Do you ever find yourself drifting from Jesus? I am sure it is not because you intend to think about him less. It is the busyness of modern life and the worldview of everyone around us that discourage us from thinking of him more. Paul wrote the letter of Colossians to a church facing many of the same cultural pressures we face today. In this letter, Paul masterfully portrays the greatness of our savior in a way none of us can forget. I hope you are encouraged to follow Christ in the modern world with greater passion because of this book.

This work is a collection of manuscripts behind sermons I preaching on the book of Colossians. The manuscripts were written for the ear, and not the eye. They read like you were sitting in church on Sunday. Since we live in a casual YouTube style world, I hope this writing style helps you connect biblical truth to everyday living.

If you are a pastor looking for additional resources, check out my web site (www.christ2Rculture.com). I also encourage you to use additional material from the series which includes full audio and video of each message, sermon handouts and small group questions designed to supplement each message.

I especially want to thank Kiley Roth for her patient editing. Each week she edited manuscripts so I could turn them into chapters of this book. I pray God blesses her and her family for her selfless service to Christ and the CrossWinds Church family.

Because of God’s mercy through Jesus,

Kurt
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Welcome to CrossWinds. This morning we begin our study of the book of Colossians. This study will take approximately three months. I am really excited about it because there is no other book in the Bible that displays the greatness of Jesus with greater clarity than the book of Colossians. Sometimes living in the modern church, it is easy to lose sight of the greatness of what God has done for us through Jesus. Colossians is like a new pair of glasses. As we study this book, it will bring the greatness of Jesus back into focus so we see why Jesus is so important.

This morning, we are not going to get far. First, I want to give you the background to the book of Colossians. If we don’t understand the context for the book, we will have a hard time understanding the book.

After the background of the book, we will look the first two verses and answer these two questions: “Why should we trust what Paul has to say about Jesus?” and “As a Christian, who am I because of Jesus?”

The background of Colossians.

When we studied the book of Ephesians — which was a letter Paul wrote to the city of Ephesus — we learned that on one of Paul’s early missionary journeys, he began the church in Ephesus. He began the church in Ephesus because Ephesus was a hub city. The city had approximately 250,000 people and was the fourth largest city in the ancient world. All the commerce from Rome going east sailed into the port of Ephesus and then was taken by land to the interior of Asia. All the manufacturing from the Asian interior was put on ships and sailed to Rome from Ephesus. Paul’s plan was to tell the story of Jesus to people in Ephesus and plant the church in Ephesus. Since people were constantly passing through Ephesus, he hoped travelers would hear about Jesus in that city then take the good news of Jesus with them to their hometowns.

On Paul’s third missionary journey he returned to Ephesus and taught in the city for almost three 3 years. His primary method of teaching was in a rented public lecture hall called the hall of Tyrannus. He typically taught there over the lunch hour when people had time off. We read about this in the book of Acts.
And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. Acts 19:8–10 (ESV)

As people passed through Ephesus, they heard Paul speaking about Jesus. They became Christians and went home to their cities where they told others about Jesus. Their sins were forgiven. Their lives were changed, and new churches began in a new city. This worked so well that all the people of Asia heard about Jesus.

In the book of Colossians, we will meet a man named Epaphras. He passed through Ephesus, stopped at the lecture hall of Tyrannus and heard Paul talking about Jesus. Epaphras became a Christian and returned to his city, which was the city of Colossae. Epaphras planted the church in Colossae and pastored the church in Colossae. Epaphras wasn’t alone in this work. Another wealthy businessman passed through Ephesus and heard Paul talk about Jesus. He also became a Christian. His name was Philemon. Philemon was very rich and had a huge house in the city of Colossae. In a moment, we will see the church in Colossae met in Philemon’s house. When the church meets in your house, you either have a really small church or a really big house. I am going with the latter. So in the church of Colossae, Epaphras was the pastor and Philemon headed up the property team since he owned the property.

At this point, there is an interesting backstory. Philemon, the wealthy Christian businessman with the huge house, had a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus was a rebellious slave. He ran from home. In the ancient world, if a slave ran away, it was a big deal. If you were found you would be severely beaten and possibly killed. Since Onesimus was trying to hide from his master, he traveled 1,300 miles to Rome, where he planned to be lost in the sea of almost 350,000 people in the city. At this time, guess who was also in Rome? Paul was in Rome under house arrest waiting for his appeal to Caesar. We read about that in Acts 25. House arrest was the ancient equivalent of wearing an ankle collar. It meant people could visit you but you had to be supervised to go anywhere. Guess who happened to run across Paul among the 350,000 people in Rome? Onesimus, the runaway slave, ended up meeting Paul in Rome. He heard the gospel from Paul. He became a Christian and ended up helping Paul while he was under house arrest.

As we will see in a moment, the baby church in Colossae began to get off track. Epaphras, the brand new pastor, didn’t know what to do. The apostle Paul didn’t have Snapchat or Facebook so Pastor Epaphras set out to find Paul in Rome to get help with church problems. When Epaphras walked in the door of Paul’s house, guess who he found inside? Onesimus! His buddy Philemon’s runaway slave. Now Onesimus’ gig is up. There was no more hiding. Paul sent him home to face the dire consequences for running away from his master.
At this point, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians to address the church meeting in Philemon’s home. He also wrote a personal letter to Philemon that was to be read in the church that met in Philemon’s house. In the letter to Philemon, Paul told Philemon how to treat Onesimus, his runaway slave. So when Tychicus and Onesimus left Rome to head to Colossae, they carried two letters from Paul, not one. One is the book of Colossians in our Bible. The other is the book of Philemon.

Let me show you how Paul told Philemon to treat his runaway slave.

For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. Philemon 15–17 (ESV)

Can you imagine how this went down? I imagine Tychicus and Onesimus both showed up on Sunday morning during church. They knocked at the front door. Philemon opened it and freaked out because his runaway slave was at his front door. Onesimus said, “Before you beat me in front of the church, we have two letters from Paul. One is written to you Philemon. Let’s read the letters before you give me a beating.” They read the letter of Philemon and Paul said “Don’t beat Onesimus, but treat him as a brother. Treat him like you would treat me. He is a Christian. He is more than a slave. Onesimus is your brother.” I bet you could have heard a pin drop in church that morning.

Incidentally, Paul’s words to Philemon in that personal letter on how to treat slaves, especially slaves that are now brothers or sisters in Christ, became a crucial part of dismantling the institution of slavery in England and the United States. Isn’t it fun to see how God puts things together? Nothing happens by chance. Onesimus didn’t meet Paul in Rome by chance. Paul didn’t write a letter about slavery to Philemon by chance. That letter was not preserved by chance. It was not added in our Bible by chance, because God planned to use it to not just bless the slave Onesimus but as part of the dismantling of slavery itself as part of our culture.

What was life like in Colossae?

The city of Colossae was part of a trio of cities in the Lycus valley. Hieropolis and Laodicea were its sister cities. They were only 10 miles away. At one time, Colossae was a big manufacturer and exporter of wool from sheep that grazed the fields around the city. It was also a big exporter of dyes made from chalk found in the local hillsides. These exports helped Colossae survive. In addition, travel was big income for Colossae. It was on the trade route for caravans heading to and from

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Ephesus. Unfortunately, just prior to this time, the Romans changed the highway and rerouted it through Laodicea, skipping Colossae. Colossae was fast becoming a ghost town as it was overshadowed by its prosperous sister cities, Laodicea and Hieropolis.

What went wrong in the Colossian church?

What so deeply upset Pastor Epaphras that he left town and made a 1,300 mile trip to Rome because he needed the advice and authority of the apostle Paul? We don’t know exactly what was going astray in the Colossian church, but we have a good idea.

In short, the culture of Colossae was pressing into the church, and it was beginning to change what people believed about Jesus. Today, just like in their day, the culture around us exerts tremendous pressure on the church. Sometimes the church changes what the Bible says to better harmonize the Bible with what most people believe. Let me give you one example that we talked about at the men’s breakfast this week. The Bible tells us the world was created in seven days. For most of Christian history, the church took the Genesis creation account at face value as seven literal days. With the advent of evolution and the need for millions of years for gradual change, many people in the church tried to harmonize science and the Bible together by saying each day in Genesis equals millions of years. “The Bible can’t mean a literal seven days,” they say. Some people took this even further. Since they don’t believe in a literal seven days, they don’t believe in a literal Adam. They also believe there was probably not a literal original sin. If you don’t have a literal first Adam, you don’t have a literal second Adam, called Jesus. If you don’t have original sin as the problem, you don’t need Jesus as the solution. Before long, trying to harmonize the beliefs of our culture with the Bible starts to whittle away the truth of the Bible.

This is what was happening in Colossae. Colossae was a melting pot for people as they traveled to Ephesus. There were two primary cultural influences pressing on the church. The first was Greek philosophy. The second was Jewish legalism.

Greek philosophy taught that God is good but matter is evil. Followers believed the original God created another God, who created another God. That continued for thousands of rounds of gods creating lesser gods until there was a little god far enough from the real god that this lesser god could create matter, which they believed was intrinsically evil. The problem with Greek philosophy is this little god was relatively powerless, plus this god that could touch matter was evil. That is the way the Colossians thought about God. When people in the church tried to harmonize the Greek culture with the truth of Jesus, they ended up with people that believed Jesus was evil and Jesus was vastly inferior to God. This is why Paul said in the book of Colossians:

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, Colossians 2:9 (ESV)

Paul said, “Don’t change the truth about Jesus to fit culture. If you change the truth about Jesus, you know longer have the truth of Jesus.”
In addition, Greek philosophy taught that only those properly educated about the secrets of God really knew God. In Greek religion there were secret societies where only certain people in-the-know knew the truth about the Greek gods. This is similar to the Masonic Lodge today, which is a secret society, with secret rituals and secret levels. The Greek pagan culture of secret societies with secret truths was infiltrating the thinking of the church. People were now thinking Jesus was only the beginning. You needed to move beyond Jesus to get to the secret knowledge about God that only certain insiders obtained. This is why Paul wrote:

...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. Colossians 2:2–4 (ESV)

Do you want to know God’s mystery? All of God’s mysteries are found in Jesus. There are no additional secrets. All of God’s wisdom and knowledge are found in Jesus. Don’t let anyone else fool you. Don’t let anyone else tell you that you need something besides him.

In addition to the church letting Greek culture start to change what they believed about Jesus, they were also letting Jewish culture tell them they needed more than Jesus by trying to harmonize Jewish culture into the church. For example, the Jewish culture encouraged circumcision. If you really want to be a good Christian, you start with Jesus then get circumcised. Jesus was circumcised. You should be circumcised. In Colossians Paul corrected this thinking by saying:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ... Colossians 2:11 (ESV)

You don’t need circumcision plus Jesus. All you need is Jesus.

They were also teaching that the really spiritual people managed their sin by learning to denying themselves of God’s good pleasures. This is called asceticism. Ascetics means self-denial. They taught that learning rigorous self-denial in even good areas of life was the key to beating sin. Paul said that is completely wrong. Denying ourselves doesn’t make us beat sin. Jesus is the one who cancels the power of sin. Victory over sin doesn’t come by making yourself suffer. It comes by delighting in Jesus. This is why Paul said:

…”Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” (referring to things that all perish as they are used) — according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. Colossians 2:21–23 (ESV)
So in Colossae, we have the prevailing beliefs of the world pressing into the church and people were trying to harmonize the truth of Jesus with what they originally believed rather than holding to the truth of Jesus and having to abandon their former beliefs.

In this letter, Paul was adamant. Jesus is enough. Jesus is all we need to beat sin. We don’t need secret knowledge, secret passwords, or circumcision to really know God; all we need is Jesus. When you try to blend the truth of Jesus with anything, we ruin the truth of Jesus. Paul’s whole point in Colossians was Jesus is more than enough for every need we have in life.

That is the background of this book. The application for us is straightforward. Today, our culture presses into the church, telling us Jesus isn’t enough. We need something beside Jesus to be happy, to be saved, or to beat sin.

Let me show you an example. If you are struggling with sin, the world says you need a 12-step program then go to church for a little Jesus. Here is the problem. The 12-step program is sin management. Jesus is the only one who saves a life, breaks the power of sin and makes someone into a new person.

I am not saying there is nothing good in a 12-step program. I am just telling you the 12-step program is only sin management. Only Jesus is the sin solution in your life and mine.

To prove to you that I am telling the truth, I ask you, what did people do before the 12-step program? What is the only way a life truly changed so they went from loving sin to hating it? Jesus!

Any time we try to blend Jesus with something else, we make him out to be less than he actually is and we direct people away from the only thing that can change their life — Jesus!

Let’s jump into the first two paragraphs where Paul told us who he was and who we are.

**Why should we trust what the apostle Paul says about Jesus?**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother… Colossians 1:1 (ESV)

Jesus is the most important person of history. We divide history by his birth. Easter and Christmas are all about Jesus. Billions of people worship Jesus. When it comes to teaching us about Jesus, Paul was probably one of the most important people in the history of the world. Paul wrote 13 books in the New Testament. Every single one of Paul’s letters is about the importance of Jesus and how he transforms life.

Surprisingly, many young people are rejecting Paul. Jesus is in style but Paul is out of style. Paul is considered a sexist, bigot, and homophobe. Today it is trendy to follow Jesus but reject Paul. Personally, I didn’t know this was an option, but the cover article of Christianity Today in 2010 was Jesus vs. Paul. Who will win? It described this growing trend among young people to reject Paul.
Rejecting Paul is not something new. It is something they did in the early church too. Paul was always a controversial figure.

As Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae, that he had never met, he began by telling them the kind of authority he had when he talked to them about Jesus. This way they knew they could trust what he had to say about Jesus. He isn’t just another opinion. What he said about Jesus is the honest-to-God truth.

Paul said he was an apostle of Jesus. Paul was speaking about the office of the apostle. The apostles were 12 men chosen by Jesus to teach the truth about Jesus. Jesus chose the apostles. Jesus trained his apostles for three years, then Jesus sent his apostles into the world to tell the truth of what he had done.

Paul was not one of these original apostles, yet he described himself as an apostle, an apostle that was abnormally born.¹

When we read the book of Acts, we find Paul began life as a highly educated religious zealot. He hated Christians. He hated Jesus. He thought Jesus was a shame. Paul was part of a group of thugs that went from town to town to find Christians, beat them up and take them to prison. When they could, they acted like terrorists and were behind public mob executions designed to strike terror into the heart of a city. That was Paul. He was at the killing of the first Christian martyr, a man named Stephen. The Bible describes it this way.

But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Acts 8:3 (ESV)

Ravaging literally means to lay waste. It means to completely destroy something. When Paul and his posse came to town, they completely destroyed a church. You were either going to die, be beaten or thrown in prison.

In Acts 9, we see the resurrected Jesus in heaven set up a little appointment with Paul on the road to Damascus. The risen Jesus appeared to Paul, blinded Paul, then knocked him on his backside and said, “Why are you persecuting me?” Saul had the sudden terrifying realization he was playing for the wrong team. Paul became a Christian. This is like Osama Bin Laden becoming a pastor. Paul went from jihad to Jesus. Paul was the least likely Christian on the planet. The only reason he was a Christian was because he was supernaturally chosen by God. The Bible also tells us he was also trained by God in the truth about Jesus.² Then God sent him to teach the good news of Jesus, just like he did the other apostles.³ By the time we get to Acts 13 to 28, the spread of the gospel message and the growth of the church throughout the world was spearheaded by the apostle Paul. Paul was one of the great authorities on Jesus because he was supernaturally converted by Jesus, trained by Jesus and

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:8
² Galatians 1:17
³ Acts 13:2-3
sent out by Jesus, just like the other apostles. Paul walked an average of 20 miles a day for the rest of his life as he tried to tell more and more people about Jesus. There were no benefits. When he came to a town, he was often met by an angry mob that wanted to kill him. He got no money out of the deal. He was shipwrecked, whipped, stoned and left for dead.

When it comes to the truth about Jesus, you can trust Paul because of the his conversion by Jesus, his training in Arabia by Jesus and because he was sent to be an apostle by Jesus; plus, the testimony of his life clearly tells us he was not in it for the money.

That is why Paul said he was an apostle of Jesus Christ in this opening line. He established his authority to the Colossian church so they knew they could trust he would tell them the truth about Jesus. I love how he said something similar when he spoke to the Corinthians.

If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 1 Corinthians 14:37–38 (ESV)

He said, "When I am telling you something about Jesus, it is not up for debate. I know what I am talking about because Jesus told me, and Jesus called me. If someone thinks they are spiritual, they just need to acknowledge I am telling the truth."

Here is our application. Every one of us needs to decide who we will listen to when it comes to learning the truth about Jesus. The people of Colossae had to choose who they would trust. Would they trust what their friends and neighbors said about Jesus when they claimed he wasn’t enough for their lives or would they trust the apostle Paul who told them Jesus is more than enough for every problem we face?

This morning, I ask you, who are you going to listen to when it comes to Jesus? The world says Jesus is just another religious teacher. The culture says Jesus may help your life but you need something else to fix your life because Jesus isn’t enough. Who are you going to trust to tell you the truth about Jesus? Paul or your friends and neighbors?

Who am I because of Jesus?

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. Colossians 1:2 (ESV)

Paul said the Christians in Colossae were saints because they were in Christ. When Paul said we are “in Christ,” that is a very special term. Paul used this term in many of his letters. We read it so fast we miss the significance of these words. “In Christ” means our identity is not found in ourselves. Our identity is found “in Christ.” Today, most of us find our identity in relation to other people. If someone is the smart person, that makes you the dumb person. If someone is the beautiful person, that makes you the ugly person. When we compare
ourselves to others, it leads to either pride because we look down on others or despair because we can’t measure up to others.

Paul said that Christians are different. Our identity is not found in ourselves or in comparing ourselves to others because our identity is now “in Christ.” Paul described the good news of what it means to be in Christ in the first chapter of Ephesians. Let me just show you one verse from that chapter.

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places…** Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)

Christ is the most blessed and exalted being in the universe, because we are “in Christ,” that means we are the most blessed and exalted beings in the universe, not because of who we are but because of who Christ is, and our identity is found in him.

