

Colossians 3:1-17

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[0 : 00] I want us to think about ourselves sort of like a tree. Think about yourself as a tree. And ask this question to yourselves.

What is your root? What are your roots? What gives you sustenance and stability? And not just what are your roots, but therefore what are you like as the shoot that grows out of these roots? Who are you? And therefore, what is the fruit that is produced, that comes out? Those three things we're going to focus on for a little bit.

The root, ourselves as the shoot, and the fruit that comes out. Another question. Is Christianity simply a list of do's and don'ts?

Most of you will probably have a quick answer to that in your head. That's how Christianity often is caricatured as just a way to be better.

[1 : 07] Do good, don't do bad. Do your Christian duty. And a lot of Christians have that misconception also. That that's sort of the essence of the Christian life.

Do good, don't do bad. And so therefore, some people grow into a great sense of pride about how well they are doing and become judgmental of others who are failing in areas of life that they themselves might not be failing in.

Other people who have that mentality sink into despair, realizing that we just can't, that we fail so much. But that's not what Christianity is.

Not in its essence. My wife and I, in only three years of parenting, we've already discovered a difficulty. And that is the difficulty of trying to impress on our three-year-old the importance of rules, the importance of do this and don't do that, while yet not having that be the essence of life for her. That there's a different route to life. That's difficult, not just in parenting, but just in daily Christian life. What is the essence, the heart, the core of the Christian life?

[2 : 26] Well, Paul, in Colossians 3, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this, he doesn't simply just say, just do it, just do good, and just don't do bad.

That is your Christian duty, and that's it. Now, as you'll probably notice, the title in your pew Bibles for chapter 3, that's not a title that's original to the Scriptures, it says, Rules for Holy Living, and that might give the impression that he's just going to give a list of things to do and not do.

But that's not how Paul understands the Christian life, and not how he writes about doing good and doing bad. It is true that it's important to the Christian life, how we live, the fruit that we bear.

Look in Colossians, at Colossians 1, 9 and 10, for the importance of how we live as Christians. I'm going to start reading in the middle of verse 9.

Paul is praying that God would fill the Christians with knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

[3 : 35] That's wisdom and understanding given by the Spirit of God. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord, and may please Him in everything, in every way, bearing fruit in every good work.

It's very important how we live as Christians. But when he gets in chapter 3 to a lot of these do's and don'ts, he doesn't simply say, here are the rules, now just do it, get on with it.

He has a very rich understanding of the Christian life, and he turns us to three things. I've already alluded to him under the categories of the root, the shoot that grows out of that, and then the fruit that is born.

But you could also say, he turns us to Christ, who is the root of the Christian life, the essence, the core. He turns us to Christ, and then to you, who you are because of Christ, and then, therefore, to what you do as a Christian.

Christ, you, therefore, do. Who? That's another way. The three things that Paul turns us to. Who is Christ? What did He do? What is He doing?

[4 : 53] What will He do? Those are at the core, the heart of the Christian life. Even at the heart of this passage that is about, do this and don't do that. Who is Christ, and what has He done?

Growing out of that root, that secure root that nourishes the tree, we are like shoots growing that are defined by this root. Who are you in Christ? Therefore, do.

Bear fruit. So we're going to focus, in Colossians chapter 3, and try to focus our eyes on those three things. On the logic of the Christian life.

When we're mainly going to focus on verses 1 to 4. We're going to spend a lot of time looking at these things that He says about Christ, about you, and about, therefore, what we do.

And then, after we focus on those verses, and toward the end, we're mainly just going to read verses 5 to 17. In that context, with that understanding.

[5 : 56] I'll comment on one or two things, but we'll mainly just read that. So, let's look at verses 1 to 4. With your eye trained, and your ear listening for, there's three things.

Christ, therefore you, therefore do. Let's read it. Since then you have been raised with Christ, therefore set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for, or because, 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. Therefore, put to death.

And he elaborates. Do you see the logic? What is true about Christ? And therefore, what's true about you? Therefore, what do you do?

[7 : 10] So, the first thing he mentions is resurrection. That's something true about Christ that he says is also true about us with Christ.

So, we're going to focus on the theme of resurrection for a moment. Look at Christ, and then look at us raised with Christ, and try to get our heads and hearts around something of what that means.

