

Out with the Old - In with the New

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[0 : 00] Well, when Susie and I got married, one of the big changes for us was how we would live together. And the best way I can put it really is that there were things that just wouldn't fit in our new life together.

There was physical stuff, clutter, that we just needed to let go of in order to make room for new things to begin our life together. But it was more than just physical stuff that needed to change. There were habits and patterns of life that just wouldn't work in our new home. You no longer could I put off work till the last second and stay awake to the early hours, finishing off deadlines. But killing my inner procrastinator would mean finding a new kind of self-discipline that I hadn't had before. Some things needed to go and other things needed to come in. Not because our lives were shrinking or getting smaller, but actually because our lives were growing. Being knit together in this union of marriage with another person was a bigger life than either of us had had before.

[1 : 08] But to really live that new life, old things needed to go and new things needed to come in. And in the same way, in this section of his letter to the Colossians that we read together, Paul calls Christians to change and grow in our union with Christ.

In verse 1, Paul picks up this really important thread we saw last week. If our trust is in Christ, then we've been united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. So we have died with Christ.

We've been raised with Christ through faith in Christ. So our identity isn't any longer in ourselves, it's in Christ. You could say, as Paul says, that we have a new home.

In verse 3, you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. So close is that bond that in verse 4, Paul can speak of Christ, who is your life.

It's as if we are connected to Christ by a sort of spiritual umbilical cord. Like a mother's life gives life to her unborn child. So Christ gives life to us as we abound to him.

[2 : 19] So if we share in his life, if we have this new home, our old way of life has to go and a new way of life has to begin. And that's so important for us to see.

Because Paul goes on to command hard and painful changes in our lives. But he's not wagging his finger saying to us, you have to stop doing bad things and start doing good things.

No, he's saying in this beautiful new life you have in Christ, there are things which simply don't fit things that need to go. But there are other things that do fit and that need to come in.

Not because our lives have gotten smaller, but because life for us has gotten far, far bigger. This is life as we have never known it before. Freedom from our sin.

The fullness of God. So this change, which sounds so hard, is so, so good for us. Because it brings us into an ever deeper sense of this deep bond, this living union that we have with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 27] So God calls us to put off the old life and put on the new life and put all of it together under Christ. So firstly, then Paul calls us to put off the old life.

Really shockingly, in verse 5, he writes, Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you? He's calling us to have a killer instinct when it comes to our sin.

Now this really rubs up against our polite British sensibilities when it comes to morals, doesn't it?

He's not talking about cutting out bad habits or saying sorry lots of times.

He's saying something in us needs to die. That sounds quite drastic. But notice that word, therefore. Paul is glancing back our union with Christ.

If we have died in Christ's death, then there are parts of our daily living which need to die too. Sin hidden in our hearts and shown in our lives that simply doesn't fit with the new life we have in Christ.

[4 : 30] Last week we saw how the power of sin was broken by Christ on the cross. So now the sin that still lives in us, it's like the defeated gladiator in the ring, just waiting for the emperor's decision as to whether he lives or dies.

And Paul is telling us when it comes to our sin, it cannot live. We must decide to put it to death. I wonder, do we have the guts to put to death something that is in us?

Do you have this killer instinct when it comes to your own thoughts and desires that are opposed to God? It almost doesn't sound very Christian.

But if Christianity is life in Christ, then our faith includes daily putting to death what is in us that doesn't belong in Christ. So what kind of things need this death sentence?

Again, in verse 5, it's not the stuff of polite conversation, is it? Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

[5 : 43] Paul is targeting sexual sins. He works from the most obvious outward sexual sins inwards towards the most hidden secret sexual sins of our hearts.

Now, before we get too far into this, it's really important for us to see in verse 7, Paul says, In these two you once walked when you were living in them.

I was writing to Christians who, when they came to Christ, had messy sexual histories. So if you're reading this feeling as if your past is too bad, or your life is too messy to come to God, please realize you are no different from the very people who Paul is writing to right here.

God welcomed and forgave these people through Jesus Christ, and God still forgives and welcomes any person who turns and trusts in him for forgiveness and new life.

No one is too far gone for God. Even though that pattern of sin is in the past for us as Christians, Paul implies that sexual sin is still a present struggle in the church.

[6 : 59] He's instructing these Christians to put it to death because it still lives in them. Now, I recognize this is awkward. This is the only time in the last few weeks I've been glad to be behind a camera to speak to you all.

But really, this is one of the places where our politeness gets in the way of our faith. Because we don't talk about our sexual sin, so often it slips under the radar of our churches, and if we're honest, even our own hearts.