In the Roman catacombs, many of the unnamed tombs of dead Christians simply have this phrase etched across the front of the grave, “in Christ.” The Christians that buried their deceased brothers and sisters realized that what really mattered was not their names, not their births, not their deaths and not what they did with their lives. The only thing that matter about their lives was that they were “in Christ.” Anything they did with their lives, no matter how great it was, is nothing compared to what it means to be “in Christ” since our whole identity in life and eternity is found in him. Since we are in Christ, our sin is paid for. Since we are in Christ, we are a completely new creation. Since we are in Christ, sin no longer has control of our hearts. Since we are in Christ, we will reign for all eternity with Jesus. Is there anything more important in this world than having your life in Christ?

Our identity “in Christ” changes the way we need to see ourselves in the mirror. The Bible says we are all sinners by nature, but because we are “in Christ,” sinner is no longer our identity. Our identity is we are saints, not sinners. Saints are holy people set apart by God to live holy lives. Will we still sin? Of course! Sin now describes our occasional activity but saint is our persistent identity. Sin explains what we do, but saint explains who we are because our identity is “in Jesus.” Struggling with sin may define our current struggle, but it doesn’t describe our eternal struggle. Once we have given our sin to Christ, our sin is forgiven and we are in the process of becoming more and more like Christ every day. When we die, we will be with Jesus and our struggle with sin will be over.

It is very important to understand that as Christians, our new identity in Christ is a saint, not a sinner. We struggle with sin, but sinner is not who we are, it is what we occasionally do. Since we are “in Christ,” we don’t need to give in to sin anymore.

**We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.… So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.** Romans 6:6-7, 11 (ESV)
When you struggle with sin, don’t let yourself get tricked into thinking you must give in to the power of sin because sinner is your nature. That is who you were. As a Christian, saint is who we are because we are “in Christ,” so we now have the desire and ability to live a holy life.

This morning, we need to know the truth of who Jesus is, so we understand who we are, so we stop living like what we were. That is the honest-to-god truth.

Conclusion

This morning, we were introduced to the problem in the church of Colossae. They were letting the culture reshape the truth about Jesus to make him far less than he actually is. They were letting the culture tell them Jesus isn’t enough to bring you to God and handle the problems in your life.

The problem is when they thought Jesus wasn’t enough, they didn’t understand their new identity in Christ, and as a result they lived in sin like who they were, not who they are.

The same is true for us today. Most of us have a small picture of Jesus or a distorted picture of Jesus. As a result, we don’t understand who we are in Jesus and that we are no longer sinners but saints that display God’s power and glory by living changed and holy lives in this world.
Welcome to CrossWinds. This morning, we continue our study of the book of Colossians. Last week we learned a little on the background to the book. This book is a letter written by the apostle Paul while he was in prison at Rome.

We also met Epaphras. He was a man that heard the apostle Paul telling people about the good news of Jesus in the city of Ephesus. He returned to his hometown of Colossae and told people in his city about Jesus. People came to Christ and a church was birthed in his hometown.

Unfortunately, the people of Colossae were beginning to undermine the new faith of the Christians in Colossae. They were telling them that simple faith in Jesus wasn’t enough. Jesus wasn’t that big of a deal. Those from a Greek background told them there must be hidden truths about God Epaphras hadn’t told them. Those from a Jewish background wanted to add circumcision to simple faith in Christ when it came to knowing God.

This young church’s confidence in the sufficiency of Jesus and what God had done for them through him began to erode. What was young pastor Epaphras to do? He traveled 1,300 miles to Rome to tell Paul what was happening and get his words of wisdom. To address this problem, Paul wrote this letter to tell that small church why Jesus is more than enough.

Last week, we covered just the first two verses. This morning, we are picking up the pace and covering 11 verses. We have a lot to cover.

In letter writing of the day, it was customary to open a letter with a few sentences telling the recipient why you are thankful for them. It was the way they had small talk before the real talk. We do the same thing today. We talk about sports and the weather before we get into the real conversation. Paul was doing something similar in these verses before he jumped into the meat of the letter.

This doesn’t mean this portion of the letter is unimportant. Paul carefully crafted these paragraphs to explain the basics of saving faith in Christ to the Christians in Colossae and to show them why simple faith in Jesus is more than enough. In these verses, Paul answered these questions.

1. How do we recognize saving faith?
2. How does someone come to saving faith?
3. How does someone grow in saving faith?
4. How does saving faith change the problem of sin?
How do we recognize saving faith?

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven… Colossians 1:3–5a (ESV)

Epaphras told Paul about three important qualities in the life of these young Christians. Paul said the existence of these three qualities was proof they were genuine Christians and that God was at work in their lives. These three qualities are faith, hope and love.

Paul talked about faith, hope and love many times in the Bible. These three things are shorthand for the defining qualities of a Christian life. Sometimes we breeze right though them and miss their significance. I want to explain them. The key thing to remember is these qualities cannot exist in someone’s life unless he or she is a genuine Christian.

Faith in Christ Jesus

As soon as we talk about needing faith, most of us hear the song by George Michael, “You gotta have faith.” While the tune of the song is catchy, the words of the song are not true. Faith in itself has no intrinsic value. It is what we have faith in that has value.

For example, some of you will remember the Tylenol murders in the 1980s. This is the reason every bottle you buy today has a seal over the top. A woman in Chicago was taking Tylenol bottles home, emptying capsules of their Tylenol and filling them with cyanide, then putting the bottle with cyanide capsules in it back on the store shelf. People in Chicago were buying Tylenol, taking one for a headache and dying. Every single person who took those Tylenols had faith he was taking medicine to take away his headache but his faith was misplaced. The pill took away his life.

You see, having faith is useless. It is what you have faith in that matters. Is what you have faith in worth being trusted?

People all over the world have faith in different gods. They have faith in Mohammed. They have faith in Buddha. They have faith in themselves. Are Mohammed and Buddha worth of our faith? They are not. They are like cyanide Tylenol capsules. Millions of people sincerely trust them but they will let you down. Faith in Christ is the only thing that is worthy of our trust. Jesus tells us he is the only one we can trust to take care of our sin.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6 (ESV)

When Jesus makes this exclusive claim, we wonder if we can trust him. What makes his claims different from the claims of Mohammed or Budda? There is a difference between blind faith and healthy faith. When Jesus said he is the only way to know God, if he didn’t back up those claims, our trust in him would be
considered blind faith. The claims made by Mohammed and Buddha are blind faith claims. Jesus rose from the dead to prove he is worthy of our trust. Jesus is the only one who died on the cross and rose from the grave, and secular history proves it. That is why faith in Jesus isn’t a blind leap of faith but it is healthy faith, reasonable faith.

Here is what makes this interesting. Even though faith in Jesus is not a blind leap but it is healthy and reasonable, your decision to follow Christ didn’t come from you. Today, if you believe Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sin, if you desire to follow Christ with your life, it is because the eyes of your heart have been supernaturally opened so you can clearly see Jesus is worthy of your trust. God supernaturally worked in your life to open the eyes of your heart so you can clearly see Jesus for who he is and trust Jesus because of what he has done. Saving faith in Christ is ultimately a supernatural gift from God.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44 (ESV)

Love for the saints.

The second way you can recognize a genuine Christian is he or she possesses love for the saints. That means they genuinely love other Christians. The reason true Christians love one another is because God gives us a supernatural love for one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:35 (ESV)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 1 John 3:14 (ESV)

The kind of love Paul was talking about is not mushy romantic love. It is a love where we genuinely care for one another in spite of age differences, racial differences, political differences or economic differences. If we look at the news, we see division. We see fighting. It is republicans versus democrats. It is Black Lives Matter. It is not standing for the playing of the national anthem. In the church, those kind of divisions should never exist because God gives us a supernatural love for our brothers and sisters, no matter their skin color.

Another way this gets distorted in churches is people in the church sometimes only hang out with people just like them. There is a group for the young marrieds and a group for the retired people, and no mixing is allowed. While there is a place for affinity groups, a genuine Christian is careful to not let affinity groups cut them off from the rest of the body because they love all Christians. God gives us a supernatural love for one another that the world can not understand. The reason we love one another so deeply is because it is a supernatural work of God in our hearts.

Sometimes people ask me if you have to go to church to be a Christian. Of course we don’t have to go to church to be a Christian, but if you are a Christian, you will want to go to church because you genuinely love other believers and
want to be with them, even if other believers in the church are of a different age or race. It doesn’t matter. God gives us love for them.

The way this love shows up is in not simply in our willingness to talk with other believers after church but in our willingness to sacrifice for other believers. We spend our money and time on the things we love. If we genuinely love other Christians, we will be glad to make time for them and be glad to sacrifice some of our money to help them.

**Our hope is in heaven.**

As Christians, we are not living simply for this life. We have our eyes fixed on the day we will be with Jesus so we want to please him. The evidence of a genuine Christian faith is we don’t have to buy everything in this life because this life is not all there is. Eternity with Jesus and the new heavens and earth is what we are looking toward.

This completely changes the way we face suffering. For example, when Paul faced times of suffering, he didn’t moan, saying he only had approximately 50 years of life before he died, so time in a Roman jail was cutting into his retirement years, which he planned on spending at a Corinthian golf resort. Look what Paul said about facing suffering.

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* Romans 8:18 (ESV)

Paul said, “I can suffer now because this life isn’t all there is to life. The next life is what really matters. In the next life I will be most blessed being in all creation, not because I deserve it but all because of what Jesus has done for me and who I am because I am in him.”

If I told you there was a million dollars on the other side of Big Spirit Lake in a cooler and all you had to do was row a boat across the lake to get it, would you be able to endure the pain to get there? Of course! We live in Iowa. That means the weather changes when we least expect it. Imagine that halfway across the lake wind, rain and waves began. They made the trip difficult. How would you get through? You would keep straining on the oars because your eyes were fixed on the treasure on the opposite shore.

The same is true about suffering today. The blessings that await us in heaven because of who we are in Jesus are beyond our wildest dreams. When we face hard times in this life, we can make it through by remembering what awaits us on the shore of heaven.

That ability to think about your life beyond this life and to live for the next life is a supernatural gift from God. It is evidence of genuine faith.

Paul said, “Do you want to know if you are a genuine Christian?” Don’t look inside of yourself for some kind of mystical experience. Don’t look for visions or out-of-body experiences. Don’t even look back on a Bible conference where you were so emotionally touched that you came forward in an altar call with tears.
in your eyes. None of those emotional moments or supernatural moments are proof of a real saving faith. The tests of real saving faith are very ordinary.

1. **Do you honestly believe Jesus is the Son of God. Do you see Jesus as the only way to be forgiven?** Has God opened the eyes of your heart? If so, that is evidence of God’s supernatural work in your life.

2. **Do you honestly love other Christians, especially Christians that are not like you?** Genuine love for other Christians can only come as a supernatural work of God and is evidence of genuine faith.

3. **Are you living for your hope in heaven and not just for this life?** Only genuine saving faith will give the desire to make sacrificial choices in this world that will be honored by Christ on the day we see him face to face. That is evidence of genuine faith.

**How does someone come to saving faith?**

…Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing — as it also does among you… Colossians 1:5b-6a (ESV)

Notice how they came to genuine saving faith in Jesus. It happened when they simply heard the word of truth. Epaphras came to Colossae and told the Colossians the truth about their sin and the truth about how much God loves them to solve the problem of sin through Jesus.

God didn’t strike them with a bolt of lightning to change their lives. All that happened is Epaphras simply told the truth. Before Epaphras came, everything the people in Colossae knew about God was a lie. All other religious truth outside of Jesus is a lie.

We need to understand this simple message of the bad news of our sin and the good news of God’s love for us through Jesus on the cross that was spoken by Epaphras is not simply words. These words are the truth of God, and God promises to infuse them with power in people’s lives when we speak them. Telling the truth about Jesus with words is what God uses to supernaturally change people’s lives. God uses the verbal message of sin and our savior to move people from an eternity in hell to an eternity in heaven.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? Romans 10:14 (ESV)

Some people will tell you we need concerts or explosions or a big band or special music to lead people to Jesus. We need to get them worked up so they are emotionally pliable. Did Paul lead people to Jesus with a band and pyrotechnics show? In all honesty, music doesn’t lead anyone to Jesus. It is ordinary people speaking the simply words of truth about who Jesus is and what God has done for us through him that God promises to infuse with power and change lives. The way Paul spread the gospel was ordinary people, like Epaphras,
telling other ordinary people with ordinary words. That is God’s preferred method to change lives.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power. 1 Corinthians 2:4–5 (NIV)

Paul said, “When I told you about Jesus, I was intentionally boring. I didn’t want anyone to think I emotionally manipulated you. I simply told you the truth and let God’s Spirit take the message of Jesus into your life and activate it. When you were born again you realized the power for a transformed life came from God and not me manipulating you.”

Paul also said the proof that the simply unadorned speaking of the truth about Jesus is enough to change lives is no matter where this simple message goes in the world, no matter what the soil, no matter how harsh the climate, people hear about their sin and Jesus as our savior, they place their faith in Jesus and are born again. It doesn’t matter if it is in Iran, Pakistan, India, your college dorm or The Family Diner.

Paul said:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16 (ESV)

The simple gospel message is the power of God to change lives for everyone. Remember how this church in Colossae began. An ordinary person named Epaphras, who never went to Bible school, used ordinary words to tell people about Jesus, and they were born again. The result was the birth of a church.

I hope you find this encouraging. Epaphras was just like you and me. I challenge you this week to do what Epaphras did. I challenge each of us to be ordinary people that use ordinary words to tell ordinary people about Jesus and to trust in God to that the message will take root in someone’s heart.

Right now, I am going to stop and ask God to give each one of us at least one opportunity to tell somebody about Jesus this week. I am going to ask God to have his spirit prompt us and whisper in our hearts, that now is the time to speak these ordinary words to the best of our ability.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we confess that for too long we have kept our mouths shut because we thought it was up to us to convince someone to trust in you. As we look at ordinary Epaphras, who shared the ordinary truth of Jesus but you used those words to save life, we ask that what happened in Colossae would happen again in our region. Give us windows of opportunity to speak about you. We look forward to seeing how you use the truth about your son to change lives. Amen.

After Paul told us the marks of a Christian and genuine Christians are made, he instructed us how Christians grow. Remember, the culture of Colossae
said spiritual maturity was moving beyond Jesus. Paul said spiritual maturity is growing further into Jesus.

**How does someone grow in saving faith?**

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, *asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy...* Colossians 1:9–11 (ESV)

These are some great verses. We often wonder how to pray for people. Paul gave us a window into how he prayed for the Christians in Colossae.

There is a lot here, almost too much. Let me take a moment to break it down. Paul asked God for these young Christians to be *filled with the knowledge of God’s will*. The word *filled* means to be completely controlled by something. Just as we say somebody is filled with wine, which means they are controlled by alcohol, Paul prayed these young Christians would be completely controlled by the knowledge of God’s will for their lives.

The word *will* is referring to God’s desire for them through Jesus, God’s heart of goodness to them through Jesus, kindness and blessing to them through Jesus.

Paul defined spiritual maturity as not moving beyond Christ but as becoming more completely captivated by a greater understanding of how incredibly good God has been to us in Christ. *Spiritual maturity is falling more in love with Jesus as we grow in better understanding of how incredibly good God has been to us through Jesus.*

The Bible tells us in Ephesians that we deserve eternal punishment in the lake of fire, but through Jesus we are now the most blessed beings in the universe. Do you get that or are those words hitting you like a bullet off a rock? Let who we are in Jesus sink into your mind.

The biggest problem Christians have in this world is as we mature we move away from Jesus, we don’t become increasingly captivated by what God has done for us through Jesus.

Paul coupled with knowledge of God’s will, spiritual wisdom and understanding. *Spiritual wisdom* means making wise decisions in life based on our new-found understanding of who we are in Jesus. That is spiritual wisdom. *Understanding* means the ability to understand concepts and the relationships between them.

To summarize, Paul said spiritual maturity is growing in our understanding of Jesus and how much God loves us through Jesus and how much God has done for us through Jesus. Then Paul prayed we have the wisdom to see how our new identity in Jesus connects with everyday living so we live wisely in life, knowing who we are.
Paul then gave us three examples of how understanding more about who we are in Christ changes our everyday lives.

1. **Bearing fruit in every good work.** Just as God has gone out of his way to save us, our natural response will be to go out of our way to care for others. The more we understand how much we are loved by Jesus, the more we want to go out of our way to love others.

2. **Increasing in knowledge of God.** Knowing Christ and knowing God go hand-in-hand. The more we know about how much God has done for us in Jesus, the more we know about God.

3. **Being strengthened with all power by God’s glorious might.** This is something many people misunderstand. What does it mean to be strengthened with God’s power? Many people think the strengthening with God’s power is some kind of funky supernatural gift. It is not speaking in tongues. It is not the gift of healing. It just isn’t. Read this in context. Paul told us three evidences of God’s power that displays in our lives as we mature in knowing Christ.
   
   3.1. **God’s power gives us endurance.** Endurance is the strength to make it through tough circumstances that go on and on and never seem to end. Has anyone faced a health situation or tough job situation that required endurance? As we focus on Jesus and who we are in him, God will give us supernatural endurance to handle tough situations.

   3.2. **God’s power gives us patience.** While endurance is supernatural strength to put up with tough circumstances, patience is supernatural strength to put up with tough people. Focus on who we are in Jesus and God will give us supernatural levels of patience to work with tough people.

   3.3. **God’s power gives us joy.** As we focus on who we are in Jesus, God gives us joy that is not found in our circumstances but is supernaturally given to us through Jesus.

   This is how Paul prayed for the Colossians to grow in Christ. It is a template for us to guide us in praying for others we love.

**How does saving faith change our struggle with sin?**

...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered 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. Colossians 1:12–14 (ESV)

Paul taught us how genuine saving faith changes our problem with sin.

**He qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints.**

This is a term which originally came from the Old Testament. Only God’s people were allowed to possess the Promised Land. Everyone else was either driven out or destroyed. Through Jesus’ death on the cross, Gentiles are now
qualified to be God’s chosen people. We will share in the inheritance of the saints which is not just being with Jesus the moment we die but it ultimately is the new heaven and earth for all of eternity. The point is we are completely unqualified for God’s inheritance. We are not saints. We are sinners. Jesus qualified us because there was no way we could qualify ourselves. We are now saints in God’s eyes because Jesus is now our identity.