Christ was raised from the dead. That might seem like an obvious fact to many of you, but it's incredibly important for the Christian life to grasp what that means.

Christ died, but He was raised from the dead, raised out of the corpses. His body is living now.

Now, Christ's resurrection gives eternal and unbeatable significance to His death for you, His death for your sins.

Had He not risen from the dead after doing that, well, He wouldn't be a conqueror. He wouldn't be able to offer the benefits to His people. But Christ has risen from the dead.

[8 : 19] This has an unbeatable significance for His people. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ did not raise from the dead, then we, Christians, we who trust Him, of all people in the earth, are the most pitiful.

That's quite a claim about Christian life. If Christ didn't raise from the dead, we are pitiful, and the most pitiful of all. But Christ has risen from the dead. And that is based, importantly, based on fact, on historic fact, even tangible fact.

It's true that we haven't seen the risen Jesus. But it's also true that the gospel, the Christian life, our faith in the raised Jesus is built on the testimony of people who did experience Him firsthand.

That's said all throughout the Scriptures by the first believers. We saw Him resurrected from the dead. We touched Him, interacted with Him. Therefore, you believe.

It's rooted in historic reality. Now, this is important. The first believers, when they first heard that Jesus had risen from the dead, they didn't believe.

[9 : 39] The first person to see Him was Mary Magdalene. She ran back and told all of the apostles, and they did not believe her. They said, no, He hasn't. He hasn't risen from the dead. They didn't believe.

They weren't looking for Him to raise from the dead. They were convinced that He had risen when He Himself appeared to them, and they saw Him with their eyes, and they touched Him with their hands, and they hugged Him, embraced Him, and kissed Him.

And they interacted with Him for over a month. They were convinced that this man, who is so clearly dead, is alive. And our faith is built on that truth, that fact.

But it's not merely enough to just know that Christ rose from the dead. What Paul says, actually, here is, you have been raised with Christ. What does that mean?

Well, if you turn just back a page to Colossians 2, Colossians 2, verses 9 to 16, shows some deep significance to that.

[10 : 50] Give a glimpse of what Paul is talking about. Colossians 2, Paul has already written to the Colossians a lot about who Jesus is, and what He has done, and in 2, 9 to 15, Paul focuses on Christ, and on, therefore you, who are you, because of Him, and then in verse 16, he gets to, therefore do, and do not.

So again, same logic here, but look at what he says in verses 9 to 13. Listen to what he says. When, oh I'm sorry, for in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

In Him, you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with a circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins, and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. Now pause right there.

The grace and the kindness of that statement, that while you were dead in your sins, God made you alive with Christ. The grace and kindness of that statement is really seen dramatically and clearly in light of what follows.

[12 : 35] The situation out of which He raised us. Look how He saves us, and then how He raises us. Following on, He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations that was against us, that stood opposed to us.

He took that away, nailing it to the cross. Pause there for a second. A few months ago, I led you all to contemplate some of these passages, and that was one of them, and I'm going to mention one of the things that I found about that passage that was very helpful for me.

what does that mean? He took away the written code, nailing it to the cross, that code that stood against us, opposed to us. It seems to be that what He's getting at was the practice in the ancient day of crucifixion, how when a person, a criminal, was crucified, hung on a cross to die, something was nailed above them on the cross.

It was a list of their crimes for which they were hanging on the cross, so that when somebody would walk by and these criminals were hung along the side of a road, when somebody would walk by and they'd look up and they'd see this person hanging on a cross, they would know, well, that's a criminal, obviously.

What did he do to deserve that? And they look up and they see the crimes for which he's hanging on the cross, the written thing with its stipulations that stood against that man that was opposed to him, why he's there hanging on the cross.

[14 : 09] But what Paul draws out here with Christ and with you is it's as if you are walking past the cross that Jesus was hanging on.

And you see that man hanging on the cross. What did he do to deserve that criminal's death? And you look up and you see a sign that has some crimes.

But then you recognize those aren't, he didn't do those. Actually, I recognize that. I did that. That's my crime.

And then you follow on down and there's more. That's my sin that he is hanging on the cross, taking care of. Why is he being crucified for my sin, the written code that stood against me?

He's hanging there, taking that. That's the picture, it seems, that Paul is painting for them. Christ died to cancel that written code for all who trust him.