You and I are sexual sinners. We still suffer from stray thoughts, nagging desires, eyes lingering where they shouldn't. How exactly we struggle with sexual sin will differ from person to person and in degree.

But at heart, Paul defines our sexual sin as a basic desire for what isn't ours, covetousness.

Because our covetousness is hidden in our hearts, so often our personal struggles go unseen and undealt with.

Statistics show that pornography is a huge problem in the church as well as outside, partly because it's so easy to hide and it's right at our fingertips.

[8 : 17] But here's the bombshell. The main reason pornography is still a problem for lots of Christians is because something in us still wants it. That is what we need to put to death.

The roots of those patterns and practices live in our hearts. That's where the fight is won and lost. Not first at the level of the body, but at the level of the heart.

Now to be really clear, sex in itself is not an evil thing. God created and designed us with sexual desires that when directed rightly, glorify him.

But that is exactly why Paul calls the sexual sin in our hearts idolatry. If we don't have a killer instinct when it comes to those sinful desires of our hearts, then the things we desire come to stand in place of God to us.

But idol worship can never satisfy because God made us for himself. And our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him.

[9 : 24] That is why Paul is not content simply to talk about our bodies, but what goes on in our hearts and our minds. And Paul carries on with that theme in verse 8 with a different list.

A list of angry sins. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth. Now perhaps you actually find this list harder to read than the list we read before.

Paul here is targeting sins which never go out of fashion. But the point is our sin is not limited to one or two areas in our lives. It spills into every part of our being.

All, every part of our experience in life is tainted by sin. So Paul is simply tearing off the covers that we have strapped down over our hearts to shine a light into what's hidden in the dark corners.

And he's not doing that to be cruel. But he's acting as the surgeon who cuts us open in order to heal us. Because if we have died with Christ, then those parts of our lives need to die too.

[10:35] Otherwise we end up with a deep spiritual cavity. If we grow comfortable with sins that get stuck in our lives, they will eat away gradually at the sense of fullness we have in Christ.

The result is a decaying gap in our relationship with God. So if you're in Christ, here is your weapon for killing sin. These words, that's not who I am anymore.

Paul says in verse 9, By dying with Christ, he's saying, Your old self, with its patterns of sin, has been stripped off you like a filthy, dirty set of old clothes.

And being raised with Christ has clothed you in a new self. See, this change goes far deeper than a new set of rules or a new set of habits.

This is your new identity. A change has taken place at the very core of your being. So when you're faced with sins that tug at your heart and play on your mind, Christ strengthens us to be able to say, That is not who I am anymore.

[11:58] That's who I used to be. That's not who I am anymore. This is our secret weapon. This is how we kill sin. Our new identity in Christ.

That power comes from resting in our union with Christ. Just remembering our identity in him, clinging to him, praying to him, asking his forgiveness, asking him to change us.

In short, we must repent. Of course, this is the beginning of our relationship with God. But as Martin Luther taught so long ago, When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, repent, He intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.

Our sins are forgiven. But until they are dead and buried, And we are standing face to face with Jesus Christ himself, Our lives are a way of repentance.

Since you have died with Christ, Put to death the sin that is in you. This life of repentance isn't only about putting off sin.

[13:07] It's also about putting on a new way of life. In verse 12, Paul writes, Put on that. I think this is something we really easily overlook. That our life in Christ doesn't only involve putting off sin, But putting on a whole new set of characteristics and instincts.

What kind of things does God call us to put on? Will you look with me at verse 12? Compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

What's so striking about these virtues is how soft they seem Compared to the really hard sins that Paul has just called us to put away. That's possibly why Paul needed to remind the church in Colossae Of what the new life is like.

You know doubt the false teachers with their strict rules And their fancy rituals Saw you killing the hidden sins of the heart And putting on these soft qualities.

You just look so weak. It doesn't look impressive. But this is what life looks like when we have died And been raised with Christ. This repentance and change is the power of Christ at work in us.

[14:22] As he renews us after his own image. His own likeness. You see the portrait of Jesus painted in this new way of life. Compassion to the lost.

Kindness to the undeserving. Humility in the face of opposition. And above all the love that binds it all together. This is the character of Christ himself.

So the new life that we put on is the life, the character of Jesus Christ. Notice these are things which are not in us.

Not things we simply need to get better at doing. These are things we need to put on ourselves from the outside. These are Christ's clothes, if you like. When we dress ourselves daily for life in the world, we must put on what belongs to him.

