So I finish with this question: how in the world, then, do we do that? With this very same list in the Book of Galatians, Paul says these wonderful words:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. [Galatians 5:22-26]

How do we put these virtues in practice? How do we put these things to death? How do we lead new lives? It is through the incomparable power and agency of the Holy Spirit. Now, here I want to speak to those of you who have been walking with Christ for years, and even some of you who have only been walking with him for a short time—I will tell you, the Christian life is absolutely impossible without a moment-by-moment dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not a power that you work up, because guess what? Christ was dead in the grave, and the Spirit raised his body from the grave, and he was raised to life. That same Spirit is at work in you as a Christian. And if you are hidden in Christ, there is no greater power than the Holy Spirit. There is no greater power than Christ. For God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are equal in power and glory. And if God the Father, through Christ, has reconciled us to himself, and we have died in Christ and are dead to sin, these old ways that used to give us pleasure in life—we are dead to them and made alive in Christ to these new virtues—then the Spirit is the gift of God.

And I want to say to you, Christian, there is no greater power than that which is in you. There is no other power in the world like that one. Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. Satan cannot keep you from the Spirit. Satan cannot keep you from Christ, who is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. Your sin, no power, can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ. Which is why, in the name of Christ, through the words of Paul, we are more than conquerors.

Friends, sin is no longer your master. Do you hear that? He's no longer your master. You have the Spirit in you that can say no to ungodliness, to kill the idols, to see them and to wage war against them, and to practice these new virtues. Yes, we stumble and we fall. We need his grace and forgiveness to enable us all the way through. But his Spirit, this new life, is in you. And he's made us a new people. And forgiveness, compassion, love, characterizes us not just as individuals, but as a people. Don't you want this new life? I do, and I bet you do too. It is ours in Christ. And today is a day of renewal. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit, breathe new life into our bodies, our hearts, and our minds. We can never recrucify Christ, for it is done, it is finished, and we are now hidden in Christ. And we can never repeat the resurrection, for Christ has been raised, and we who trust in him have been raised with him. Therefore, O Lord, we are in Christ, and the Spirit is in us. Now, Lord, by your Spirit, with your Word, breathe new life into our lives, that we might kill idolatry and receive a new wardrobe. May it change us more and more to look like our Savior, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.