[15 : 11] But then when God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, vindicating him as the Son of God in power, he didn't only raise Jesus. He took those whose sins were paid for, those who would trust Jesus.

And while raising Christ, he raised us with Christ, giving us new life. He will fully give us this new life later, but he's begun it.

We were raised with Christ because he took our sins and we are forgiven. Therefore, as Paul says in chapter 3, since you were raised with Christ, therefore, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated, not on earthly things.

Do you see what the core of the Christian life is? And then what are the fruit that grow out of that? But let's follow on because there's so much more just in these few statements. Let's look at verses 2 and 3.

Colossians 3, verses 2 and 3. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for because you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

[16:37] That statement, that was sort of what I was getting at with the kids. Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. What does that mean?

Well, Paul first turned us to resurrection, the resurrection of Christ and therefore our own. And now he turns us to security. Who Jesus is and therefore the security that you have because of that. Your life is hidden or concealed with Christ in God. Or putting it the other way, Christ is the concealment. He is the guard of your life.

Jesus said something similar to this. Jesus himself in John 10. John 10, 27 to 30. Listen to what he says. My sheep listen to my voice.

I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all.

[17:44] No one can snatch them out of his hand. I and the Father are one. Your life is now hidden, concealed and protected with Christ in God.

If anybody or anything attempts to get to your life, they have to go through Christ, through God, and that's not going to happen. That's security.

That leads Paul on to focus more particularly on life itself where he says, he says, you died, 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. Christ, who is your life. Again, Jesus said some similar things to this.

Jesus claimed this in John chapter 5, verses 38 to 40. Listen to what Jesus says to the teachers leaders of the law, those religious leaders.

[18:53] This, I think, would be fairly applicable to a lot of people who are in the free church or other churches, but don't really trust Christ. They like being in church, they like hearing the scriptures, but don't exactly trust Christ.

I think his statement here is very applicable. He says, God's word does not dwell in you because you do not believe in the one whom he sent.

You diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. Yet, those are the things testifying about me and yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Christ himself is your life. Jesus says again in John 11, 25, I am the resurrection and I am the life. And then he raised a man from the dead right after that.

In John 14, 6, Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

[19:59] In John 17, 3, Jesus prayed to his Father He says, this is eternal life to know you, the only true God and me whom you have sent.

That is eternal life to know God and his Son, Jesus. Christ is your life. Now, that's true about Christ. He is your life.

Think about it from your perspective. And to do that, I'm going to read to you some lyrics of a recent song, a recent Christian song that he really captures, captures well what Paul is talking about.

He captures the essence of the Christian life. This is a recent Christian rap by a guy named Lecrae. And don't worry, I'm not going to try to rap it because I don't have the skills that he has. But I'm going to read it to you here.

Tune your ear to what Paul is saying also. Lecrae says, Paul said, if Christ ain't resurrected, we wasted our lives. Well, that implies that our life is built around Jesus being alive.

[21:08] Every day, I'm trying to show the world, so every day, I'm trying to show the world why Christ is more than everything you'll ever try. Better than pretty women and sinning and living to get a minute of any women and men that you admire.

It ain't no lie. We're created for him. Out of the dust, he made us for him. Elects us and saves us for him. Jesus comes and raises for him. Magnify the Father.

Why bother with something lesser? He made us so we could bless him and to the world we confess him. He resurrects him. The Father resurrects Jesus. So I know I've got life.

Matter of fact, better, I know I've got Christ. And if you don't see his ways in my days and my nights, you can hit my brakes. You can stop my lights.

Do you hear similar argument to what Paul is saying about the Christian life? Magnify the Father for what he has done in Christ. He resurrected Jesus so I know I have life.

[22 : 13] And then did you catch this? Matter of fact, better. What can be better than having eternal life? Better, I know I've got Christ himself.

Then, based on that, if you don't see his ways in my days and in my nights, stop me. Christ is your life.

This is the root and the shoot of the Christian life. Christ is the root that gives sustenance and stability to the shoot, us, that grows out of this.

And then it bears fruit. Therefore, set your minds on the things above, not on earthly things. The fourth thing that Paul turns us to in this first four verses, so he turns us to resurrection, he turns us to security, he turns us to life, and now he turns us to glory.

