



Colossians 3:1-4:1
Colossians: Mature In Christ
A New You

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Every now and then – it's not too often – but every now and then, I will come home from work, walk in the house and things look different. For instance, the furniture is rearranged (not *different* furniture, fortunately [no surprise expensive bills!], just moved). Pictures are moved on the walls. Plants are in new places. Decorative items and other things on shelves are all rearranged...Country music is playing on the stereo...and I notice that on our back deck is a doghouse with my name over the entrance to it...Ok, maybe not those last two parts...but I *have* come home to a house that is redecorated, rearranged, and reordered. It's happened a few times in our marriage. Some people imagine that the new life that is promised to followers of Jesus is kind of like that: Jesus comes in and rearranges the furniture, does a little updating or freshening up of some things, and so forth...but essentially leaves us as we are.

And so this morning as we continue our series in Colossians, the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Colosse, in the middle of present-day Turkey, we are looking at a portion of the letter that helps us understand what Jesus' aim is in our lives when we follow him. Let's read today's passage...

So, spoiler alert about the sermon: What we see in this portion of the letter is that Jesus does a lot more than just rearrange the furniture of our lives. He doesn't come in and redecorate. He doesn't come in and clean the floors or wash the windows or put a new coat of paint on the walls. And he certainly doesn't build a doghouse where the ungodly stuff in our life goes to rest for a while. **When Jesus comes in and we open our lives up fully to him, the old furniture of our life is thrown out, the house is torn down, the foundation is ripped out, and Jesus Christ replaces it all with pieces that come from him. It's a whole new you.** Our old selves die, and Christ raises us anew. As one commentator bluntly writes, "We are welcomed into the church by death."¹ *Our* death is what he means: the death of the way we once lived.

That's what Paul is talking about in this passage. He focuses first on getting

rid of our old ways of living. He writes, “...for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God...Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly...But now you must get rid of such things...you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self...” (Colossians 3:3-10).

And when Paul speaks of this dying to the old self and putting to death whatever in you is earthly: these are phrases and images that would be familiar to them from baptism. Baptism imagery is throughout this passage. Literally, when someone was baptized, they were laid back under the water – many were baptized in the Jordan River – and then were raised up out of it. There's powerful symbolism of being buried...laid to rest...and then raised to new life. Also, many of them would be familiar with Old Testament passages that speak of being clothed in the garments of salvation or clothed in righteousness.ⁱⁱ So this idea of putting to death and putting off the old and being clothed in the new is symbolic language with which they would be familiar.

What Paul needs to clarify for them, however, is in regards to *what* it is they're putting off. He says in verse 5, “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly...” He then goes on to say what he means by this; he defines for them what it is that is earthly. He says to: **Put to death things such as “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips...Do not lie...” (Colossians 3:5-9).**

Now, in that time, in that part of the world, there were several different and conflicting religious/philosophical ideals that were competing for people's allegiance. We touched on this briefly last week, but it is especially helpful today in order to properly understand this passage. One of the influences was the Jewish faith, out of which Christianity grew. Another of the philosophical/religious ideals of the day was called gnosticism.ⁱⁱⁱ **Gnostic teaching taught that the physical world was evil, and only the spiritual was good and true.** For example, Gnosticism taught that humans are spirits “trapped” in a physical body. Our body isn't who we really are, and our bodies are actually evil. The physical world is evil. The idea that God created the world and called it “good” is entirely foreign in gnostic teaching, and it

creates a tension between the spiritual and the physical. And so the gnostics created all these rules to guide their living that restricted their interaction with the physical world. I suppose, if Gnosticism was lived out to the extreme, Gnostics would simply starve to death or die out for lack of procreation, because even food was considered evil and they had restrictions pertaining to eating, and sex is the joining of two physical bodies – something they taught to avoid, even in the context of marriage.

At the other end of the spectrum it's also true that there was a very materialistic, “if it feels good do it” mentality in parts of the culture, too. That pleasure-seeking facet was in direct conflict with Gnosticism. This is a philosophical ideal of our culture as well, perhaps the dominant one, showing up as materialism, emphasizing wealth and status as the highest good, and so forth. It's totally contradictory to Gnostic teaching. And as we read Colossians, we see that both schools of thought seem to be trying to gain a foothold in the Colossian church. Instead of having Jesus at the center, these competing ideologies are trying to slip into their lives and replace Jesus. Probably, some of the followers of Jesus had been a part of Gnosticism or this “do what feels good” ideology, and they’re having a hard time letting go of these things.

And so when Paul writes, “put to death whatever in you that is earthly” the gnostic-leaning folks would’ve been shocked to read that “earthly” *doesn't* mean physical stuff, but rather things like anger, wrath, malice, abusive language, lying, and so forth. Paul is redefining for them what it means to live a pure and holy life. And notice that he says, “put to death sexual immorality, impurity, lust,” which are all facets of sex outside of marriage. He's telling them that sex within the confines of marriage is good. He didn't say, “put to death all sexual relations.” And the crowd that has the mentality of “if it feels good, do it” are going to be shocked by the exact same things, but for different reasons, because some of these things – like sexual immorality, lust, and greed – were exactly what they sought in life.

For the Gnostics, this message from Paul means redefining what holy living is and actually gives them more freedom; for the feel-good crowd, it means learning for the first time what holy living means and learning some God-honoring and people-respecting boundaries. **So when Paul writes here, “Put**

to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly” and then goes on to define that, he's grabbing the attention of both groups of people. These things that Paul lists are the kinds of things that prevent healthy relationships and unity from developing. These are the things that get in the way in our marriages. These are the things that get in the way in our churches. These are the things that wreck our careers. These are the things that can drag a person down into depression. These are the things that get in the way of knowing and loving God. Maybe these are things that are dragging you down and you need to put them to death in your life, too.