Jesus delivered us from the power of sin in our lives.

The word deliver is a word used in the Greek to describe a king coming to a land and picking up an entire people group and moving them to a new place. This is what God did for us through Jesus. He took us from the domain of darkness, where we have no choice but to sin because we were controlled by the power of sin, and he transferred us to the kingdom of his own son, where we no longer have to sin. Our love for Jesus controls us. If you are a Christian, none of us have to sin. We may struggle with wanting to sin and giving in to sin but we don’t have to sin. The power of sin is broken in our lives. We can live holy lives. Our identity is as a saint, not a sinner because our identity is now in Christ.

We have redemption, the forgiveness of our sin.

Jesus has paid for all of our sin so when God looks at us he doesn’t see the filth of our lives, he only sees the purity of his own son. My friends, even after someone has forgiven us, they have a hard time not seeing what we did in our past. Not so with God. Our sin is forgiven! God the Father sees the purity of his son when he looks at us, not the filth of our pasts.

Conclusion

My friends, do you see why Jesus is more than enough? Do you see why moving beyond Jesus is a twisted demonic doctrine?

It isn’t just the Colossians who lost sight of the greatness of Jesus and all God has done for us through him, it is us.

Many of us subtly think spiritual maturity is moving beyond Jesus because saving faith in Jesus is just the beginning of the Christian life, when in reality it is all of the Christian life.

This week, we have a challenge, to speak the truth about Jesus in our own words at least one time this week. We are going to trust God to quicken those ordinary words in the hearts of our friends and neighbors and give them new life, just like God has given to us.
October 22, 2017

Welcome to CrossWinds. Today we talking about the most important person in the history of the world. His name is Jesus Christ. You may have heard of him. Jesus comes from the Hebrew Joshua which means “God saves.” Christ comes from the Hebrew into Greek and means God’s anointed one or chosen one. Jesus’ last name is not Christ. Technically it is Jesus, who is the Christ.

Jesus lived about 2,000 years ago. He spent the first 30 years of his life as a blue collar carpenter working for his father. He never traveled far from home. Contrary to some messed up books, he didn’t marry and father children that now live in Europe. He didn’t make a lot of money or write a book, but he is, without doubt, the most significant person in the history of the world.

We divide our calendar into B.C. and A.D. based on his birth. Our major holidays are Christmas and Easter, which are based on key events in his life. More books are written about him, more paintings are painted for him, more songs are sung to him and more songs are written about him that anyone else in the history of the world. He is the most important person in the history of the world.

That means the most important question that everyone needs to answer this morning is the same question Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say I am?”

Today, there is no shortage of answers.

Jehovah’s Witnesses say Jesus is the first created being. He is the archangel Michael. Mormons say he is the polygamist half brother of Lucifer. We can become like him and be gods, get our own planets, and keep our wives eternally pregnant with spirit babies (I am not sure why that is heaven for her) if we can be like him. Christian Scientists — which is a contradiction in terms because they are neither Christians nor scientists — tell you Jesus is not God. Muslims tell us Jesus was just a prophet but an inferior prophet to their prophet Mohammed. Hindus say Jesus was one of many enlightened holy men.

No matter what other people say about Jesus, the big question is what we say about Jesus. “Who do you say I am?” This morning, we are going to answer that question by turning to the Bible and getting a little help from the apostle Paul.

As a church, we are studying our way through the book of Colossians. In the last two weeks, we covered the background of the book. In the introduction of the book, we learned the signs of genuine saving faith in Jesus. We also learned what Jesus did for us. Paul told us Jesus qualified us for the inheritance of the saints, which is heaven and the new creation. We saw that Jesus transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his son. Instead of being controlled by sin, Jesus freed us from the power of sin. Jesus also forgave all our
sin so before God we are completely pure and clean, no matter what we have done. As we continue our study, Paul now shows us Jesus’ resume. He tells us the true identity of the Jesus that saves us. He gives us the correct answer to the question, “Who do you say I am?”

Paul will answer that question under three headings.

1. Jesus is No. 1 is this creation. 2. Jesus is No. 1 in the new creation. 3. Jesus and me

**Jesus is No. 1 in this creation.**

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:15–17 (ESV)

**Jesus is the image of the invisible God.**

The Bible tells us God is invisible. Nobody has seen God or can see God. Jesus is the image of God. Jesus makes the invisible God visible. The word image in Greek is the word icon. It means a picture representing reality so we can see it. When we look in the mirror in the morning, we see an accurate icon of ourselves. We may not like what we see, but the mirror flawlessly represents us as we truly are. Jesus is the perfect image of God the Father so we can see him as he is.

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? John 14:9 (ESV)

I and the Father are one. John 10:30 (ESV)

Paul’s point was not that Jesus is just a picture of the father, Jesus and God the Father are two different people but they are so closely connected that to see Jesus is to see God. They walk in lockstep with one another. There is no gap between them. Everything we couldn’t see about God the Father is now made visible by Jesus.

The word image carries the idea of seeing God much deeper than visual sight. It carries with it the idea of character. Jesus’ character also flawlessly reveals God’s character, a perfect copy of God’s true character.

(Jesus) He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature… Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

If we want to see how God the Father would act, look at Jesus. If we want to see how God the Father feels about something, look at Jesus.

Jesus being the image of God doesn’t just tell us about Jesus. It tells us about ourselves. In Genesis 1:26-27, we see that man was created in the image of God. That means we were also designed to reflect an image of God with our intellect, emotions and desires. The problem is the image of God in us was bent
because of sin. We are still in the image of God in some ways but not in all ways. Now, instead of reflecting God’s character, we lie, cheat, steal and cuss as part of our innate character.

Jesus is a man in God’s image but Jesus is without sin. Do you want to know what we were supposed to be like before sin twisted the image of God inside of us? Look at Jesus. Jesus is what we were originally created to be. That is why Jesus is called the second Adam. Jesus is the perfect realization of humanity without sin.

In Jesus, not only do we see who we are supposed to be, but God in his grace is restoring us to our original sin-free image of God. He is doing this through Jesus.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29 (ESV)

So Jesus is the image of God, which means he is the way to see God in the flesh because God the Father and God the Son are in such lockstep that to see one is to see the other. Jesus doesn’t just allow us to see God visually, but he allows us to see God’s character and choices. Jesus also shows us what we were supposed to be like without sin. As we trust in him, we will become more like him.

**Jesus is the firstborn of all creation.**

When we read this, it sounds like Jesus is the first created being in the universe because our firstborn child is our first created child. The Jehovah’s Witnesses love to use this verse to try and prove Jesus is not God, but he is the first created being, possibly the archangel Michael. In a moment, we will see that calling Jesus the first created being in the universe is impossible because Paul said Jesus existed before anything was created. What was Paul talking about when he called Jesus the firstborn of all creation?

We need to understand that the biblical term, *firstborn* does not necessarily mean the one first born. Firstborn can also be used to describe the position of highest rank and honor. For instance, the firstborn son in the Old Testament times had the position of highest rank and honor in the family. He was given double the inheritance and the position of leadership in the family line. But if that firstborn son dishonored his father, the son could lose the title of firstborn in the family and it was given to one of his younger brothers.

The title firstborn may mean someone is born first but it doesn’t always mean someone is born first. Often it is used to describe someone who holds the position of highest rank and honor. To show you what I mean, let me show you how the title firstborn is used in the Psalms, speaking prophetically about Jesus.

And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Psalm 89:27 (ESV)
Jesus was not the first king to be born. His is the highest and greatest king to have been born. When Paul said Jesus is the firstborn, Paul was saying Jesus is the one who holds the position of the highest rank and honor in all of creation. How did Paul support this claim? That is what Paul gave us in the rest of the verse.

1. **By him all things were created in heaven and on earth**. In Genesis, we read of God the Father speaking and things coming into existence. Let there be light and there was light. John 1 describes Jesus as the Word of God which created the universe. God the Father spoke things into existence. Jesus made what his father spoke into creation. Hebrews 1 also tells us Jesus is the one who created the universe. Everything that God the Father spoke into existence was carried out by Jesus, who is so closely connected to his father that he is described as his father’s powerful word. All 800,000 insects on our planet were made by Jesus. One day I want to ask him why he had to listen to his father and create the mosquito. Every tree, every animal, every fish, every bird, every grain in the field was made by Jesus. Every cell in our bodies was designed by Jesus. DNA was created by Jesus. Not just everything on this planet was made by Jesus, but the universe around our planet was made by Jesus. For instance, the sun was made by Jesus. The sun is 864,000 miles across, which is 100 times larger than the Earth. The sun is so large, 1.3 million Earths fit inside of it. Jesus made the Earth and the sun. Every planet orbiting around our sun was made by Jesus. Every star in the sky was made by Jesus. Stars look small but they are actually large big. The star Betelgeuse has a diameter of 100 million miles. That is larger than the size of the earth’s orbit around the sun. That is just one star. Jesus made it. The size of the universe where the other stars reside is staggering. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second — which is faster than my wife drives. It takes light from our sun eight minutes and 20 seconds to reach the earth. That same light takes four years to reach the nearest star known as Alpha Centauri, which is a mere 24 trillion miles from earth. Jesus made the light, and he made Alpha Centauri, our nearest star. Our galaxy, known as the Milky Way had hundreds of billions of stars just like Alpha Centauri, and Jesus made every one. Scientists now say there are billions of other galaxies beside the Milky Way and each galaxy has billions of stars; all of this was made by Jesus. Scientists says the number of stars in the sky is the equivalent to the number of grains of sand on planet earth. According to the Bible, Jesus made all of this.

...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. Hebrews 1:2 (NIV)

2. **Jesus created the visible and invisible world**. We are only slightly in tune with the grandeur of our visible world using telescopes. There is another vast world only visible to us with microscopes. There is great complexity on the cellular level, on the DNA level, on the molecular level and the subatomic level. Scientists say the intricacies of the subatomic world, which are visible only by powerful microscopes, rivals the grandeur of what we see with
telescopes in the skies. All of this was intricately created by Jesus when his father willed it to happen. In addition to this visible world we can study with powerful optics, there is another invisible world of angels and demons, which are interacting with our physical universe on a daily basis. A few years ago, when we studied the book of Daniel, we learned the Bible hints that the invisible created angelic world that we can’t see is vaster and more complex than the visible world which we can see. All of the visible and invisible world was made by Jesus. Jesus is not a powerful angel. Jesus made the angels. That is clearly stated in Hebrews 1. Paul said Jesus is over all thrones, rulers, dominions and authorities. What are these titles? The best way to understand them is to look at Jewish literature at the time of Christ. The Jews believed that just as the visible world is ordered by ranks and leaders, like we have mayors, governors and presidents, the invisible angelic world is also ordered. There are higher ranking angels with more power and authority than others, no different than what we have in our country today. The dominions and authority angels were considered to be the highest and most powerful angelic being in the universe. Guess who is above them and who created them. Jesus!

3. **All things were not just created by Jesus but they will end with Jesus.**

   Just as everything began with Jesus, all things will end with Jesus. Jesus created everything. Everything will come back to Jesus and be wrapped up in Jesus because all things were created by him and for him. This is why, in Revelation, Jesus says, “I am the alpha and the omega.” I am both the beginning and the end. Right now we don't see everything created by Jesus submitting to him as the rightful creator and ruler. Right now most things are in rebellion against Jesus, but it will not always be that way. One day Jesus will assert his authority as the creator of the universe and everything and everyone will bow before him.

   …so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10–11 (ESV)

   For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36 (ESV)

   Everyone and everything will bow the knee to Jesus either willingly and joyfully or unwillingly and in torment while in the lake of fire. Everyone and everything will bow to Jesus because Jesus created everything.

   Remember who Paul was speaking about. He was talking about Jesus — the man that was just executed 30 years before on a Roman cross and who rose from the dead, then appeared to him on the road to Damascus. The idea of Jesus as God was not dreamed up hundreds of years later. It was in existence at the beginning of our faith.

   The people of the city of Colossae were saying, “Jesus isn’t a big deal. We have options. You have your God. We have our god.” The only reason the
people our Colossae could see Jesus as just another god is because they didn’t understand what Paul told us about him. To take any other course in our lives other than living to please Jesus is completely irrational.

4. **Jesus is before all things and in him all things hold together.** I told you earlier about the Jehovah’s Witnesses who say Jesus is the first created being. The way to defeat these heresies is simply to read things in context. Here we see Jesus existed before all things. He cannot be the first created being. He existed before any created being. Jesus is also the one who holds this universe together for every moment of its existence. Jesus is the one who is involved in this world, keeping it from spinning out of control. Years ago there was a belief popular at the time our country was founded called deism. It is the belief that God built this world, set it in motion and he spun it like a top, then he walked away to watch and see what would happen. Like a top eventually spins completely out of control, deists thought life on this planet was spinning out of control, and God was sitting back to see what would happen. These verses says that is not true. This world isn’t spinning out of control. Jesus is the one who holds this world together every day so it doesn’t spin completely out of control. For example, today, everyone is nervous because of the tension between President Trump and Kim Jung-Un. Are they in charge of this planet’s future? According to the Bible, they think they are in control of their hearts but actually Jesus is in control of their hearts.

The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)

Do you know why we just took another breath? It was a gift from Jesus. Do you know you didn’t die of a heart attack last night? It was a gift from Jesus. Do you know why you survived that close call in traffic and avoided a head-on collision? Jesus. This means when things are falling apart in life, we go to the one who holds things together and plead for his grace and mercy to help in our times of need. When our health is falling apart, we go to Jesus and plead for mercy. When our marriages are falling apart, we go to Jesus and plead for mercy. When our lives are falling apart, we go to him and plead for grace and mercy. He specializes in holding things together.

The problem in Colossae was people began with Jesus but with the pressure of the culture around them, they left Jesus in the dust. They became Christians who lost sight of Christ. They thought Jesus wasn’t that big of a deal, when in reality, just like us, they need him every day.

The same problem happened for us this morning. It is so easy for us to become Christians who have moved on from Christ that we forget what we have in him. For example, sometimes you are depressed because you didn’t get a varsity spot in your favorite sport. I understand why that hurts. Keep things in perspective. We have Jesus. He loves us. He died for us. He chose us to save us. So often you are crying over the penny you lost in the Wal-Mart parking lot when you are holding the winning $100 million dollar lottery ticket in your hand given to you by God. When we lose some things on earth, remember we have
the best of all things in the universe. We have the one who created all things in the universe who loves us. He died for us. He completely saves us from our sin. He calls us the most blessed being in the universe. That is what we have in Jesus.

**Jesus is No. 1 in the new creation.**

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:18–20 (ESV)

This is interesting. Paul went from talking about Jesus as head of the entire universe to the head of the church. Most of us don't think of the church as a big deal. Church is an optional activity for the weekend if we have time. Jesus thinks of the church as a big deal because he died to create it. He is the head of it. When it says Jesus is head of the church, it is not like Jesus is the CEO of the corporation called Church. The term head in this context implies a living organism that is inseparably connected together. Just as our head controls every part of our body and is inseparably connected to it, Jesus controls his church and is inseparably connected to it. He gives life to the members of his church. He is inseparably connected to us. Just as my left and right hand work together because they are both controlled by my head, so people in the church work together in a complementary, not contradictory way, because they are controlled and directed by Jesus who is our head. Just as I can run only by putting a left and right foot together as they are directed by my head, so Jesus needs to guide the members of his church so we work together in unity. This is why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are all connected to Christ. When there is disunity in the church, it is because some have lost connection to Christ, the head. Jesus, our head, creates unity in our diversity.

Just as Jesus is the source and the rightful head of this old creation. Jesus is also the source and the rightful head of the new creation. Today the new creation order is breaking into this world. We see this new creation order in the church.

The death and resurrection of Jesus created a new Genesis moment where a new creation order began unfolding where Satan and sin no longer reign because Jesus defeated them on the cross. Just as Jesus is the head of this current creation because he made it, Jesus is also the head of the new resurrection creation order because he created it through his resurrection from the dead.

That is why Paul said Jesus is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. He holds the title of firstborn in the old creation order because he made it. He also holds the title of firstborn in the new resurrection creation order because he created it.
Paul said that in everything, Christ is preeminent. That means that in everything, Christ has first place. Nothing comes before Jesus or is higher than Jesus. Jesus is first place in our current fallen creation since he made it, sustains it and ultimately will wrap it all up. Jesus is first place in the new creation as the first to rise from the dead.

The only proper way to respond to Jesus is to place him first in our lives because he is first in everything else in this world. We must make him first in our families, in our marriages, in our jobs, in our thought lives, in the way we spend our time, in our eating habits, in our sports, in our television, in our music, in what we watch on the Internet. Since Jesus is first place in the old creation and the new creation, we must respond by giving him first place in our hearts and lives. That is the only reasonable response to Jesus.

Paul also said that in Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. This is super important to understand. Jesus is not 50 percent man and 50 percent God. Jesus is 100 percent man and 100 percent God. The only time God the son doesn’t do something or know something that God the father knows or does is because Jesus has chosen to voluntarily limit the free exercise of his full rights as God.

The good news of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the new creation order — which is from the power of Satan, sin and death — doesn’t just apply to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It doesn’t just apply to our resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of Christ from the dead will ultimately have cosmic implications which will free the entire universe from its bondage to sin and death.

Let me explain. Sin doesn’t just affect us; it infects the fabric of the universe.

…that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Romans 8:21 (ESV)

The reason we have natural disasters and rampant death in this creation is because of sin. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was the beginning of a new creation order where sin and death do not reign, not just in our lives but in this universe. One day Jesus will extend the power of his resurrection from the dead to the ultimate re-creation of the entire universe to be free from sin.

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

The new heavens and new earth is this heaven and earth completely restored free from sin and vastly improved, just as Jesus’ body was restored free from sin and vastly improved.

