

How can I change?

Colossians 3:1-11

March 8th, 2020

Intro

Last week we identified 3 strategies for dealing with sin that sound wise but are ultimately ineffective: legalism, mysticism, asceticism (Colossians 2:16-23)

What should we do then? As Christians we know we still sin – we still lose our temper, we still indulge in moments of gossip, we still find ourselves feeling jealous and greedy, we may fall into sexual sin.

We remember what is true (about Jesus, our identity, our forgiveness) and then we act on it by setting aside the things that don't fit anymore and putting on the things that do fit.

1. We were given a **new life** in Christ. (3:1a)

- a. "if you have been raised up with Christ" – "since"
- b. How were we raised? When were we raised? What does that mean?
 - i. Look back at Colossians 2:12-14
 1. We were dead in our sins. We lived in the sphere our realm of spiritual death.
 2. Consider what it is to be dead physically: unable to respond to stimuli, lifeless. The Bible uses this imagery because that is how we all are spiritually – unable to respond to God, locked in the grip of our own sin.
 3. **Ephesians 2:1-3** And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.
 4. Strong terminology, but the Bible is clear that this is the starting point for all of us, regardless of how decent and moral we are on the outside. Paul lumps himself in there ("we too all...")
 5. When that was our state, God graciously raised us up with Christ through faith. He made us alive together with Him. He links this with our sins being forgiven.
 - a. Rom. 6:13 – The wages of sin is death
 - b. He uses the imagery of all our sins having been written out on a piece of paper and when Christ died our sins were nailed up there with Him.
 - c. We need to respond in faith.
 - d. When we do that, we are united with Christ (buried with Him...raised up with Him...alive together with Him). Instead of having to pay the penalty for our own sins, His payment for them is credited to our account. Then, just as He was raised from the dead physically, so are we raised from our position of spiritual death and given new life.
 - e. **Colossians 1:13-14** For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
 - c. This is positionally true of us if we are in Christ. If we have placed our faith in Him and allowed His payment for our sins to be credited to our account.
 - d. **But, we don't always act like it and we don't feel like it.**
 - i. **We may wonder, if I have this new life, why do I still struggle to do what's right?**

- ii. This text will flesh it out as we are urged to bring our priorities and our practices into conformity with our position in Christ. Told to live consistently.

2. We should have new priorities consistent with our new life. (3:1b-4)

- a. Since it is true of you that you have been given new life in Christ (FACT, indicative) therefore *keep seeking the things above...set your mind on things above* (COMMAND, imperative).
- b. It's true that we've been given new life, and it is real and powerful, but so is the indwelling sin within us. It no longer rules us, but can still do some serious damage.
 - i. Jerry Bridges in Pursuit of Holiness uses the analogy of warfare to illustrate this (pg. 55)
 - ii. Just because it is true of us *positionally* that we are no longer slaves to sin, doesn't mean the desire to sin is gone.
- c. Seek those things/ set your mind on those things that are consistent with the new life you have been given.
 - i. You are a new man – Think like a new man, act like a new man.
- d. In your old life you sought things that were consistent with that life. V. 2 calls those the “things that are on the earth.”
 - i. The things that revolve around life here on earth: possessions, career advancement, money, popularity, our own image.
 - ii. Some of these are wrong things to pursue, some are neutral in themselves. The point is that they are not consistent with the greatness of the new life you have been given.
- e. So what are the things above?
 - i. Should we pursue lofty but irrelevant discussions with glossy eyes?
 - 1. William Wilberforce biographical movie, *Amazing Grace* – pictures Wilberforce after his conversion as contentedly staring off into space out in a field, presumably thinking about the things of God. But then he gets to work, a work he was uniquely suited for in politics, working for reform in the slave trade and the ethical treatment of animals over the course of decades.
 - 2. We sometimes have the idea that we need to turn our minds to seek after things like that that seem totally irrelevant from real life. Is that what this is calling us to? No.
 - ii. John MacArthur: “Paul is not advocating a form of mysticism. Rather, he desires that the Colossians’ preoccupation with heaven govern their earthly responses. To be preoccupied with heaven is to be preoccupied with the One who reigns there and His purposes, plans, provisions, and power.”
 - 1. To view things from His perspective. To view things in light of our new understanding.
 - iii. Kent Hughes says it this way, “‘The things that are above’ (v. 1) are not material, but rather have to do with Christ’s sovereign reign over the universe as he fills the universe with his power. They include his character, his presence, his heavenly joys. We are not to be seeking heavenly geography, but the One who dwells there.”
 - 1. Several years ago when I was in Tom’s position as the college pastor we took a bunch of students on a retreat up in the Sawtooths. One student who is pretty new to the faith talked to me about how different it is to sit by the running water of the creek and take in the outdoors when you think about the God who made it all.
 - a. I think that is a partial illustration of this principle. Instead of just seeing a sunset, consider what that sunset tells you about God’s creativity and God’s grace that He would make it beautiful for us.