Now, because there were different factions who brought their former ideologies into their new Christian faith, there was probably some heated discussion – maybe even a church fight! – over these things. They're trying to make Christianity “Jesus plus something” but because their previous world views are completely contradictory to one another, they can't agree on what the “something” is – strict rules to follow or freedom from all rules. But Paul is telling them they're both wrong – that it's not Jesus plus *anything* – and then he tells them to set aside their differences. He writes in verse 11, **“Here [in the Church] there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”**

In other words, don't allow your differences to divide you. Today, we might say that there is neither “Kangaroo or Mustang or Rebel (that one's hard); Husky or Cougar or Duck (that one's harder!); Republican or Democrat (maybe the hardest of all), for Christ is all and in all!” When we recognize the complete and total lordship of Jesus (which is what we struggle with as a society) and stay centered on him, we are drawn together. The differences fall by the wayside.

So if there are a number of things that get in the way of holy and right living: **How, then, *are* we to live? With “compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulness” (Colossians 3:12-15).** These are what we “put on,” after we have put off the junk in our lives. These are the characteristics that positively impact our relationships with other people and with God and are a demonstration of our

life in Christ. When we follow Jesus and allow him fully into our lives this is the new way of living. This is the new clothing that we wear. You see, it's not just a rearranging of the furniture...as if we just move our hate or our idolatry or our lust or our greed from one thing to another...as though we're moving the couch from "this wall" to "that wall." This is a *whole new you* that is founded on Jesus' death and resurrection, His love for us, our love for him. The old is put to death, and the new is put on in its place.

I once heard a message on this passage that compared this old life and new life to lemons turning into lemonade. Lemons are sour and somewhat distasteful on their own...but when the right ingredients are added, you have one of our favorite beverages: lemonade. Perhaps another illustration would be to take carrots and make them into carrot cake. Although: Carrots were not meant to be turned into a dessert. I think it's the 11th commandment, "Thou shalt not turn veggies into dessert."^{iv} But with regards to the pastor who suggested that lemons turned into lemonade is a good illustration, I beg to differ. When we fully open the doors of our lives to Jesus Christ he takes the lemons that we have to offer and makes orange juice or chocolate milk or even better: a caramel frappuccino with whip cream on top.

The point is: **Jesus takes the shack of a life that that we built for ourselves, demolishes it, and builds us a mansion out of love, peace, thankfulness, kindness, mercy, and so forth.** We're not perfect at living into this, of course. That's why Paul is telling them to do this. It takes some effort on their part, it takes effort on our part, to put these things to death and live into the new stuff. God opens our hearts up to see that the death of these things is needed; Jesus died on the cross for these kinds of things and God sees us as forgiven because of His death. But God wants us to live holy and right lives for Him here and now.

And so this morning, I invite you to share with God what parts of our lives need to be put to death, what needs to go to the cross with Jesus, and then open our hearts for Jesus to come in and dwell in us instead. Paul writes in verse 16, **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16).** In the Greek, that word, "dwell" means, "make one's home." Let Jesus Christ and His word make his home in your life, so that you can have a whole new

you. When someone makes their home somewhere, they have access to all parts of the home. Not just part of it. Let Jesus and His word into all aspects of your life so he can come in and dwell there and give you the grace and the strength to do what needs to be done to live fully, as God intended. Not just a rearranging of the furniture...not just a new addition...not just lemonade out of lemons. It's a complete demolition and reconstruction of who you are.

And this impacts all of our relationships. Paul makes it very practical here as he names several different kinds of relationships. I know "submit" is a hard one in our day in age (he does qualify it with "as is fitting in the Lord"), and Paul uses it in Ephesians as well. But there his command to husbands is to love their wives *as Christ loved the Church*. In other words: love your wives even to the point of dying for their benefit. Maybe there's something in your life, husbands, that needs to be put to death in order to love your wife better.

Regardless, in this letter addressed to the men and women, the message is clear: Put to death your old way of living, and be raised up to new life as a whole new you. **What needs to be put to death in your life?** Maybe you're struggling with sexual impurity or lust; maybe it's unethical business tactics in your place of work; maybe it's a habit of lying; maybe it's anger or slander or gossip or greed; maybe it's an attitude toward your spouse or kids or someone else...Or maybe you've got something going on that's more of an obstacle in a direct way with God: Maybe it's fear of something that you need to give over to the Lord. Maybe you're in a place of grief and you're struggling to see the goodness of God or to know His comforting presence.

Whatever it may be, even if you pretend you don't know, the reality is: you probably do know what needs to be put to death, so you could be raised up as a whole new you. Whatever part of your life that needs to be opened up to the light of Christ, to be exposed to his forgiveness and his love, I invite you this morning to do that. It's not just a re-arranging of the furniture He will do. It's a whole new you, the way God intended you to be. And with Jesus, it's possible, even if we live into it imperfectly. As the old is put to death, and we are raised up to new life, as a whole new you, let's grow and mature in Christ, as Christ dwells in us. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ Dunnam, Maxie D. *The Preachers Commentary – Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, p. 373.

ⁱⁱ For example, Isaiah 61:10 and Job 29:14.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gnosticism – comes from the Greek word “gnosis” which means “to know.” It wasn’t used in Paul’s day as a label for people who thought this way, but is applied later, used to describe the ideologies that existed then and thought like this.

^{iv} Someone asked me the next day if, based on this statement, I dislike pumpkin pie. Technically, pumpkins are not vegetables, but a fruit. That being said, I realize most people probably think of them as a vegetable, in which case: they become the one acceptable exception to my theology of vegetables becoming dessert, because pumpkin pie is awesome.