We see that so clearly in Paul's instruction to forgive. In verse 13. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. See, the power to be a forgiving person doesn't come from within ourselves.

[15:28] Theologically, we would think it would be easier, for example, to forgive a person for a sin that we ourselves find difficult. If you're prone to anger, it should be easier to forgive someone else when they get angry.

But it doesn't work like that, does it? Angry people get angry with angry people. Why? Because it doesn't come naturally to us to forgive.

That is why we must put on the new self. Only then are we set free from holding a grudge against another person. Or simply treating others in the way that they treat us.

Only in Christ do we learn to forgive. Not because people stop hurting us or sinning against us. But because Christ himself has forgiven us.

Our offenses against him. So in your daily walk with Christ, don't forget to put on the new self. In fact, we cannot put off the old self without putting on the new self.

[16:32] They come together. As Christ died and was raised, so you have died and been raised. So you also must put to death daily what is sinful in you.

And daily put on the new life in Christ. Christ comes as one whole package. One whole person. So let me ask, how closely does this character portrait match your life right now?

If you ask somebody to describe you, someone who knows you well, a close friend or your spouse or a family member. If you ask them to pick five words to describe you, how many of these words in verse 12 do you think would be in that description?

Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. Could you be summed up by that one word, love? Is Christ the pattern of life that you inhabit at the beginning of each new day?

Now, of course, this growth, it comes over the course of years, not days. Remember, Paul is writing here to Christians. Yet he still needs to remind them to keep putting on the new life.

[17:46] And that holds true for us, too. You know, it's like getting a really nice new pair of crunchy denim jeans, really stiff and awkward.

You know, when you get them, they feel kind of heavy and awkward on you. It's difficult to move.

They're shapeless and heavy. But the more days you wear them, the more natural it becomes, the more molded they become to your shape and the more fitted to your body they become.

Until they start to sit nicely on you, it looks natural. You wear them well and they suit you. Well, that's what putting on Christ is like. At first, this new way of life, it feels stiff and awkward and heavy. But the more days we put it on and live it, the more natural it feels, the more instinctively it comes to us. In short, the more his character becomes our character.

How do we put on the new life in Christ, then? We put on Christ when we are overruled and overwhelmed by the glory of what he has done for us.

[18:51] Paul writes, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. In other words, let the peace that Christ made on the cross between you and God overrule your being.

Let the reality of peace with God through his death sink into the depths of your heart. Because it's only when we are resting in what Christ has done for us, our identity rooted down in him, that his character will begin to shine through us.

How do we know if his finished work is ruling in our hearts? What's a word Paul uses three times in three verses? Verse 15, 16, and 17.

Be thankful with thankfulness, giving thanks. We do not put on Christ by gritting our teeth and trying to be better people.

We put on Christ by fixing our hearts on the peace he has given us with God until it fills us and rules us and our hearts overflow with thankfulness to him.

[19:54] In short, worshiping Christ for who he is and what he has done is how we put on the new life. So we need this change of clothes every day, put off the old life, put on the new life.

You can call it spiritual hygiene. But it's more than that. It's spiritual life. This is how we live life in Christ. Out with the old, in with the new.

But Paul is really clear, too, that this new life in Christ is not just an individual thing. It includes our relationships, our families, our work. And so finally, when we put off the old life and put on the new life, we must put it all together under Christ.

Verse 17, Paul writes, 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.

The whole of life is to be brought together under Christ. In this final section of chapter 3, Paul highlights three relationships in which our new life is seen.

[21:06] Paul writes here what's known as a household code. And that's important because the super spiritual new false teachers, they would never have bothered with a household code.

To them, ordinary family life and work and relationships didn't matter. That wasn't where spiritual life was lived. But Paul insists that life in Christ has everything to do with these basic relationships with others.

In short, our vertical relationship with Christ has to reshape our horizontal relationships with others. So firstly, how does life in Christ shape marriage?

In verse 18, Paul writes, Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. So Paul doesn't say much here, but what he does say is really striking.

And to us, it's probably the first instruction to wives, which is most shocking. The instruction to submit, it seems so out of step with 21st century values in relationships.

[22 : 14] Doesn't it devalue women? Doesn't it put wives in danger? Well, the first thing to say is that the Greek form of the verb that Paul uses there to say submit has the sense of submit yourselves.

There is no sense at all in the Bible that wives are ever to be made or forced to submit by their husband or any other human power. That sort of coercion and domination is abusive.

And it's the very opposite of the instruction Paul gives to husbands, do not be harsh. Now, what Paul has in mind is a wife's free and willing submission to her husband because she is safe under the overruling love of Christ.