Now let me clarify something. Some people have misunderstood this to mean everyone will go to heaven or that Satan and his demons will be restored to God. That isn’t true. This is what the Bible says about Satan and those who die apart from Christ.
...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10 (ESV)

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

Their state is everlasting torment. The Bible is clear that not everything and everyone will be reconciled and restored to God.

Paul’s point was that everything which is possible to be reconciled to God will be reconciled to God. That includes Christians, this earth and this universe. Jesus is first in the new creation order and the only way to the new creation order for eternity. Since Jesus is the source of the new creation, first in the new creation and the only way to the new creation, the question becomes, what have you done with Jesus? Who is Jesus in your life?

**Jesus and Me**

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him…, Colossians 1:21–22 (ESV)

Paul told us who we once were, who we now are and who through Jesus we will be on the most important day of our lives.

Paul said we were once alienated. The word alienated in the Greek is a particularly strong word. It means a permanent consistent condition of being cut off. We were completely separate from God. We expressed our separation from God with hostile minds. Our attitudes and thinking were against Christ and God’s plan for us. It was not just our minds that hated God and rebelled against him but the hallmark of our lives was evil deeds. We did evil all the time. That may sound harsh, but it is true. The Bible tells us in John 3:19 that our problem is not ignorance of God but that we are in rebellion against God. Men love darkness and not light.

While we were hopeless, God took the initiative to save us through Jesus. He reconciled us. Bringing us back to God was Jesus’ initiative, his idea, his plan. Our being brought back to God is a gift from God, not a great achievement of ourselves.

Notice what Paul said is Jesus’ goal: It is to present us holy, blameless and above reproach before him. One day, everyone will stand before Jesus. You will stand before Jesus and give an account of your life. Jesus will have a perfect record of every sinful word, action and lustful thought. We will be judged by Jesus. Look inside your heart. Each one of us knows this is true.

The difference is for those who have trusted in Christ, our sin is paid for by Jesus. On the day we stand before Jesus to be judged. Instead of a bucket of sin, we are seen as holy and pure because Jesus took all our sin. Instead of worthy of blame, we are seen as innocent, completely blameless. We are seen as above reproach.
Satan, our great accuser, will need to stand there, and when he looks at our lives, he will say nothing. His mouth will be shut because no matter what we have done, when we stand before Jesus on the day of judgment we will be completely blameless through Jesus’ death for our sin having been applied to our sin so we are completely pure and clean.

My first question is, since we will all stand before Jesus on that day of judgment, have you trusted in what Jesus did on the cross to reconcile you to God or will you stand there on your own merit? Have you become part of the new Jesus order through the resurrection of Jesus? If you haven’t trusted in Jesus, today, I beg you to run from your sin and run to the arms of Jesus and be forgiven. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. That literally means that trusting in Christ makes you part of his new creation order. The only way to be part of the new creation order that is free from the power of sin is Jesus.

What about the rest of us who already know Jesus, like the Christians in Colossae?

...if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Colossians 1:23 (ESV)

We will stand before God on the day of judgment with confidence because of Jesus, as long as we stay stable and steadfast in him. All of our hope for the day of judgment rests in Jesus. Whatever happens in life, don’t let anything shift you away from him. The word shift literally means pressure trying to push or pull something away from the base where it should stay.

In Luke 8, Jesus told the parable of the sower. The sower sowed seed and the seed in the parable represents the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God. In the parable, some seed fell on the thorns. It grew up but was choked out. This represented those who let the cares, riches and pleasures of life choke out their spiritual lives. The business of life and the good things in life shifted them away from Jesus.

My friends, life is busy. Life is hard. There are lots of distractions. But the only thing that matters is that Jesus is first place in this world. Jesus is first place in the new creation. Jesus must stay in first place in our lives. We can’t let anything put Jesus out of the place he deserves in our lives. He is the only way we can stand before God with confidence on the day of judgment.
October 29, 2017

Welcome to CrossWinds. If you are new, it is great to have you. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. As a church, we are studying through the book of Colossians.

Last week we covered the most famous verses in the first chapter. In these verses, Paul pulled back the curtain to reveal Jesus’ true identity. We learned Jesus is the very image of God. While Jesus and God the Father are separate, they are in such lockstep with one another that to see Jesus is to see God. Jesus represents his father so flawlessly that looking at Jesus is to see the image of God like he was looking in a mirror. Jesus reflects an image of God as perfectly as the image you see in the bathroom mirror every morning that represents you. That is why the Bible says to see Jesus is to see God the Father.

We also learned Jesus existed before anything was created. Jesus created everything. While it was God the Father’s will to create everything in Genesis, in John 1 and Hebrews 1, we learn it was Jesus who carried out his father’s creative decrees. Jesus made everything on this planet, every insect and every animal. News flash: Nothing evolved. Jesus created everything.

Jesus also made the rest of the universe. He made every star in the sky. Every star was created by Jesus and placed in the sky by Jesus. That is a lot of work. There are more stars in the sky than grains of sand on our planet.

Jesus didn’t just make every visible thing but he also made every invisible thing. Every angelic being in the universe was made by Jesus. You can’t go higher than Jesus in this creation because Jesus made all of creation.

In addition, just as it was God the Father’s idea to create this world but Jesus carried out the creation of the world, it was God the Father’s idea to redeem the world from sin. Yet, Jesus is the one who carried it out by taking on a human body forever, dying on a cross for our sin and then rising from the grave.

Jesus’ death and resurrection doesn’t just forgive our sin and bring our spirits to God when we die, but one day we will get a resurrection body like Jesus’ body. One day the power of Jesus’ resurrection will not just restore our bodies from the grave but it will remake the earth and the entire universe to be free from sin. Jesus is No. 1. Jesus is No. 1 in creation because he existed before creation and he made creation. Jesus is No. 1 when it comes to restoring us to God, because the power of Jesus’ resurrection is the only way for us to be restored to God, and Jesus’ resurrection will ultimately restore the universe to be free from sin. This means Jesus is not a second-class deity or a good teacher or prophet.
Why does the good news of Jesus always appear to be losing ground?

We will spend a little extra time on this point because it is so important. The gospel of Jesus often appears to be weak. In fact, it often looks like it is losing ground. There are plenty of statistics describing the growth of Islam and the decline of the American church. It also appears that messengers of the gospel, like the apostle Paul, pastors, missionaries, plus you and me end up losing ground or suffering when we talk about Jesus. If the good news of Jesus is so powerful that it changes lives, why doesn’t it appear to make better progress?

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known... Colossians 1:24–25 (ESV)

The Colossians, who heard about the apostle Paul, had a question. Why was Paul in jail? They thought Jesus was in charge. It appears the Jews and Romans were more powerful than Jesus or Paul wouldn’t be in jail.

Paul then made a very important point.

God spreads the gospel through the suffering of the servants of the gospel. God has chosen for the good news of Christ to spread through the suffering of those who preach Christ, not their victory. When Christians suffer, especially for talking about Jesus, that is normal. It is to be expected. Leaders in the ancient church suffered when they talked about Jesus. Leaders in the modern church should expect to suffer when they talk about Jesus. Let's look at how Paul explained this.

Paul said he rejoiced in his suffering for their sake because he was filling up what was lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the church. What does that mean? Some people think it means Jesus’ death on the cross was not sufficient to pay for our sin. Jesus didn’t pay 90 percent, then Paul was filling up with his own sufferings for the remaining 10 percent of suffering that is needed to know God. Just so you know, that cannot be true. Paul just said in Colossians 1:21-22 that God reconciled us to himself by the death of Jesus. Jesus paid for all of our sin to present us holy and blameless before God.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him... Colossians 1:21–22 (ESV)

What was Paul talking about when he said he was filling up what was lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his church? Just as Jesus suffered to defeat sin and create the gospel message, his servants will suffer to defeat sin by the spreading of the gospel message. Just as suffering was part of Jesus redeeming the world from sin, suffering is part of the spread of the gospel in the world. As Christians, especially when we are talking to other people about Jesus, we should expect to suffer. That is part of the way the church grows.
Let me show you a few more insights on this. As many of you know, Paul grew up as a Jew hating Christians. Then named Saul, he went out of his way to round them up and persecute Christians. In Acts 9, Jesus had a little appointment with Saul on the Damascus Road. The resurrected Jesus showed up and knocked Saul to his butt and said:

And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Acts 9:4–5 (ESV)

Saul was persecuting Christians, not Jesus. Why did Jesus take Saul’s persecution so personally? Jesus so closely identifies with us that when the people of Christ are persecuted, Christ is persecuted. When Christians in the church are suffering, Christ is suffering. These sufferings of Christ are not suffering for salvation but if refers to the total amount of suffering Christ will experience through the lives of Christians in his church as they share about Jesus and spread the good news.

This is what Paul meant when he said he was filling up what was lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his body, the church. Suffering for Jesus because we are talking about Jesus is what we call growing pains in the church.

The other thing to see is a little later in Acts 9 Jesus said this to Ananias, about the apostle Paul.

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” Acts 9:15–16 (ESV)

As God’s chosen servant to spread the gospel, in a big way, Paul needed to know he would suffer in a big way. We know Paul was shipwrecked, beaten with rods, five times given 40 lashed to bring him within an inch of death, stoned and left to dead. There is a long list in 2 Corinthians 11.

So the Bible tells us if you are going to do a lot of spreading of the gospel, expect to do a lot of suffering for the gospel. That is called Christian growing pains.

It has always worked this way.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Acts 5:41 (ESV)

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake… Philippians 1:29 (ESV)

The suffering we face as we share about Jesus won’t just be direct physical persecution. It may be physical sickness. It may be family breakdown. It may be a financial meltdown. Paul had a thorn in his flesh. Sometimes the suffering we face for sharing about Jesus may be indirect, instead of direct.

While we are on the topic of suffering, since it is an important topic in each of our lives, let’s take a minute to talk about how it is misunderstood. One of the
things that gets me extremely frustrated is something called the prosperity gospel and prosperity preachers. They tell you that if you have faith and love the Lord, you’re going to have lots of money, health and everything is going to go well for you. If you are sick, it must be because you are outside of God’s will. You just need to have enough faith for God to cure you. If you are not cured, it is because you didn’t have enough faith. It is your fault if you die of cancer.

That is such a terrible trick to play on people. If someone is sick, you turn to God and plead for his mercy, but he may not heal you. God has reasons why he lets us suffer, even if we can’t understand them. Sometimes he lets us suffer to grow us in Christ. Sometimes we suffer to get us places we normally wouldn’t be without our suffering. Paul shared the gospel in Rome because he was brought there in chains. The whole palace guard in Rome heard about Jesus because Paul ended up in Rome in chains. You see, God had a good plan for Paul’s suffering.

Our suffering may even end in death if God has decided that our time on the chessboard of life is up. Remember that for Christians, death is the better end, not the bitter end. It is hard for those left behind but for those who die, they pass into the arms of Jesus which Paul says is better by far.

Sometimes when people suffer, they think God is discipling them. They start to go through their lives to try to find anything God may be discipling them over. It is true that God sometimes uses suffering to break us from sin, but many times the suffering we face is not for our discipline, it is for our good. One of the most terrifying things out there is what is called the passive wrath of God. God’s passive wrath means he will leave you healthy and content with everything going perfectly in your life all the way up to judgment. That is God’s passive wrath. When everything goes well, we don’t turn to Christ. We don’t grow in Christ. We may even fall away from Christ. God, in his grace, will allow suffering into our lives to tear out of our hand the myth that we are in control and we can handle life on our own. Suffering teaches us to depend on Jesus. Suffering is sometimes the most merciful thing God can do. Suffering teaches us to seek God’s mercy and depend on him every day.

Don’t be discouraged. As a Christian, expect suffering. The more we tell people about Jesus, the more suffering we will face, but that is the way the church grows.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted… 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

Why is this gospel a new thing not an ancient thing?

…the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:26–27 (ESV)

Paul called the good news of Jesus a mystery.
What is this mystery? When we see the word mystery, it bring to mind the program, *Unsolved Mysteries*. That is not what mystery means in the Bible. A mystery is something that was always part of God’s plan in the Old Testament but it was hidden from people. No one could figure it out until God revealed it. In the New Testament, God revealed many of his Old Testament mysteries. That is why it is called a mystery. A biblical mystery is something nobody can figure out unless God tells them.

A great example of a mystery of God hidden in the Old Testament but also revealed in the Old Testament is seen in Daniel 2. In this chapter, Daniel was in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a massive statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, middle and thighs of bronze and feet iron mixed with clay. In the dream, a stone not cut out by human hands that struck the base of the statue, destroyed it then expanded to fill the earth. Nebuchadnezzar demanded his wise men interpret the dream but he refused to tell them the dream. Things were not going well because God was the only one who knew the dream.

Finally, Daniel heard of the situation and sought God in prayer asking that God would tell him the dream and the interpretation of the dream. God did. Look at what language was used.

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel 2:19 (ESV)

God revealed this mystery to Daniel in a dream. A mystery is something only God knows and no man can figure it out on his own.

This is why Paul said Jesus was the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. Just as nobody could figure out Nebuchadnezzar’s dream unless God intervened, in the same way, nobody can figure out the significance of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done unless God intervenes to tell us, like he did for Paul. Just as Daniel was chosen by God to know the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Paul and the apostles were chosen by God to know the mystery of Jesus’ life and death and to share that mystery with the ancient world. That is because nobody can figure a mystery out on his or her own.

Today, we are chosen by God to share the mystery of Jesus with the world. Nobody will figure out the significance of Jesus unless we speak, just as nobody would understand the mystery of Jesus unless Paul spoke and Daniel spoke.

Nobody will know about him and become a Christian unless we tell them. Next Paul is going to talk about the contents of this mystery.

**Jesus is not just for the Jews but the Gentiles.**

Today, we have racial tensions. Black football players won’t stand for the anthem as a way of protesting white cops. We have the KKK and the neo-Nazis hating the blacks. We have Black Lives Matter groups hating the whites. If we
think black and white tensions are tough, the tensions between the Jews and the
Gentiles were much worse in the ancient world. There was deep hatred between
them. In 70 A.D. the Romans became so frustrated with the Jews they ransacked
Jerusalem and killed 1.1 million Jews in the city, most of them unarmed ordinary
citizens like you and me. The blood ran in the streets like a river. Why did they do
this? They hated the Jews.

Here is what makes this story such an amazing mystery. God’s plan was
not just for Jesus to die to be the savior of the Jewish people but to be the savior
of all people. This was not something that was obvious in the Old Testament.
This was a mystery revealed by God. Nobody will know this unless we tell them.

The other part of the mystery is that Jesus didn’t just die to save Jews and
Gentiles but Jesus died to live in us and be with us. Nobody could guess this.
The one who made the world, the one who holds the world together every day,
the one who will redeem the entire world’s desires to live inside of us, irrespective
of our ethnic or racial background. Think about this. The one who created and
sustains the universe is inside of you when you trust in Jesus. He changes your
thinking. He changes your desires. He changes the way you parent. He gives
you patience when you are tired and life feels overwhelming. He gives you peace
when life is filled with anxiety. The spirit of Jesus Christ is alive in you! This is a
mystery. Nobody could figure out that God wants to come live in us on our own.
God needed to tell us. We need to tell other people.

**How should we treat the gospel message?**

As a servant of God entrusted with this mystery, he tells us how we treat
this mystery. This is the way Paul lived and it is a challenge to us who are now
servants with the same message.

…**Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom,**
that we may present everyone mature in Christ. **For this I toil, struggling with all
his energy that he powerfully works within me. Colossians 1:28–29 (ESV)**

**We are to proclaim him.**

The word proclaim means to publicly declare a completed event. This is
what Paul did with Jesus. He publicly told people about Jesus. Remember that
Jesus is a mystery of God. You can’t figure it out any other way than somebody
telling you. This is what we are to do not just in the church but in the community,
tell people about Jesus.

**We are to warn everyone.**

This is not popular today but it is necessary today. We need to warn
people about the consequences of facing the day of judgment without Jesus.
This is not because we hate them but because we love them. The Bible has a lot
of warnings.
We teach everyone to mature them in Christ.

This is opening the Bible and helping people learn about Christ and what God has done for us through him. Paul said he works hard to teach people about Jesus so they don’t stay continual baby Christians.

Paul’s goal is to present everyone mature in Christ. That is our goal. Like Paul, we are stewards of the good news of Jesus.

We are to work hard at telling others about Jesus.

How much energy did Paul put into teaching, warning and telling people about Jesus? He didn’t work casually. He worked really hard. He literally said he worked to the point of weariness and exhaustion. The word strives means he struggled like an athlete. It is used to describe the kind of struggles that takes place in winning an athletic competition. You give it your best. Paul said that is the kind of effort he put into sharing Jesus.

So we are servants of God, like Paul, and we are entrusted with the most powerful force on the planet. The good news of Jesus is not just for Jews. It is for all people. It is that the God of the universe wants to come and live in you and make you into a completely new person that is like Jesus. Since we are entrusted with this message, we do our best to tell it to people publicly and privately. We warn people, and we teach people with the goal of presenting them mature in Christ. The more mature anyone is in Jesus, the happier they will be. So we work really hard knowing we will one day answer to God for how we have done with the mystery he has entrusted into our hands.

What are the results of maturing in Christ?

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:1–5 (ESV)

Then Paul moved from the general truths he taught us about what it means to be a servant of God entrusted with the mystery of Christ and he applied them to the Colossians as he told them what would happen in their lives as they matured in Christ. These are the same things that will happen in our lives when we mature in Jesus too.

Our hearts will be encouraged by Christ.

Has anybody found life to be hard? Life is hard because we lose those we love. Life is hard because work is long and the money often doesn’t seem to be enough. Life is hard when it comes to raising children. They say everyone needs a little encouragement. The most encouraging thing any one of us can
experience is to mature in Christ. Having Christ living inside of us transforms our character to be more like Jesus so when we get depressed, we can call out to God in prayer and the Holy Spirit gives us peace that surpasses understanding.

I love you. I know many of you face hard circumstances. I want to encourage you. The best encouragement I can give you is to grow in knowing Jesus better by reading his word, prayer and through the church. You will find Christ encouraging you through the tough times in life. They will not overwhelm you but Christ will carry you through as you understand more about how much he loves you and you have peace in your heart from his presence in your life.