Christ will return in glory. Did you see verse four? When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

[23 : 24] So focusing on Christ, he will return, he will appear in glory. Jesus actually said, again, something very similar in John 14, verses one to three.

Jesus says to his disciples, do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God.

Trust also in me. In my Father's house, there are many rooms, and if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back to take you to be with me where I am. Or again, Jesus says in Matthew, this time, Matthew 24, verses 30 to 31, Jesus talks about when he returns.

He says, the sign of the Son of Man, that's himself, will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory.

[24 : 35] He will send His angels out with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of heaven, one end of heaven to the other.

Christ will return in glory, and when He does, you also will appear with Him in glory. This is why earlier in Colossians, Paul can tell them about the glorious riches of the mystery of the gospel.

That is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is our only hope for glory. Now, this is the heart of the Christian life.

Who Jesus is, what He has done for us, what He continues to do by His Spirit in us and among us, and what He will do in the future.

That's the core of the Christian life. That is the root that holds the Christian life and place and gives it meaning. But so closely connected with this, and I hope you're seeing this, so intimately wed with who Christ is and what He does, is you, personally, and you as a corporate body, a group of believers.

[25 : 50] It's true, what is true about Him is true about you. That is, if, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved.

This is the essence of being a Christian day in and day out. In the mundane things as well as in the exciting things, gathered together to worship, parenting, at work, everything, this is the essence of the Christian life.

Who is Jesus? Who are you because of Him? Therefore, what do you do? And that leads us to that final thing, the therefore do part, the fruit that comes out, which is what most of Colossians 3 is, but it's rooted in such deep truth.

So we're going to read now. Read the rest. Verses 5 to 17. There's one verse, verse 11, that I'm going to comment briefly on, but basically I'm just going to read the therefore, the fruit.

Because you probably caught in verses 2 and 3, or 1 and 2, because of Christ and because of who you are in Him, therefore set your hearts and set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

[27 : 24] What does that mean? Does that mean that Christians are pie in the sky, believers that we don't really care about things down here like taxes and work, but we just think about heaven.

Is that what it means to set our minds and hearts where Christ is, not on earthly things? No, that's not it at all. And that becomes clear in verse 5 and onward where He describes the earthly things that we are therefore to put away.

And He describes the heavenly things that we are to put on. So, verses 5 and following. Therefore, put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

That is, 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.

[28 : 34] Do not lie to each other since, because, 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 to look like God.

Here, here meaning in the Christian community, here, there is no Greek or Jew. There is no circumcised or uncircumcised. There is no barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free.

But, Christ is all and is in all. We'll pause right there for a moment. You see, even when Paul does start talking about the fruit of Christian living, the do's and the don'ts, if you will, he can't get far before he draws our attention back to Christ who is everything.

He says, Christ who is all and is in all. Now remember, he's writing to Christians. He's not saying that Christ is in every person in the world, people who deny him. What he's saying is that all of you here receiving this letter, whether you're Jew or Greek, whether you're circumcised or uncircumcised, whatever distinction there might be between you, Christ is in all of you who believe. And Christ is all that matters. It's a lot like Psalm 16, verse 2, which we've been singing. You are my Lord and apart from you I have no good thing.

[30 : 08] Christ is all. We're like Psalm 73 that we also started with. Whom have I in heaven but you? And on the earth, the earth has nothing that I desire besides you.

Christ crucified for our sins and raised for our glory. He is all. And because He is in all who believe, therefore, start at verse 12, therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, with kindness, humility, with gentleness, with patience.

Bear with each other. Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And over all these things, over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts because as members of one body you were called to peace.

And be thankful with who Christ is and what he's done. Who couldn't be thankful? Be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.

[31 : 42] And as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Is the Christian life simply about the rules? About do this and don't do this? Not at all. It's about Christ who is all that matters.

about Christ who is in you who believe. It's about who you are because of God's work in you through Christ by his Spirit.

So therefore, remember, as I draw this to a close and then we turn and pray and sing to God, remember, both when you're reading Scripture and in your life, in each aspect, as you are trying to live a life that is worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit.

Remember the focus, Christ, and therefore you, therefore do. Because of Christ and therefore who you are in him, therefore, clothe yourselves with love.

[33 : 09] Let us pray to God and then we will sing praises to him.