See, that's Paul's reason that he gives, submit as is fitting in the Lord. So it's not down to women being less valuable or less important or less anything.

No, it's because it's Christ's design for human marriage that the husband would lead his wife and the wife would help her husband, both out of a sacrificial love for Christ and for each other as different but intrinsically equal members.

[23 : 30] In fact, it's Paul's instruction to husbands which would have surprised the church in Colossae most. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. In the ancient world, nobody told a husband how to treat his wife.

Women were seen simply as property. And it was actually the spread of Christianity which began to change that. Because in Christ, it does not fit for a husband to be domineering or harsh with his wife.

Instead, what fits in Christ is for him to love his wife gently and sacrificially. So we see there that putting off selfish anger, dominance, harshness, and putting on love, gentleness, service, sacrifice. That is what reshapes a marriage. But more than that, as families grow, being in Christ transforms the relationships between parents and children. Verse 20, we read, Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Again, we see that beautiful balance in Paul's teaching, applying it to each member of the household.

[24 : 43] And again, it was unheard of in the first century for anyone to tell fathers how to raise their children. And hard as it is for us to imagine, children were seen as worthless because they couldn't provide for the family or work.

So nobody really cared how fathers treated their children. But Christ does. Christ cares that the children in our families don't become beaten down and discouraged by overbearing parenting. That's a huge challenge if you're a parent, not just to keep your child alive and well, but to keep them encouraged in their walk with Christ. If you're a parent, you are your child's primary discipler. So much of what they learn of Christ will come from you. Discipline is important. But on the bad days, remember, Christ cares that our children remain encouraged in him.

Discipline is important. Putting off frustration. Overbearing anger. Discipline. Putting on love. Gentleness.

[25 : 54] Encouragement. Kindness. Patience. These are the things which reshape that relationship between parents and their children. But finally, how does life in Christ reshape our working relationships?

It's fascinating. More than to any other person here, Paul speaks to those who were slaves. So Paul isn't here supporting slavery. No, the fact that he writes to slaves at all shows that they were as valuable as anyone in the church to him.

And how Paul instructs them in their work is important for us in our work, whatever that is. Because Paul isn't telling them what to do, but how to do it.

Notice verse 22. They are to obey, not by a way of eye service as people pleases, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not the men.

Again, we can see that pattern. Our work doesn't reflect our worth on a human scale. No, we follow instructions. We work hard.

[27 : 01] We do a good job. Because our work is for Christ. You are serving the Lord Christ. So in Christ, whatever we do, it works is right.

It fits to work as for a king. Or better still, as for a father from whom we receive an inheritance. Putting off fear.

Self-serving. Putting on service of Christ. Love for others. Diligence. These are the things which reshape our working relationships.

Now in this climate, all of these relationships are far more stressful and difficult than they were before. You cabin fever from being stuck at home.

It doesn't do our marriages any good. Children find it so tough, don't they? Being out of their normal routines. And perhaps work for you has just been such a source of anxiety these last few months.

[28 : 01] That's working from home or being furloughed or losing your job altogether. These relationships are not easy. But that is why Paul is writing here.

Not to tell us it will be easy. But to show us how God is wonderfully at work in these relationships. Through his work in us. The weeds and the thorns that have entangled and damaged marriage and family and work ever since humanity's first sin are real.

But in Christ, these relationships are being put back together again. The curse is being reversed. No longer are we driven by sin to be harsh husbands or discouraging parents or half-hearted workers.

In Christ, that curse is being lifted. Our relationships are being restored. Because we get to belong to this redeeming work in Christ.

It's as we rest with thankfulness in our union with him. And daily live out this death and resurrection. We're putting off sin and putting on Christ.

[29 : 10] That he changes and transforms us day by day into his own image. And as we grow, so do our relationships in newness of life.

So, life in Christ. Out with the old. In with the new. Let us live it in every area of our lives. Let us live it in every area of our lives.

We thank you, Heavenly Father, that you continue to work in us. To put to death those sins which remain in us.

To transform us more and more every day into the image of your son. So, Father, we pray by your spirit, please give us a heart. To belong to that work.

Every day to put off the old life. The old self. And to put on the new self. Life in Christ. We ask, Father, that this would transform our relationships.

[30 : 42] And, Father, that we would turn to you for the change that we long to see in our own lives. And in the lives of others around us. Father, we pray for those who do not know you. That you would draw them to yourself.

Lord, that this message of grace. Of your free welcome of sinful people through Christ. Would be one that draws many to yourself.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.