**We will be knit together in love.**

Everybody needs somebody that loves them. They say we are the most connected generation with technology but we are the most disconnected in genuine relationships. Everybody desperately wants a family. They want a group of people that genuinely care about them.

I have good news for you. There is a family that really cares about you. It is your church family. Is the church family perfect? Of course not. Does the family occasionally mess up and prove unloving? Yes. Those offenses are rarely intended. When Christ lives in us and starts to remake us, the spirit of Christ in us knits us together as Christians into a family. The best day of the week becomes Sunday because you love hanging out with other Christians. This incredible sense of family across age lines, racial lines, gender lines all because of Jesus is a result of Christ in us and maturing in Christ. This is why it is important to mature in Christ.

**We gain true riches.**

Some people are financially wealthy. Some people are wealthy with children. One of the greatest riches of all is a full understanding of God’s mystery in Jesus, who we are in Christ and what God has done for us in Christ. The more we understand how much God loves us and how nothing can take us out of God’s hands, the richer we are. God’s plan for us in the future is to bless us beyond our imagination. It is not because we deserve it but because we are to be a grand demonstration to the entire universe of what it looks like for God to give the greatest amount of mercy, kindness and blessing to the most undeserving and wretched beings in the universe. For all eternity, our purpose is to be a grand demonstration of God’s undeserved love. The more we grow in understanding who we are in Christ, the richer we become. Everyone else runs around in fear of eternity. We have no fear of eternity, because we have Christ who takes away our fear, because he takes away our sin.

**We are filled with wisdom and knowledge.**

This is a swipe at some of the false teachers in Colossae who said you needed special knowledge and insider passwords to know God. Paul said all of God’s secrets are no longer secret. They are all found in Christ. There is nothing else after Christ. There is another way we should understand this. Who in this
world wants to be wise? Who is this world wants to make good decisions? I don’t think any of us like to act like fools. One of the great benefits of knowing Christ and maturing in Christ is God helps us live wise lives. Christ helps us think clearly and see things wisely. The more we pursue knowing Jesus by reading God’s Word, by prayer and by corporate worship, the wiser we become as parents. We become wiser in raising our kids. We become wiser in how we spend our money. We become wiser in how we spend our time. We become wiser in trying to make wise decisions for our future. The best thing we can do to be wise in this life is pursue Jesus.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge… Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)

For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding… Proverbs 2:6 (ESV)

While growing in Christ is full of benefits, the danger is letting yourself be deceived away from Christ.

Watch out for persuasive sounding arguments that take you away from Jesus.

Remember that Jesus made the world. Jesus’ resurrection is the only way to eternal life. Our only hope for this life is Jesus. Whatever you do, don’t let anyone take you away from him no matter how smooth his or her speech sounds. Anything that takes you away from pursuing Jesus, his Word, prayer and growing in understanding of all that God has done for us is not good. How does this work? Satan loves to use persuasive speech to create doubts in our minds.

In the Garden of Eden, this is how Satan worked. Satan said to Eve, “Did God really say you can’t eat of the fruit from the tree in the center of the Garden?” He also said, “God is just holding you back because he knows that when you eat of the tree you will become like him knowing good and evil.” Satan used persuasive speech to create doubt in Eve’s mind about the truth of God’s word and the goodness of God’s intentions. Satan does the same thing today. We will constantly hear "You can’t trust the truth of the Bible and the full forgiveness you have through Jesus.”

Conclusion

This morning, we looked at how the amazing truth of Jesus spreads. It spreads by our words, because nobody can figure it out on his or her own. The truth of Jesus is a mystery of God that nobody can discover on his or her own. When we tell others about Jesus, expect we may suffer. God has always chosen to spread his Word through the suffering of his servants, rather than their power and victory.
Colossians 2:6-15 — Why is Jesus All I Need?

November 5, 2017

Good morning. Great to have you at CrossWinds. We are studying the book of Colossians on both of our campuses. This book is all about Jesus, why we desperately need him, and how amazing it is to have him. So this morning is more about Jesus, which is always a good thing.

One of the things my high school English teacher didn’t like was run-on sentences. She always corrected my sentences telling me to keep them short. Did anybody else write sentences that were too long in school? While our English sentences should be kept short, in Greek—which is the language the New Testament was written in—the best sentences were long and complex. Paul’s high school Greek teacher would have given him an A+ for Colossians because in Greek Colossians 1:3 to 2:5 is one huge sentence all designed to introduce us to Jesus. For the last three weeks we studied only one sentence!

In that sentence, Paul taught us what genuine saving faith in Jesus looks like. He also revealed the true identity of Jesus as the creator and savior of the world. Last week he taught us how God chose to spread the mystery of Christ to the world. It is through simply by people like you and me who can expect to suffer when we talk about Jesus because the world is opposed to Jesus.

This morning, as Paul continues talking about Jesus, he will answer another question about Jesus, “Why Jesus is all we need?” We don’t need Jesus plus designer jeans or Jesus plus a date to the senior prom. If we have Jesus, that is enough. Everything else in life is just extra gravy. In these verses, Paul develops his thoughts under the following headings. 1) The Christian life is about growing in Jesus. 2) Satan’s plans are to trick us away from Jesus 3) God’s plan is to fill me with Jesus. 4) What happens when we are filled by Jesus.

Let’s jump in.

1. The Christian life is all about Jesus.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6–7 (ESV)

You can tell Paul just finished his huge sentence about Jesus because he takes a break and says the word therefore. Since we have the creator and savior of the universe in our lives, therefore all of our life should orbit around Jesus. We should not just start with Jesus but we must focus on growing in Jesus.

That should seem rather self-evident but the truth is some Christians over time become what I call Christ-less Christians. They began with Jesus but over time the start to focus on everything else but Jesus. This sometimes happens when you get Christians mixed with a cause. For example, you have Christians for the rainforest. Over time they become people who want to save the rainforest.
who happen to be loosely associated with Christ. Eventually they are people that want to save the rainforest and they don’t care about Christ. I know my rainforest illustration is lighthearted but this happens all the time. A good illustration of this would be Harvard University and many other Ivy League schools in our country. They started out as Christian schools for higher learning but eventually drifted away from Christ to become only about higher learning. Paul is warning again that kind of life. Paul is clear that once we become a Christian, everything always and only goes back to Jesus.

He says, “as you received Christ.” In the Greek, this is a technical word. It means receiving a body of truth handed down to you, holding to and making sure it isn’t changed. You don’t play the game of telephone with this truth where we get to change it a little at a time to suit our liking. It is the idea that we are entrusted with the tradition about Jesus and we do our best to hold to that tradition and ensure it isn’t changed. It is our job to guard the tradition about Jesus and pass it on in tact. The Christian faith is not a matter of self-discovery or inventing new things. It is always a matter of holding to the old things.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 (ESV)

Ultimately the traditions of Jesus come to us as the New Testament. The New Testament was originally recognized in the early church so people knew what were the true traditions of Jesus, not the changed traditions of Jesus. The criteria for most the books of the New Testament were they are either written by an apostle or by someone closely connected to an apostle so we know we are holding to the truth of Jesus not something that came a few hundreds of years later written by a guy that was a fruit loop.

Not only do we hold the truth about Jesus but we are to walk in that truth. Whenever you see this idea of walking in the Bible, you need to realize it is a Hebrew idiom for how we live our day-to-day life. The Christian life is about holding to the truth of Jesus plus living our day-to-day life based on the truth about Jesus. In Colossians 3, Paul will spend most of the chapter explaining how the truth we learn about Jesus in Colossians 1 and 2 changes the way we live our every day life. Paul will explain how Jesus changes materialism, sexuality, marriage, anger, work, and parenting.

The Christian life is all about Jesus. It is about holding to the truth of Jesus and then letting that truth change the way we live every day.

Since our lives about to be about Jesus, we must become better rooted in Jesus. The picture is of a tree sinking its roots deep into the soil so it can grow stronger and stand the storms. Trees blow over if they have a shallow root system. Paul says if you don’t want to have a mid-life Christ crisis, develop a
good root system in Jesus. This means we take the basic truths of who Jesus is and what he has done for us and we anchor them deep into our lives. Many times this means we memorize something so we can bring it to mind. One of the best ways to root ourselves in the truth of Christ is to memorize some basic Bible verses about who Christ is and what he has done for us. Let me share three basic verses. If you don’t know these by heart. I encourage you to take the time to memorize them this week.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (ESV)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 (ESV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

Not only are we to anchor ourselves down into Jesus, but we are to build ourselves up in Jesus. The idea is we are not just to be content in knowing old things about Jesus but we are to constantly learn new things about Jesus. This means reading our Bible on our own. Keeping our finger in the text. It also means showing up at church on Sunday to learn more about Jesus in the preaching. It means getting involved in a CrossWinds University Class or a Life Group during the week. The reason we always want to learn more about Christ is because the Christian life is not just about beginning with Christ, it is about staying with Christ and rooting ourselves deeper in him over the long haul.

Paul says the goal is we would become established in the faith. The word established literally means settled, packed down and sunken in. It was used to describe materials, that pressed together so they fused together. One way to picture this is what I used to find at the bottom of the lake where I went to summer camp. There were boats and other buried treasure sunk in the mud but still visible to the eye. As a boy, we want to pull these treasure out of the mud to put them on shore. Do you think they ever came to the surface? Absolutely not, they were sunk in the earth, fused with the earth. Another way to think of this word is like you are trying to unscrew a rusted bolt from the rusted frame under your vehicle. The steel screw and the steel frame rust becoming established together over time so it is impossible to take them apart. This is what should happen to a Christian and Christ over time. We hold to him, walk in him, root in
him, grow in him so we become so fused with him then when we are cut, we bleed Jesus.

This sounds like work. What are the results of becoming established in Jesus over time?

A heart of thankfulness comes from anchoring to, growing in, and living for Jesus.

It is thankfulness. The way you recognize a healthy Christian that is growing in Jesus is they are filled with gratitude. If a person is consistently griping, whining, complaining, causing division, or grumbling; it may not be your problem. It may simply be they don’t have a healthy walk with Jesus. The byproduct or growing deeper with Jesus is always a heart that overflows with gratitude.

The more we understand all that God has done through Jesus by paying for our sin and making us into a completely new person; we can’t help but have an attitude of gratitude. A grateful attitude shows up in our marriage when instead of wanting a different spouse, we are grateful for our spouse. A grateful attitude shows up in our job when even though our job is not everything we want, we are grateful to have a way to serve others and to serve Jesus. A grateful attitude shows up in church during worship when we can’t keep our mouths closed when we are singing about Jesus because the gratefulness in our heart needs to find release through the words we sing with our mouth.

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Hebrews 13:15 (ESV)

Here is Paul’s simple point. The Christian life from beginning to end is all about Jesus. Every step we take in our Christian life is about going deeper with Jesus. True Christian growth is not about discovering the way the end times will unfold, it is about loving Jesus.

2. Satan’s plan is to take me away from Jesus.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:8 (ESV)

Since a healthy Christian life is all about Jesus, Paul warns us that Satan’s plan is to lead us away from Jesus. It is possible for Christians to be lead away from Christ as captives. The word captive literally means to be taken captive as a prisoner of war. How does this happen?

Philosophy can lead me away from Christ.

Philosophy in itself is not wrong. It simply means loving wise, or living wisely. Good philosophy in life is to eat healthy. It is to brush your teeth. It is to use soap in the shower. It is to use deodorant every morning. Those are good philosophies for life.
Philosophy is also covers the way we look at the world. The Greek philosophy in Colossae was that knowing God involved secret passwords and secret rituals. The Hebrew philosophy of their day was that pleasing God involved asceticism (harsh self denial of the body, like going without food for a week) and circumcision. These were all part of knowing God and pleasing God. Paul says none of this is true. We don't need to know secret passwords, to starve ourselves or to circumcise ourselves to know God. All we need is Jesus.

Today we don’t have those kinds of philosophies leading us away from Christ. What are the modern philosophies Satan is using to lead us away from Jesus today? Let me give you an example. Have you seen this bumper sticker? Today tolerance is the philosophy of the day. There is a lot of cultural pressure that everyone must agree and that all religions are essentially the same. We can’t say what somebody believes is wrong or we are considered intolerant. We can not say Jesus is the only way to God, when Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the father but through me.” If we say that, we are considered intolerant of other religions. We can’t say homosexuality is sinful, not because that is our opinion but because that is what the Bible says. If we say homosexuality is not pleasing to God, we are considered an intolerant homophobe.

The one thing modern culture is intolerant of is not agreeing with them about tolerance.

**Modern philosophy is filled with empty promises.**

Not only does modern philosophy oppose Christ but modern culture makes empty promises that never fulfill. A great example of this is materialism. It is the promise that the person who dies with the most toys wins. More stuff will make us happy. Do we really need more stuff to be happy? No. Studies tell us that after our basic needs our met, more stuff leads to more stress.

**Modern philosophy is demonically inspired.**

Where do these modern philosophies and empty cultural promises that lead Christians away from Christ come from? Paul says they are usually based on human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world. This is an interesting statement. It is complex. Let’s break it down. The first word we want to understand is what is translated as the little phrase according to. In the Greek, it literally means to be source from something. Modern godless philosophy and empty cultural promises for happiness come from human traditions which come from the elemental spirits of the world. What we have is a hierarchy. The elemental spirits of the world are creating human traditions, which are creating modern philosophies and empty cultural promises. What do these other words mean?
Human traditions means the group think of our cultural. For example, most ladies do not need a new dress. We look at ladies magazines and see there is a new style everyone is wearing. Since everyone is wearing a new style, to be in style we feel pressure to go and buy a new dress. This is where modern philosophy and empty culture promises come from in our culture. They are pressed on us because it is the group think of our culture. What creates the group think of our culture? Here is where it gets interesting.

Paul says the group think in our culture, such as tolerance and materialism, ultimately come from the elemental spirits of the world. What is that? This is actually one Greek word. It is an interesting term. It is used only here in the New Testament. It is only used occasionally outside the Bible in some Jewish literature and some Persian religious texts. In all those cases it appears to be referring to powerful demons and are seeing to demonically influence the world by fostering a dark cultural values in the world. Demons are trying to take Christians captive and pull them away from Christ by pressing godless philosophy and empty cultural promises on them by the group think of society which is ultimately being spurred on by powerful demonic beings. Once we realize that demons don’t just possess people but, like Russia trying to influence the American election, part of their strategy is to pull Christians away from Christ through culture, life begins to make much better sense.

3. God’s plan is to fill me with Jesus.

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. Colossians 2:9–10 (ESV)

This is incredible stuff. The god who dwelled on Mt. Sinai with fire and smoke, the God who dwelled in the tabernacle in the wilderness and in the God who dwelled in the Jerusalem temple now dwells completely and totally in Jesus. Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body. John 2:19–21 (ESV)

God had left the building! God was no longer in the holy of holies in the temple. He had fused himself with a human body in Jesus and he was now walking around the temple. There can be no more deity found anywhere than in Jesus.

This means that since all of God dwells completely in Jesus, how can anyone go anywhere else other than Jesus when it comes to knowing God? God is not 75 percent in Jesus and 25 percent some place else. All of God is concentrated into Jesus. The one who made the universe poured himself into a human body forever.

Now what makes this even more amazing is not just that all of God lives in Jesus but we have been completely filled by Jesus. Jesus now generously and
constantly pours himself into us so we are always full of him. We have everything we need in Jesus.

Since Jesus is fully God and since Jesus completely and totally fills us, the idea that we need anyone or anything else to know God is preposterous. The idea that anyone else knows God apart from Jesus is insane. The idea that we need an intermediary to pray to God outside of Jesus can’t be true. We have Jesus and he completely fills us.

This should completely change the way we think about ourselves. In high school, our identity was found in what we did. If we were an athlete, we were part of the jock group. If we played an instrument, we were part of the band group. If we were smart, we were part of the nerd group. Remember the way what we did defined who we were?

Even though many of us are out of high school, we still let what we do define ourselves. For most men and women, their work is their identity. For many mothers, raising children is their identity and when the children are out of the house, moms face an identity crisis.

As Christians, our economic group, our social group, and our friend group is not our identity. Jesus is our identity. That is what matters. All of God lives in Jesus and Jesus completely fills us. The one who created the universe is living inside of you. I can lose my identity in my work, as a father and as a husband and still make it. It would hurt but our identity is in something much bigger than what we do. It is in the fact that the one who created the universe loves us and is inside of us.

Now Paul is going to explain why our identity being in Jesus and all God has done for us through him is such a big deal

What happens when we are filled by Jesus?

I experience the death of my old nature and resurrection life my new nature.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. Colossians 2:11–12 (ESV)

What does it mean to have Christ filling us? Paul says what happened is we literally participated in the events of the cross. The benefits of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection are ours because we literally participated in them when we trusted in Christ by faith.

Paul uses circumcision to refer to Christ’s death. In this passage, Paul is speaking metaphorically. Circumcision is the cutting away of a small piece of a male’s flesh, traditionally done on the eighth day after a child is born. Paul says circumcision is a gruesome metaphor for Christ’s crucifixion. Jesus’ death on the
cross involved the painful stripping away not just of a small piece of flesh but the violent removal of Christ’s entire body by death. As Christians, we participate in Christ’s circumcision, that is his death. As Christians, when we trusted in Christ, our sinful nature was cut away from us by the death of Jesus. We literally die to our former way of life.

Paul says we didn’t just die with Christ but we were buried with Christ. That means that our old way of life was taken away from us and literally buried with Christ.

Paul says you see our identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in our baptism. Incidentally this is why we baptize by immersion, not sprinkling. Paul is talking about baptism symbolizing Christ’s burial and resurrection. Our old way of life died with Christ. We go under the water to symbolize our old life and the way we lived being buried with Christ. We come out of the water to symbolize that we literally rose with Christ to a new life by our faith in him. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead has transformed our lives so we are literally a new person living a new life.

When we trust in Christ by faith the person we were is circumcised out of us. We are given a new resurrection nature inside of us. A person that now hates the sin they used to love and loves the Jesus they used to hate. The practical implications of this are immense.