- iv. We are to intentionally “set our minds” on things above” so that we are preoccupied with them.
 - 1. Example of my dad's dog, a golden lab, whose mind was set on the endless pursuit of playing fetch.
 - 2. **Philippians 4:8** Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.
 - a. That's what's in mind here – setting your mind on those things that are consistent with our new life.
- f. “Keep seeking” – has the idea of persevering effort, a continual seeking after.
 - i. William Hendriksen writes that our union with Christ should transform our entire lives: minds, hearts, and wills.
 - 1. Because of our union with Christ, it is positionally true of us that we have a new life and a new standing before God. That is true of us instantly when we place our faith in Christ. But the process of living it out takes time. Actually it takes a *lifetime* as we bring our lives more and more into conformity with Christ.
 - ii. It is to be the pattern of our new lives.
- g. 2 Reasons why we should seek and set our minds on things above not on things of the earth.
 - i. Our old self has died
 - 1. reiterating the point he's already made, but from the other side.
 - a. Already said that we've been given a new life, the flip side is that our old life died.
 - 2. **2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
 - 3. This is part of our union with Christ - *Ga 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..."*
 - ii. Our new life is hidden with Christ
 - 1. Secure – nothing can take away this new life we have been given.
 - 2. Concealed from the world.
 - a. unbelievers are unable to fully understand a believer's new life.
 - 3. Will be revealed one day when Christ is revealed to the world.
- h. **But this new life should bring more than a new way of thinking and a new set of priorities.**
- 3. We should have **new practices** consistent with our new life. (3:5-11)
 - a. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead...
 - i. Seems confusing - You died (v. 3)...now put to death/consider dead
 - 1. Goes back to the same principle: our position and our practice do not coincide. We're not consistent.
 - 2. We are new creatures but we live in old bodies.
 - 3. There is still a sense of conflict between our priorities and practices on one side and our position in Christ on the other.
 - ii. The lists

1. 5 specific things to put to death because they are inconsistent with our new life. Verse 8 includes a second list. Both are samples, not to be considered exhaustive.
 2. First list, individual sins, could commit without anyone else around.
 - a. immorality: *pornea* – refers to sexual sin.
 - b. impurity: moves beyond the physical actions of immorality to the thoughts and intentions.
 - c. Passion and evil desire: dig deeper into our motives.
 - d. Greed: caps off the list because it can lead to the others. It is the unsuitable desire to have more.
 - i. The others spring from this because it is essentially putting your own desires first and foremost. Above everything, including God, which is why it is called idolatry.
 3. Second list, social sins, committed against other people.
 - a. anger: slow burn - *orge* -
 - b. wrath: like a fire in straw - *thumos*
 - c. malice: looking to do harm to another
 - d. slander, abusive speech from your mouth, lying
 4. Lay them aside like a wornout shirt that doesn't fit anymore.
 - a. Like trying to find clothes to fit growing kids – its hard when they realize a favorite shirt doesn't fit anymore
 - b. They just don't fit with new life in Christ.
- b. Three reasons to put these practices to death
- i. These were the things that bring God's wrath.
 1. You have been saved from that wrath, but why indulge in those things for which Christ died?
 2. Believer's will still experience God's loving discipline for their sin.
 - a. "God will react against sin. The unbeliever will experience His eternal wrath, and the believer His loving chastening. Either way, all who pursue sin will suffer the consequences." MacArthur
 - ii. You've been there, done that, don't want to go back.
 1. You already know the end result of that life, besides the judgment, you know that lifestyle didn't supply what it promised. You've been there and you hated it - the guilt, the consequences – which is why you came to Christ. Why return?
 2. "Why would anyone who has been made rich return to the slums to live in poverty?" MacArthur
 - iii. You have put on the new self.
 1. Comes back to the same principle. You're a new man, act like it.
 2. Your new self is being renewed.
 - a. No distinction between Greek and Jew, etc. – the major distinctions of the day.
 - b. Renewed to the image of Christ – so that our outward actions more and more match up with our inner position of being "in Christ."

3. He will continue in this chapter to what the practices of the new man should be. We've already learned what we are to put off because it's inconsistent. If you keep reading you'll learn what to put on. (Read 3:12-14 and mention peace of Christ, Word of Christ, relationships with other believers, family relationships – all should be impacted by the new life.)

4. Conclusion

- a. Christ is all.—Col. 3:11. These three words are the essence and substance of Christianity. J.C. Ryle
- b. The repeated refrain of Colossians – He's enough. He's sufficient. We're "full" in Him.



1

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