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Romans 6:6–7 (ESV)

Before Christ, the dominant operating principle in our life was sin. We sinned because we were sinners. We went to sin like a duck goes to water. It was our nature. When our old self died with Christ and we were literally given a new nature. We no longer have to sin. We are like ducks the no longer want water. The power of sin has no grip on our life. We may want to sin but you don’t have to sin. In fact sin is against our new nature.

Satan wants us to think we have to give in to sin because its pull is too powerful. He wants us to think we are a slave to sin and sin is our master. As a Christian, because we died with Christ and rose with Christ, the power of Christ in us is more powerful than the power of sin against us.

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:9–11 (ESV)

If you are a Christian, how do you think of your struggles with sin? Do you think there is no hope? Do you think you have no power to walk away from lust, anger, selfishness, half-truths? That isn’t true. That is what you were, not who you are. Satan wants you to think you are still living your past life before Christ.
that was controlled by your impulses to sin, not your present life that is controlled
by Christ.

I have complete forgiveness of my sin.

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,
God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by
canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he
set aside, nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:13–14 (ESV)

What God did when he caused us to trusted in Jesus is he not only gave
us new life in Jesus but he forgave all of our sin. It say God literally canceled the
record of debt that stood against us by nailing it to the cross.

In the ancient world, when you couldn’t pay money you borrowed money
and what you borrowed was written on a piece of paper called a certificate of
debt. When the debt was paid off, the certificate was canceled. Paul says that
every time we sin we put ourselves in debt to God.

When Jesus died, he took our debt to God and he nailed it to the cross.
Paul is talking about the placard that hung above a criminal dying on the cross
which detailed the criminals crime. That was the traditional way the Romans did
tings. It was a real deterrent. The wooden placard on the cross of Jesus said,
“King of the Jews.” Paul says in reality the placard on Jesus’ cross listed our sins
that put us in debt to God. Jesus died to pay for all of our sin so the record of our
debt to God would be completely canceled.

In fact, Jesus’ last words on the cross when he died were, “It is finished.” It
is the Greek word tetelestai. It literally means paid in full. It was the word
stamped across a certificate of debt when it was finally paid. Jesus’ final words
as his physical body and his spirit separated on the cross were “paid in full”,
signed Jesus. Those words were stamped across the front of our sins which put
us in debt to God. That is what it means to be filled by Jesus.

I have complete victory over every demonic power.
He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by
triumphing over them in him. Colossians 2:15 (ESV)

Jesus’ death on the cross did not just break the power of sin from our life.
It did not just pay for our sin in full so when we die we can stand before God with
confidence. Jesus literally disarmed all the rulers and authorities (those are the
ranking demonic powers) that are set up against us. Jesus literally conquered the
vast fallen demonic world of Satan and his powerful demonic army. He
conquered them and put them to shame in his triumph. Picture and entire army
stripped of their weapons and clothes. They stand their in bare feet and rags.
That is all that is left.

The picture Paul is giving us is what would happen in his day after the
Romans conquered another country. The soldiers would march through the
streets of their cities to cheering crowds. Behind them came the captives in
chains stripped down to the barest of clothes. The powerful kings and dignitaries of the conquered nation came through the town in complete humiliation as they walked through the street in front of the people of the city.

Paul point is Satan and all of the high ranking demonic powers in the entire universe that were fought against us were completely stripped of their weapons by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ’s victory is so complete that today the idea of resistance against Jesus is futile. All that is left is for Jesus to lead them through the streets with a ring in their nose and chains around their hands and feet for the final public spectacle of their defeat.

We started with the question, “Why is Jesus all I need?” After we look at all we have in Jesus, what else could we possibly want?

Jesus defeated every demonic spiritual power in the universe. At the name of Jesus, they must flee. That same Jesus completely fills our heart.

Jesus completely forgave us all of our sin by taking the list of sins against us and nailing them to the cross. Jesus stamped across them “Paid in full.” In his own blood.

Jesus took our old nature that had to sin, he cut it away and gave us a new resurrected nature that is not controlled by sin. Don’t be tricked. If you are a Christian, no matter how enticing the sin, we have the power to walk away.

Don’t let yourself be deceived by the demonically inspired cultural pressure around us that wants to take us captive away from Jesus. Hold to Jesus, walk in Jesus, sink your roots deep in Jesus and grow in in Jesus.

Conclusion

Today with your family or in your life group, I want you to think through three questions.

4. Am I guilty of idolatry by finding my identity in my friends, job or family more than who I am in Jesus?

5. What demonically inspired modern thinking and empty cultural promises are taking me captive and leading me away from Christ?

6. How well am I rooted in Christ? What is my plan to learn more about Christ? Why is Jesus all I need? After we see what God has done for us through him, what else could we possibly want? After Jesus, everything else in this life is just extra gravy.
November 12, 2017

Good morning. Great to have you at CrossWinds. Let’s begin with a question. When you grew up, were any of you bullied in school? Did someone ever try to intimidated you or manipulate you? If that was you, put up your hand.

Bullying is more common than most of us realize. Even though schools have initiatives to stop bullying, not much has changed. Kids are bullied today, just like they were 20 years ago. What makes life more difficult for kids today is they face a new type of bullying. It is called cyber bullying. That is when kids post nasty things about about others they don’t like on social media. Sometimes they are so direct they text message other kids intimidating words or photos. Even when a young man or woman is in the privacy of his or her own bedroom he or she can be beat up through his or her cell phone. Some kids have even taken their own lives because of cyberbullying. Most of us didn’t know a cell phone in a kid’s hand could be a deadly weapon.

One government study tells us one in three middle school students are bullied. The same study claims one in four high school students are bullied. Another study claims 160,000 kids stay home from school each day to avoid a bully. Bullying is not a problem limited to our schools and the teenage years. Bullying can take place in the church. Some people try to spiritually intimidate others so they can push people away from Jesus. Today we are going to study three types of church bullies and learn how they work.

At CrossWinds, we are studying the book of Colossians. This New Testament book is all about Jesus. It is about how good God has been to us through Jesus. Paul wants us to understand who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. Jesus created the world. Jesus took a body to be one of us so he could die for us and save us from our sin. The same God who created the universe poured all of himself into a body, and when we become a Christian he pours himself into us. That is a mind-blowing thought.

Since every good thing we have comes from Jesus, Satan’s plans are to take us away from Jesus. Last week, we looked at how Satan does that through cultural pressure outside the church. Today, we will see how Satan tries to push us away from Jesus through bullies inside the church. Let me introduce you to the first church bully. Maybe you will recognize him.

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4 https://www.stopbullying.gov/media/facts/index.html
5 https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/10/160-000-kids-stay-home-from-school-each-day-to-avoid-being-bullied/280201/
Legalistic Larry: The church bully that wants me to follow his rules instead of Jesus.

Legalistic Larry takes Jesus and the Bible then he adds his own rules to what he thinks makes a good Christian, like homeschooling, no cable TV and avoiding any movie not done with cartoon characters by Disney.

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Colossians 2:16–17 (ESV)

Paul told us not to let anyone pass judgment on us in questions of food and drink. What it means when Paul said, “Don’t let anyone pass judgment on you” is don’t take people seriously if they are upset about what you eat or drink. Paul said the Christian life is not about what we eat or what we drink. It is about Jesus.

In the church of Colossae, there were Legalistic Larrys. What they were sticking their noses in the air over was not cable TV or homeschooling. They were upset over what people were eating and drinking. The context of Colossians tells us there were Jewish Christians in the Colossae church. We also know there were new gentile Christians. I imagine the church had a potluck and some Gentile Christians thought they would bring the best food in the church. I can see them bringing bacon-wrapped lobster and shrimp. They thought they were encouraging everyone but the Jewish legalistic Larrys in the church freaked out! They were upset that bacon and shrimp were served at church. What was their issue?

Let me give you some background. If we turn to the Old Testament, we find the Jews were told to classify foods as either clean or unclean. If it was unclean, they were to avoid it. A good place to see these classifications is in Leviticus 11:2-20. When we check the Old Testament, we find pork is unclean. Shrimp and lobster are shellfish. That makes them unclean. They may be tasty foods, but Jewish Christians came from a background where you avoided those meats like they were the plague.

Why did God declare some foods clean and others not clean? Some people point out there are good health reasons for calling some foods unclean, such as avoiding pork meant you avoided triganosis. God called foods clean and unclean for more than health reasons. There was a teaching element to this in the Old Testament. The teaching element is that in our everyday lives, God’s people were to set ourselves apart for God and live a separate holy life. What better way to remind yourself that you are set apart for God than to remind yourself that at every meal? Clean and unclean foods served as a powerful reminder to God’s people that they were to be different from the rest of the world.
Here is what the news Jewish Christians missed: The Old Testament dietary laws were a shadow. They were designed to point people to Christ. Once Christ came, they do not matter.

If I am working around the house, and I lose track of my wife because she slipped around the corner, one way I can see if she slipped around the corner is I can look at the yard and see her shadow cascading across the lawn. The shadow points me to her. When I get to her, I don’t care about the shadow anymore. I am not worried about stepping on the shadow. I don’t talk to her shadow. I don’t take a picture of her shadow and put it on my desk. All the shadow does is point me to her. Once I have her, I don’t need the shadow anymore. In the same way, these Old Testament food laws pointed us to God's people being set apart. Once Jesus came, the shadow of the food laws don’t matter. We can eat what we want. Jesus and Paul teach this.

And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him.” Mark 7:18–20 (ESV)

And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Acts 10:13–16 (ESV)

Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 1 Corinthians 8:8 (ESV)

Jesus eliminated the Old Testament diet regulation.

Not only did Jesus eliminate the Old Testament diet regulations but he eliminated the requirement of observing the special holidays on the Jewish calendar. They were also just a shadow pointing to Christ. Now that Jesus has arrived, people don’t need to observe the special holidays in the Jewish calendar.

Paul specifically mentioned Jewish festivals, new moon celebrations and Sabbaths. You can learn more about these in Leviticus 25, Isaiah 1:12, Exodus 20:9-11. A good example of the Jewish holidays Jesus eliminated would be Passover. Passover was an annual reminder that the angel of death passed over God’s people through the sacrifice of a perfect lamb. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist sees Jesus and says, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Passover was a shadow pointing to Jesus, who is the perfect lamb that takes away the sin of the world so that all who trust in him have death pass over them. Jesus is the substance of Passover, observing the holiday of Passover was just the shadow pointing to him.

The same thing applies to observing the Old Testament Sabbath. As many of you know, the Old Testament Sabbath was on Saturday, the last day of the
week. We worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. How did this change? Jesus rose on the first day of the week so Christians started worshipping on the first day of the week. They called Sunday worship the Lord’s Day because it pointed to Jesus. Sunday worship is not the Old Testament Passover simply moved to a different day of the week. Why did the early church let go of observing the Old Testament Sabbath? The Old Testament Sabbath day was a day of rest from work. It was God’s people trusting for God to provide for them instead of them working to provide for themselves. The sabbath day of rest was the shadow pointing to Jesus is who the substance. Jesus is true rest for all our work. Jesus saves us not by working to please God but by simply resting from our work to please God and trusting in God to provide salvation for us through Jesus. That is why the early church let the observance of the Saturday Sabbath go when Jesus Christ came. It was a day of rest simply pointing to the one who came to give us true rest. Here are a few more thoughts.

All of the Ten Commandments are reinforced in the New Testament except the fourth commandment, which is the command to keep the Sabbath. The one place the Sabbath is talked about is here in Colossians. It tells us to ignore people that try to force us to observe the Sabbath, now that we have Jesus. Paul warned the Gentiles about many different sins in his letters but never once did he warn them about breaking the Saturday Sabbath. In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council gave its rules for new Gentile Christians, and it didn’t include keeping the Sabbath. All the early church fathers taught the Old Testament Sabbath was abolished and now the first day of the week, was the day of Christian worship.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Hebrews 10:1 (ESV)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

What happened in Colossae is Jewish Christians were telling the Gentile Christians they needed to follow a bunch of Old Testament rules in addition to Jesus. They wanted everybody to dress, act and be just like them. In doing so, they were church bullies, Legalist Larrys that pushed people away from Jesus.

How can we become Legalistic Larrys today? I texted a friend of mine who came from a church that had a legalistic bend to ask him what legalism looked like for him. He told me that if he missed church on Wednesday night, people shunned him. Is it good to make Wednesday night church? Yes. I hope every kid comes Wednesday night. Wednesday night church may be a personal rule in my house, but we have no right to force it on other people. When we do, we become Legalistic Larrys.

Let me give you a few other examples. When I grew up, in church you needed to wear a suit. If you didn’t wear a suit, people looked down on you. There is nothing wrong with wearing a suit. Wearing a suit may be your
preference at church. That is fine. Wearing a suit may be the right clothing for you, but don’t impose what you think is right to wear in church on everybody else. Don’t turn your preference into a rule not found in the Bible.

Years ago I remember talking with people who insisted songs were sung at church with the organ and out of a hymnal. I like the organ. I like the hymnal. That may be a preference for some of us but we don’t have a right to insist everyone else worships with an organ and the hymnal. There is nothing wrong with making our own rules to help us in our walk with Jesus but we become Legalistic Larrys when we impose our personal rules on others.

Here is what makes this tricky. Paul didn’t say it was wrong for a Jew to observe Jewish holidays and food laws if he saw them as part of his culture and as pointing to Jesus. That was fine. It was wrong for Jews to pressure other Christians into observing those holidays.

Another example would be homeschooling. It is not wrong to homeschool your kids or to send them to Christian school. That may be your conviction. It is wrong to pressure other Christians into thinking that all true Christians must homeschool their kids.

All that matters is Jesus and if you are in him. When we start forcing our extra-biblical preferences on others, we have turned into Legalistic Larrys that push people way from Jesus.

**Mystical Martha: The church bully that wants to be the center of attention instead of Jesus.**

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. Colossians 2:18–19 (ESV)

This time Paul warns us to watch out for people that want to disqualify us. Disqualify may not be the best English translation of this Greek work. The word literally means to tell somebody they are inadequate, to tell him he is a failure. That is harsh. How could one Christian tell another Christian he or she failed in his or her faith? Let’s find out.

The first way this happens is through people that insist on asceticism. Other translations rephrase the words “insisting on asceticism.” They call it false humility or taking pleasure in humility. Have you ever met a Christian how is into fake humility? He pretends to be humble but after a while, you realize he is all about himself. These are Christians who like to talk about themselves and all the wonderful things God has done in their lives so they can be the center of attention. Their stories usually start out with how they started with a terrible life before Christ. They were hopeless. They were broke. Their marriages were on
the rocks. Jesus came to their rescue. Jesus changed their lives. Jesus saved their marriages. Jesus made their businesses succeed. There is nothing wrong with this kind of story. The problem is these people are not really telling their stories with humility. They love to tell their stories again and again because it makes them the center of attention instead of Jesus. That is false humility. Has anyone met someone at church like this? They are church bullies because they make themselves the center of attention.

The other things these people did, at least in Colossae, is they took pleasure in the worship of angels. Angel worship isn’t something that is common today. It was a common practice in that area of the world and in that time. In A.D. 363 in Colossae’s sister city of Laodicea, people held a special church council to declare that it is not right for Christians to abandon the worship of God for the worship of angels. In fact, the archangel Michael was worshiped in that part of the world until A.D. 739. Archaeology even discovered amulets people wore around their necks that pictured an angel. They thought this angel amulet helped ward off demons. Jesus was very clear that we are not supposed to worship angels.

Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” Matthew 4:10 (ESV)

What was happening is these people with false humility claimed they were too humble to go directly to God so they decided to worship angels instead, believing the angels would serve as intermediaries between them and God. When they became involved in angel worship, they claimed to experience extraordinary supernatural events such as dreams and visions. Where were these supernatural visions and dreams coming from that began when they worshipped angels instead of Jesus? This is my opinion — the Bible tells us Satan masquerades as angels of light. Demons are more than happy to keep people entertained with counterfeit spiritual experiences to keep their eyes off Jesus.

These Mystical Marthas were going around the church talking about the dreams and visions they received when they worshipped angels instead of Jesus. What happened is ordinary believers, like you and me, felt like Christian failures because they didn’t have special dreams and visions when they worshipped Jesus.

Here is what Paul said this about these people — they were puffed up without reason. They thought they were something special but it was all in their own heads. Their egos were puffed up like marshmallows in the microwave. Paul said their arrogance was coming from their sensuous minds, that is their fallen minds.
The people with false humility who were always talking about themselves wanted to be the center of attention. They were claiming supernatural experiences of visions and dreams when they worshipped angels instead of Jesus, so made themselves the center of attention. They were church bullies trying to make ordinary people with ordinary faith who were simply trusting in Jesus feel like spiritual failures. In so doing, they pushed people away from Jesus.

How do these Mystical Marthas show up today? One of my friends in college asked me if I had undergone a second baptism of the Spirit. I told him I didn’t see a second baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. I don’t have a problem with Christians going through large steps of growth later in life. That is normal. When someone says, “You need to seek and pray for a second baptism of the spirit, so you can be like me,” it creates a two-tier system in the church. If you haven’t received that second baptism — whatever that may be), it leaves you feeling like a Christian failure.

Another example is speaking in tongues. I haven’t spoken in tongues. I personally think many of the people who speak in tongues are bogus, but God can give that gift if he wants. It is his gift. Some people say you need to speak in tongues to really know God. That isn’t true. It is not like the tongue speakers in the church are varsity and the rest of us who haven’t spoken in tongue are JV. God will probably not give that gift to most of us. That is OK. The Mystical Marthas run around telling people about their supposed supernatural, spiritual experiences to make other people feel inferior and make themselves the center of attention. That is being a church bully that pushes people away from Jesus by taking the attention off of Jesus and putting it onto yourself.

Folks, speaking in tongues is nothing compared to having the God of the universe living in us and making us into new people.

The result of all Mystical Marthas in a church is never church unity; it is always division because Mystical Marthas have lost their connection with Jesus.

Self-Denial Sam: The church bully that wants me starve my body to feed my soul.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)— according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. Colossians 2:20–23 (ESV)

Paul said we died to the elemental spirits of the world. Who are the elemental spirits of the world? We learned last week they are powerful fallen demons in this
world that influence culture. When Paul said, “since we died to them,” he meant since Christ conquered all the fallen spiritual powers in the universe and since Christ is in us we have no fear of demons and their influence over us through things in this world. Why, as if we are still needed to fear demons, do we run from things in this world to avoid possible demonic influence? Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch.

We don’t know exactly what new Christians were told to avoid but whatever it was they were told not to touch it, taste it or hold; and if they did, they believed they opened themselves up to the influence of the demonic world. While Paul wasn’t specific on what it was they felt they couldn’t touch, taste or hold, we are given a little idea of what these things were because he said these things were destined to perish as they were used. The word perish means to decompose. It is what bananas do when we leave them on the counter for a week.

Apparently there was some kind of food they thought they needed to avoid because they believed coming in contact with that food opened them up to demonic influence. Here were Paul’s words of advice: First, “It is just food. It is not going to hurt you.” Second, “the one who conquered all the demonic powers in the universe lives in you. You don’t need to be worried about what you think is a demonically influenced banana!”

Paul said, “Depriving yourself of these foods has the appearance of wisdom but it is actually self-made religion as you go through self-denial and severely treatment of your body.” Apparently there was a lot of food in Colossae that these Self-Denying Sam Christians considered tainted by evil spiritual powers. Rather than eat the food, they denied themselves of food, even starved themselves to avoid what they considered demonic influence through what they ate.

At first, these people appear super spiritual. They were starving themselves because they didn’t want to even touch food that would compromise them spiritually. Paul said it wasn’t as spiritual as it looked. It was just food. It rots over time. Jesus conquered all the fallen demonic powers in the universe, and he lives in you. You can eat meat offered to idols that is sold in the meat market and not worry about being overrun by demonic powers.

Here is what these Christians were doing. Rather than having their identity be Christ, their identity became their self denial. For Self-Denying Sam, he was not known for the Jesus he enjoyed but for the pleasures he avoided. Self-Denying Sams are people who find their identity in spiritual subtraction rather than Jesus addition.

Paul said we are to be known for our identity in Jesus, not what we won’t do because we are Christians.

In addition, Paul said all this severe self-denial because you are afraid of being spiritually contaminated actually has no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.
When it comes to battling our fleshly desires, like food, denying ourselves of these desires doesn’t make them go away. They only get worse. For example, if you decide to avoid food for two days, what are you constantly thinking about after two days? Food! In the end, it results in you pigging out!

How does Self-Denying Sam show up today? There is a strand of Christendom known as poverty theology. It is the idea that we can live on less so we can give away more for the kingdom. In one sense, this is good. It is a desire to not be so caught up in the world that we lose our focus on Christ. In another way, this isn’t good. Some people take this too far. They try to live on nothing. Their poverty is their new identity instead of Jesus. They live in a tiny house or a small apartment. They drive an old car or just ride a bicycle. When they have children, their children are faced with the minimum of clothes in an empty apartment. I have a friend of mine who began following this practice. He even gave away his bed so he could sleep on the floor. Sleeping on the floor worked until he met his future wife who told him he took his poverty theology too far. The problem with Self-Denying Sam is people become know for what they don’t do rather than the Jesus that lives inside of them.

Maybe another example is the Amish. Don’t take this wrong. Many of the Amish love Jesus. I know that. In Pennsylvania, where I came from, the Amish are known for not using electricity. They are known for using only buttons, not zippers. They are know for driving horses and buggies instead of cars. When they farm, they use horses instead of tractors. People come from around Pennsylvania so they can watch the Amish work in the field like they are watching monkeys at the zoo. For most people, the Amish are entertainment, because they are known for their rigorous self-denial of pleasure more than their love for Jesus. Self-Denying Sam can be a Christian bully. He wants you to think the real Christians are known by what they give up for Jesus, not what they gain because of Jesus.

Conclusion

Have you been pushed around by Christian bullies like Legalistic Larry who added a bunch of rules to God’s Word, making everyone follow his preferences and his word?

Where you ever pushed around by a Mystical Martha who wanted herself to be the center of attention rather than Jesus? She had false humility and spoke about supplementary spiritual experiences like dreams, visions, and tongues making you feel inferior because you just had Jesus?

Where you ever pushed around by a spiritual bully know as Self-Denying Sam who wanted you to think the Christian life was more about what you give up for Jesus not what we gain because of Jesus?

Maybe even the most convicting thought of all is the realization that from time to time, each of us have been one of these spiritual bullies and unwittingly pushed people away from Jesus. Thankfully, when we confess our sin, Jesus forgives our sin. As we close, if God has convicted you of the sin of being a
church bully, confess and repent and let him make you new. Keep him as the center.
Good morning. Great to have you today. This is a great morning. On both of our campuses, we are studying our way through the book of Colossians. This morning begins an exciting and intensely practical section of the book.

Before we jump into our study, I need to do a little overview. You need to understand most of Paul’s New Testament letters are written in two pieces. The first half gives us the truth about Jesus, the second half gives us practical instructions on how to live for Jesus. For instance, in the book of Ephesians, chapters 1-3 are the truth about Jesus, chapters 4-6 are how we live for Jesus. The book of Romans is the same way. Romans 1-8 are the truth about Jesus. Romans 9-16 teach how the truth of Jesus works out in everyday life. The same is true for the book of Colossians. Chapters 1 and 2 are about what God has done for us through Jesus. Chapters 3 and 4 are about how we live for Jesus in everyday life.

This morning, we begin Colossians 3, which is about how to live for Jesus in everyday life. For the next month and a half, Colossians will be extremely practical. Paul will show us how Jesus changes our marriages. We will learn how Jesus changes our parenting. We will see how Jesus changes the way we work. We will see how Jesus changes the way we respond to people that hurt us.

While I always encourage you to invite friends and neighbors to church where they can hear about Jesus, the next few weeks are an especially good time to do this since they are about how Jesus changes everyday life.

This morning, Paul will look at how Jesus must change our thought lives. Please listen closely. What we are talking about is essential to living for Christ. This is also one of the huge blind spots in the lives of most Christians as they think their thought lives don’t matter. What we think will determine how we live.

All Christian living begins with a Christian-honoring thought life. Satan is waging a battle for your mind. He is waging a battle to fill your thoughts with ungodly things. If he can fill your thought life with ungodly things, an ungodly lifestyle will naturally follow. What we allow ourselves to think about matters.

We will develop our thoughts this morning under three headings. 1) Set my thoughts life on godly things, not sinful things. 2) Put off my old life and put on my new life. 3) Jesus is my identity. I don’t need to find one.

**Set my thought life on godly things, not sinful things.**

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* Colossians 3:1–2 (ESV)
Paul began, "If you have been raised with Christ..." In other words, "If you are a Christian." If you are a Christian, you need to be seeking the things that are above, in other words heavenly things. This means the goals in our lives — what we are seeking out of life — need to change.

As Christians, when we trusted in Christ, we buried our old lives and old ways of thinking. We were raised to new lives with Christ and a completely new way of thinking. Baptism is a picture of what happened to us. When you go under the water in baptism, that represents being buried with Christ. Your old life died, and we bury it. Then you come out of the water, and that shows we have risen with Christ. Just as Christ’s resurrection power raised him to new life, the same resurrection power raises you to a completely new life. This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3 that he must be born again. This is why Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that if you are in Christ you are a new creation. You are not a repaired old person but a completely new person.

Set godly goals that reflect who I am in Christ.

Seeking refers to the goals we set in life. What are your goals? Is your goal popularity? It will show up in what you wear, how you spend your money and how much time you spend on social media. Is your goal money? For many people, that is their goal. They will do anything to make money. They are not ethically honest. Is your goal to be the most beautiful person out there? We all have goals. Most of us do not write our goals down. Each of us have them, and they subtly drive us.

There is nothing wrong with a goal to make money. There is nothing wrong to have a good name with our friends. The problem is when our goal becomes our identity. Earthly things are not to be our ultimate goal in life. We set our minds on heavenly things. Living for Jesus and living to please Jesus is our ultimate goal.

If you are a Christian, God gives you a different set of goals in life. Your goal may still be popularity but you are now more concerned with putting a smile on God’s face than the face of others. Your goal may still be to make money but you want to make money ethically with integrity so when you stand before Jesus he is pleased with your business.

Think thoughts that are in line with my eternal life, not my old earthly life.

This is very practical. Paul said we are to set our mind on things that are above, not on earthly things. As Christians, our thought life matters. We must think thoughts in line with who we are in Jesus, not who we were before Jesus. As Christians, it doesn’t just matter how we live. It matters how we think. It matters what we put into our minds. We want to put godly things into our mind, not earthly garbage.

One of the reasons why this matters is because what we think about in our minds will become the goals we set in our lives. This is the way advertising
works. Advertisers want you to see new clothes in their magazine and on the Internet. When you see their clothes, you will begin thinking about their clothes. If you are thinking about their clothes, your goal will eventually becoming buying their clothes. What we think in our mind will set the direction in our lives.

This is what makes the Internet so good and bad. The Internet can fill your mind with good things but it can also quickly fill your mind with bad things. As Christians, we must guard what we pour into our minds. What we think about will set the goals for our lives.

Consider this when it comes to music. What kind of music do you listen to? There are some great non-Christian musicians. That doesn’t mean we should listen to their music. We need to be discerning. We need to be careful of the words we put into our mind through the music we enjoy. Some of you are disagreeing with what I just said. You want me to know that you just listen to the music but you don’t listen to the words of the music you enjoy. When our minds remember music, we remember the words of the music. If I started to sing the words to “Amazing Grace,” you could finish the lyrics and you would finish the lyric as you sung the melody. Music and words work together to cement the words of the music in our brain. The words of the music we listen to will determine what we are seeking in life. If you listen to music that talks about a low view of sexuality, violence or cuss words, what direction will your mind be thinking? What goals will you subtly set for your life?

Others of you claim you don’t necessarily listen to evil music but you listen to value neutral music. Is that possible? I don’t think there is such a thing as value neutral music. All words have meaning. It is simply a question of how positive the meaning of the words are. Second, if there was such a thing as value neutral music, listening to it might not be a good idea. What is better, listening to value positive music or value neutral music? Do you want to eat food with no nutrition or good nutrition? It seems wise to eat the most wholesome foods and listen to the most positive music.

Christian teenagers, I commend you to listen to positive Christian music. Not just any Christian music but music whose words are saturated with Scripture and truth. Listen to music that builds up your mind in Christ. I don’t care if it is rock, classical or rap music. The style doesn't matter to me as much as the message it contains.

One of the reasons we sing worship songs on Sunday is we want you singing them through the week as you are remember Sunday’s songs and sing them in your heart.

The same principle is true when it comes to movies, Netflix and television. We need to be discerning what we use as entertainment. The scenes of a movie become what we think about in our minds. They teach us how to respond in life. If we watch movies modeling violence, we learn to respond to those who hurt us with violence. Watching movies about revenge certain doesn’t encourage us to treat those who hurt us with patience, love and gentleness. When Hollywood big-
wigs began giving homosexual characters key roles in television programs, they did it so we learn to think homosexuality is normal. They know that when we are watching, they are teaching.

What we think about as Christians is very, very important. What we think in our minds will determine the direction for our lives. This is why when Paul wrote to the Philippians he said:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

Here is Paul's point: Set your mind on things that are above. Think the same kind of thoughts now we will have in our resurrection bodies later. Don’t allow yourself to be captivated by the sinful thoughts of your old creation life. That is who you were. It isn’t who you are.

Remember who I was, who I am and one day who I will be.

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:3–4 (ESV)

Paul said to remember you died to your old way of life with Jesus. Remember what happened. You don’t think about life like other people. You don’t have the same goals in life as other people. We are completely new because of Jesus. Our old lives are dead. Don’t expect to fit in.

Right now, we don’t look different. We don’t feel different. Right now, we get sick like everybody else. We get old like everybody else. We face temptations, troubles and trials like everybody else. We don’t look that impressive. That is OK. Paul told us that while our true identity has begun in our hearts, our full identity isn’t yet visible.

The fullness of our new lives in Christ is currently hidden with Christ in God. Right now who we truly are is not visible.

When Christ appears, we will also appear with him in glory. That means when Christ returns, he will not come back with his glory hidden — like he was on earth — he will come back with his glory fully revealed. He will come back as the rider on the white horse in Revelation with eyes like fire that blaze with brilliance. He will pulsate power. The glory of Jesus’ true identity will be fully revealed as God in the flesh. He will be so brilliant that he will illuminate the entire new creation. There is no sun because the new earth is illuminated by the son. Paul said when Jesus appears, we also will appear with him in glory. Our bodies right now are weak. They get sick and die. One day our bodies will rise from the grave like Jesus’ body rose from the grave. Our bodies will be just like his body. We will glow with light, be filled with power, brilliance and strength. As Christ became like us, when he returns, we will become like him. That is our true
identity. You and I will one day be like the resurrected glorified Jesus. Think of that moment when who we are is fully revealed.

Our true identity for all of eternity we will be the most blessed beings in the universe. We will be the most powerful and highest ranked beings in the entire universe. Nothing in all the universe will have more brilliance than Christians. We will be even more powerful and highly exalted than the angels. Nothing is higher in power, might and glory for all of eternity than Jesus, and we are in Jesus. The angels that now look down at us will one day look up to us. Look what Paul said:

_Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!_ 1 Corinthians 6:3 (ESV)

The word judge in Greek implies we will take part in the judgment of the fallen angels. The word judge doesn’t just imply judgment but it implies ruling and governing. This implies we will rule and govern the elect angels that are not condemned to the Lake of Fire.

This needs to change the way we think about life. We need to think about who we are. We need to live like who we are. Stop living like what we were. Paul said because of who we now are, there are things that must be put to death in our lives because they are completely antithetical to our new identities. He gave us three examples of what we must put to death.

**Put off my old life and put on my new life.**

**Kill Sexual Sin**

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5 (ESV)

When Paul talked about getting rid of these things from our lives, he was not implying we do this on our own strength. Rather it is the strength of God working in us that enables us to live out who we are and to take off our old ways.

**Sexual Immorality** — This is the Greek word _pomeia_. This is the word where we get our English word pornography. _Pomeia_ is a junk drawer term for any sexual expression outside of the marriage. It is absolutely not to be part of the Christian life. Sex before marriage and outside of marriage is the kind of life we lived before Christ. It is not who we are in Christ. The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:20 said the new Gentile Christians were to avoid sexual immorality. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:18 to run from sexual immorality. Sexuality immorality (_pomeia_) doesn’t just mean avoiding the final act of sex, but it includes all the preliminary stuff leading up to the final act. I tell my boys it is anything you wouldn’t do with your sister. God doesn’t want you making out with your girlfriend before marriage. That is _pomeia_.

How far is too far? When the pastor in the wedding says, “You may kiss the bride,” God says that is to be the first time you should kiss your bride. Before that moment the woman at the altar was your sister, not your wife.
I had someone approach me after I talked about this subject and he asked where in the Bible it tells us young men and women should not kiss passionately before their wedding. I shared with him 1 Timothy 5:2 where Paul instructed young Timothy how he should conduct himself around young women.

*…older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.* 1 Timothy 5:2 (ESV)

Now I know what you are thinking — “Pastor Kurt is a complete prude. He isn’t living in reality. Everybody sleeps together before they are married.” Some of you think, you don’t plan on sleeping together before the wedding night but you plan on plenty of other things before the wedding. You know how I know what you are thinking? The culture around us tells us everybody does this before their wedding night. What they have you thinking has become the goal you are seeking for your dating life. You see, it is always a battle for the mind.

Some of you think I have a negative view of sex. Others of you think the Bible has a negative view of sex. The Bible has a high view of sex. God created sex. He understands it better than you do. The Bible has a high view of sex. God knows the only safe place for a fire is the fireplace. If you light a fire on your couch, you will burn down the house. In the same way, God knows the only safe place for sex is marriage. If you light sexual fires someplace other than marriage, there will be serious damage. It is almost impossible to avoid.

**Impurity** — In the Greek, this word means not clean. While *porneia* dealt with physical sexuality outside of marriage, impurity covers not just the physical but the imagination of the mind, sexual fantasies. Some people say, it doesn’t matter what I am thinking about people. It doesn’t matter if I am undressing them in my mind. It doesn’t matter what I am fantasizing about because nobody else is involved. It doesn’t matter if I look at people on the Internet, lust after them and dream about what I would like to do with them because nobody is involved. Paul said nobody else may be involved because it is just your fantasy, but treating people that way in your mind is unclean. It shouldn’t be part of your life. Jesus said it this way.

*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* Matthew 5:28 (ESV)

Here is what you need to remember. Sinful sexual behavior in our lives always begins as sinful sexual behavior in our minds. What we role play in our minds will eventually become what we real play in our lives.

I told you before, it is always a battle for the mind. What you allow yourself to think about will set the direction for your life.

**Passion** — This is the Greek word *pathos*. It is sometimes translated lust. While impurity is a forbidden fantasy, passion is what ignites that desire. It is looking at people with a lustful intent. This is looking at people like they are pieces of meat. It means you look at somebody as a body, not a person. It is constantly evaluating the opposite sex based on their sexuality. It is putting yourself in the
position of an Olympic judge, giving people of the opposite sex a grade. You decide who is a perfect 10. Paul said this kind of thinking not to be part of a Christian’s life. Put it to death. We look at people like people. We look at others as brothers and sisters in Christ, not as sex objects to satisfy our lust. I like the way Job put it.

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? Job 31:1 (ESV)

Notice the progression. We went from the physical act of extramarital sexuality, to the mental act of rehearsing premarital or extramarital sex, to where it all begins, which is fanning the flames of the lustful thoughts of our hearts. Instead of rebuking those thoughts, it is enjoying them. Paul said we put this kind of stuff to death. It is the earthly-only life. It is not the stuff of our new life in Jesus.

Evil Desire — This literally means wicked lust. The previous word dealt with normal sexual lusts. What happens is when people spend time enflaming their normal sexual passions, it leads to an appetite for perverted sexual passions. This gives rise to all the perverted stuff on the Internet. When people allow themselves to begin this kind of lusting, they are no longer looking for a husband or wife but for a twisted sexual experience to satisfy their wicked lusts. This is where it leads. Paul said all this stuff must be put to death in a Christian’s life. It is who you were; it is not who you are. You must no longer live that way.

Notice all of these thing come from what you allow yourself to think. What you think about in the mind starts sets goals for your life, which sets your actions.

Remember, Paul said that as Christians, Jesus inside of us gives us the power to say no to this sin. We can choose to walk away from that lifestyle and put it to death. We have help from the Holy Spirit. We have help from the Word of God. We have help from prayer. We have help from the church and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Since we have Jesus, this is not a losing battle.

Covetousness — Covetousness means a constant desire to have something we don’t have but other people possess. It is listed as one of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. If somebody has a nice car, it is not being content with your car but having a burning desires to possess your neighbor’s better car. In this vice list in Colossians, I don’t think Paul was talking about covetousness in general. Everything else in this list is talking about sexuality. I think Paul was talking about sexual covetousness. This means refusing to be content with the spouse you have and longing for someone else’s spouse, who you think is better. Instead of seeking contentment with your husband or wife, you have a burning desire for someone else’s husband or wife.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. You don’t actively covet somebody else’s spouse. That would be creepy. The problem is when you look at a picture on the Internet, you are coveting what is somebody else’s spouse, or if that person is single, someday that will be somebody else’s spouse. You are refusing to be content with our own spouse. Some of you are not married. If you are not married and want to be married, ask God to bring the right person into
your life. Until that time comes, do not lustfully covet a woman that can’t become your wife no matter where you find her. Sexual covetousness is longing for someone you don’t have rather than thanking God for the spouse you do have. As Christians, we put that to death. That is the kind of person we were, not the new kind of person we are because of Jesus. It all starts in the mind. The thoughts of our mind set the goals for our lives.

**Idolatry** — Paul said sexual covetousness is rooted in idolatry. It is worshipping other people’s bodies instead of our savior. It worshipping our sexuality instead of the God who created sexuality. Paul said we need to put all this to death.

God is not a sexual prude. He loves you. Biopsychologists are now saying what the Bible says about saving sex for marriage and not inflaming it before marriage or enflaming it outside of marriage is the best thing to do. They tell us the center in our brain triggered by sexual intimacy is the same part of our brain triggered by heroin. That means sexuality is as addictive as heroin. It bonds us to people like heroin. Just as heroin addicts find themselves with a habit that is almost impossible to break, the same chemical fix a couple receives during intimacy bonds them to one another in a way that is very difficult to break. That kind of bonding works great in marriage. It doesn’t work well in a hook-up and break-up lifestyle. It leaves deep wounds.

For those of you who are young, I know a life of absolutely no sex until your wedding night where you don’t kiss someone until your wedding day feels really off in our culture. That is because the culture, not the Bible determined what you are thinking and the goal you are seeking for your dating life. God loves you. Live who you are, not who you were before Jesus changed you into the most blessed being in the universe. Trust God on this. You won’t regret it.

To add a little extra incentive for sexual purity, Paul added this line. **On account of these the wrath of God is coming. Colossians 3:6 (ESV)**

Remember, sexual impurity is the kind of thing on which God pours out his wrath.

Let me give you some examples from the biblical past to show you what God’s wrath may look like in the future.

**Noah** — Genesis 6:12 tells us that one of the reasons God sent the flood to destroy the earth is that all flesh had corrupted their ways. The word corrupted in Hebrew means moral perverts. Sexual perversion was rampant on the earth at that time of Noach, so God poured out his wrath with the flood.

**Sodom and Gomorrah** — In Genesis 19, God reigned down fire and sulfur on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because they were sexually perverted. In particular, they were given to homosexuality, but I am sure other kinds of sexual perversion permeated the city.

**Israelite Men with Moabite Women** — Numbers 25 tells us that Israelite men allowed themselves to be seduced by Moabite women so they began to indulge
in sexual immorality with Moabite women. As a result, God sent a plague on the nation and 24,000 died.

Sexual purity is something everyone constantly battles. The thing to know is enslavement to our sexual appetites is not who we are, it is who we were. We don’t have to live the way we were. Come to God in prayer. Read God’s Word. Grow close with Christian friends. There is victory over your struggles. Remember it all begins in the mind and what you allow yourself to think about. That will set the direction for your life.

**Put to death sinful anger.**

In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Colossians 3:7–8 (ESV)

Paul said, before Christ, not only was sexual perversion natural but so was anger. An angry life is something we must put away. Paul described it this way. — get rid of:

**Anger** — The word for anger means a deep smoldering bitterness. It is a general attitude of the heart. We would describe this as a person that is always angry. They are just irritable. They are not known for joy. While they say other people make them angry, the truth is other people only give them a chance to vent their anger. Minor offenses result in major blow ups because anger and bitterness are their disposition toward life. Do you know people like this? Do you know Christians like this? As Christians, we need to change the way we think. We need to see ourselves for who we are, the most blessed beings in the universe. Grumbling angry people have a disposition that doesn’t display our new identity in Christ.

**Wrath** — Wrath is anger that boils over. Wrath is recognized by sudden outbursts of anger. It is flareups. Explosions. It is hastily spoken words. Biting and nasty responses. Do you know people like this? If there is a pinprick, they respond with a blowup. Paul said that Christians put to death that kind of lifestyle. That is not who you are in Jesus. It is who you were before Jesus. Angry wrathful people are not what we will be like in eternity when we appear with Jesus in glory. It is not what we should be like now.

**Malice** — This is planning evil and rejoicing when misery happens to someone. It is assuming the worst about people not the best about them. For example this is seeing somebody you don’t like forget his wallet as he walks out of a restaurant. Rather than telling him, you let him leave it behind. The next day, when you see him at work in a panic, you are laughing inside saying, “It serves him right!”

You see, it always begins in the mind. What we think in our mind will set the direction for our lives. If you think the worst about people, you will start acting maliciously toward people. Paul said that is not the way the Christian life works.

**Slander** — Slander is hurtful speech about someone that shames her character. It is talking about people behind their backs. It is saying harmful things about
people to others. Slander is what we see in modern politics. Slander can be a lie, which is a false story created to destroy someone’s name or reputation. Sometimes slander is true. Sharing a true story about someone that is unhelpful or unnecessary often qualifies as slander. As Christians, we are guilty of this kind of slander all the time. We call it a prayer request. We hear something of poor judgment said or done by a fellow Christian, we post it to all our Christians friends on Facebook asking other to pray for that person. In reality, we should have protected her reputation rather than ruined her reputation. Slander will not be part of our lives in heaven so it shouldn’t be part of our lives on earth.

**Obscene talk** — Paul said Christians are not to be known for our cuss words. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4 (ESV)

We are to be known for our words, building others up not tearing them down. As Christians, our speech should not contain cussing. Trust me, you won’t be cussing in your resurrection body in heaven, so we shouldn’t be cussing in our current bodies on earth.

**Stop lying.**

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Colossians 3:9–10 (ESV)

Paul moved from talking about sex and anger to talking about how we speak to one another. Don’t lie to one another. John 8:44 says the devil is a liar. Lying is his native language. If the devil speaks lies, we shouldn’t speak lies. Lying is who we were. It is not who we are. We are known for telling the truth. Lying was the old life we got rid of. Truth is the new life we live because we are Christians.

**Conclusion**

As I was thinking about how to wrap up this message, I ran across the illustration of Lazarus. Remember when Lazarus died? He was wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a grave for three days. His rotten body began to stink of decomposing flesh. Rotting human flesh is one of the nastiest odors. Those grave clothes reeked of human decomposition. Jesus came to the grave, said Lazarus’ name and transformed his dead life into a living one. He raised him from the dead. Lazarus came out of the grave a completely new person. He came out still wrapped in grave clothes, strips of cloth that permeated with the smell of human decomposition.

Now that he was alive, he was wearing the wrong clothes. He needed to get off the disgusting clothes of the dead and put on the clothes of the living. He was no longer a dead man!
In the same way, before Christ, we were dead men and women. The clothes of our human lives reflected the death of our soul, but Jesus said our name. He called to us when we were dead, and he made us alive.

He said we are no longer dead men and women but living men and women. We need to take off the filthy rags of our old lives and live like who we are—the most blessed beings in the universe, the adopted sons and daughters of God.

How do we live our new lives? It all begins with our thought lives. Think the thoughts in line with who we are, and we will begin living like what we have become.
Colossians 3:12-17 — How Does Jesus Change The Way I Treat People?

November 26, 2017

Good morning. I hope everyone had a great thanksgiving and stuffed themselves with turkey. I love thanksgiving because it reminds us to be thankful for all the good things God has done for us. A heart of thankfulness is very good.

Today, on both of our campuses, we continue our study in the book of Colossians. Last week, we began the third chapter of the book. The first two chapters of Colossians are filled with truth about Jesus. The last two chapters are filled with practical instructions on how we live because of Jesus.

Last week, Paul taught us how our new identity in Jesus takes over our lives. Sexual immorality, anger and lying are not to be part of our life because that is not who we are in Jesus.

This morning, Paul will review who we are in Jesus and tell us things that are now part of our lives because of Jesus. Since Christ is in our hearts, the character of Christ will become part of our lives.

Who Am I?

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved… Colossians 3:12 (ESV)

I am chosen by God.

How many of you feel like you are chosen? For most of us, when we are chosen, it feels like it is only for bad things. You are chosen, but it is to be laid off at Polaris. You are chosen, but it is to have your taxes audited. We tend to feel like we are chosen for bad things. God chooses us for good things. That is Paul’s point.

…he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)

Before the world began, God chose to adopt us into his family. Don’t think you were chosen by God because you were better than anyone else. We were chosen to be loved by God before the world began, before we had done anything.

God chose us to make us the most blessed beings in the universe. For all of eternity, nobody will be closer to Jesus than we will be. For all of eternity, nobody will be more like Jesus, than we will be. Being chosen by God for this blessing is all God’s choosing. It is none of our choosing.

Some of you get hung up on the question, “Why?” You want to know why God chose you. I don’t know why God chose some of us. It is not because any of us were more deserving. In Ephesians 1:6, we learn God chose us for the praise of his glorious grace.
...he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:5–6 (ESV)

That means the reason he chose us was so that we would be a display of God’s undeserved grace. If there is any reason God chose us, it is not because we are more deserving than other people but because we were less deserving than other people so God would get more praise for his undeserved grace.

It is like marriage. After a while, the best thing we can do is stop asking why and just be thankful for the relationship. For example, I still don’t know why Cindy said, “Yes” when I asked her to marry me. I am just glad she said, “Yes.” I can spend all my time getting hung up on why she said, “Yes” to my marriage proposal but it is smarter to just be thankful.

Be filled with gratitude. God chose you for a good thing, to be the most blessed being in the universe through Jesus for all eternity. If that doesn’t put a spring in your step, I don’t know what will.

I am holy for God.

How many of you have holy on your Linked-In page? The Bible tells us that is what we are. We are a holy people. Holy means set apart. God adopted us out of the world. When we don’t act differently from the world, we are going against the grain of our new identity. This is why we feel greater conviction of sin as Christians than we felt before we were Christians.

The opposite of holy is profane. That is to treat something special as if it was ordinary. This is why we have certain days called holidays. They are holy days. These are days we treat different from the rest. Thanksgiving is a holiday. We set it apart as different and as a time to be thankful. We eat turkey and get together with family.

Maybe the best way to think of the difference between holy and profane is our cell phones. Cell phones love to intrude on holy moments and make them profane. For example, how many times have you forgotten to put your phone on mute and it has gone off at the wrong moment. One Sunday, in the early days of cell phones, I was preaching, and a guy's phone rang in the back row. Guess what he did? He answered it in church and started having a conversation during the service. You don’t need to talk on your cell phone while in church. That is a holy time. It is time set apart to be treated differently.

In the same way, as the most blessed beings in the universe, we are a holy people. As a holy people, we are set apart to be different in the world, not to act like everyone else.

I am loved by God.

This means God has great affection and devotion toward us. Some of you feel like you are insignificant or unimportant. Some of you feel like nobody loves you. It feels like if you died, nobody would attend your funeral. As children of
God, we are the objects of his love. God loves you more than you can imagine. You are special. He cares about you. God loves you more than your own parents loved you on the day you were born. Every one of us wants to be loved. That is what drives marriage. I just want somebody to love me unconditionally. God loves you more than anyone can love you. Let that soak in for a moment.

We are the chosen — holy and loved by God. We cannot be more blessed, honored and exalted for all of eternity than we are through Jesus. That means we must live differently. It especially means we do relationships differently. We treat people differently. The character of Christ starts to come out of our lives. Let’s see what that character looks like.

**How does Jesus change my character toward others?**

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience… Colossians 3:12 (ESV)

**Compassionate Hearts**

This means God gives us hearts that care about other people. A compassionate heart has a deep awareness and sympathy toward others suffering. In the Hebrew, it is called a feeling in your stomach, because God gives us the ability to feel other people’s pain. We care about other people in pain because Jesus changes our heart. We see Jesus’ compassionate heart in Matthew 9:36. When he saw the crowds, it says Jesus had compassion on them. He literally felt their pain. This is Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus. Even though he knew he would raise Lazarus, he felt Mary and Martha’s pain at the death of their brother.

In the ancient world, the sick, injured and elderly were often left to fend for themselves. People didn’t care about them. As Christians, God didn’t remake us to be indifferent to the sufferings of others. We are a compassionate people. When we see people in pain, we feel that pain, and we do something about it. Years ago, I read a great book called *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born* by D. James Kennedy. In the book, he describes how orphanages, hospitals, nursing homes, civil liberties, and medicine plus a host of other social graces in the western world have their origin in Christian charity that grew out of the Christian heart of compassion for those in need.

The heart God put in us is not indifferent to others in pain. As Christians, like Jesus had compassion on the crowds, we have compassion for people in need. It is a distinctly Christian quality.

**Kindness**

Kindness is becoming more concerned about our neighbor’s good than our own. It is being warmhearted toward others and sympathetic toward the needs of others. It is getting our eyes off ourselves and thinking about how our actions influence other people. It is not insisting on what I want but being willing to relinquish what I want because it could be inconsiderate toward you. If you are
a teenager, this is picking up after yourself. It may not bother you to live in a pigpen, but it bothers everybody else when you are a slob.

We do not live in a world of kindness where other people are the focus. We live in a world where people typically focus on themselves. For example, we used to take pictures of other people because other people were important. A photo of someone else mattered. Now, we turn the camera around, and it is a photo of me, another photo of me, another photo of me, a photo of you — oops, that is a mistake, delete, another photo of me. We live in a world where we are the center of attention. In all honesty, kindness is on the decline because of the selfie. You hear it all the time when people talk about me, me, me. Kindness is a focus on you, you, you. That was the heart of Jesus. He died for us. His focus was on us, not himself. When he died for us, he didn’t take a selfie while doing it.

**Humility**

In the classical Greek, humility always had a negative connotation. In our culture, humility is also not thought of as virtuous. I checked William Bennett’s Book of Virtues, which is usually a good book. Humility is absent from the table of contents. In our culture, pride is considered good. Humility is considered bad. Humility is about how we think about ourselves. Humility is to think of yourself as small, not to think of yourselves as big. In the news this past week, there was a tweet war between LaVar Ball — who refuses to thank Donald Trump for helping free his son from a Chinese jail — and President Trump. A thank you from LeVar Ball would require humility. Humbling himself is not something he wants to do. He doesn’t want to think of himself as small. He wants to think of himself as big.

Jesus is the one that taught us humility is a virtue, not a vice. In Philippians 2 we see that Jesus set aside all of his rights as God. The one who created the universe took on a human body. He died in our places for our sins. Jesus humbled himself. He could have thought about himself as big. After all, Jesus is big. He chose to think about himself as small. He didn’t self-promote and have an ego issue. In the same way, as God’s people, we don’t promote ourselves. We think about ourselves as small and leave the ego behind. If God wants to lift us up, that is OK. We don’t lift ourselves up.

The reason we have so much conflict in our culture is proud people. There is a lack of humility. Proud people produce conflicts because they won’t humble themselves. I have never seen a nasty conflict between two humble people. Humble people don’t escalate conflicts and problems. They don’t bring difficulties. They are willing to sacrifice themselves to find solutions to difficulties.

**Meekness**

When we think of meekness, many of us think of weakness. A meek person isn’t easy to control, easy to roll over and as spineless as a jelly fish. That is not what meekness means. Jesus was meek. Moses was meek. Meekness is strength under control. It is someone who is very tough but also very tender. Meekness is knowing when to be tough and when to be tender. Let’s say there is a Navy SEAL. He fights the bad guys. He punches people in the face for a living.
He is tough. When the SEAL comes home and is with his family, he is tender, not tough. That is meekness. This is a father that works out at the YMCA lifting weights, but when he comes home he wrestles with his kids in the living room. He can be tough and pin them, but out of love for his kids, he is tender and lets his kids put him to his back.

This is Jesus. Jesus is tough for his people but he is also tender with his people. Jesus was tough with the devil, but he is tender toward us.

Meekness is understanding that most of the time, we need to be tender, not tough. There is a time for each. Meekness is strength under control.

**Patience**

This is not getting angry with other people. It is willing to endure unhappiness. It is taking insults without seeking revenge. Some of you are in difficult marriages. You tell me you have suffered long enough. Your spouse will never change. You want out of the relationship. You shut off the emotional light switch in your relationship. That is the earthly response. It is not the Christ-like response. God has given us patience. Galatians 5:22 tells us patience is a fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Every time you think you cannot endure your marriage any longer, I want you to remember 2 Peter 3:9.

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)*

God was patient toward us. After all the hair-brained, stupid and foolish things we have done, he didn't zap us. He was patient with us, waiting for us to repent. For some of us, he was patient a long time. I am to be patient toward others like Christ is patient toward me. I can be patient with others because Christ is living in me.

Those of you who struggle in this area are already thinking I spent too much time on this point and can't wait for the next point in the outline.

**How does Jesus change my conflicts with others?**

Jesus doesn't just change our character when he lives in us but he also changes our conflicts. Christians handle their disagreements differently than the rest of the world.

*...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Colossians 3:13-15 (ESV)*

Let's see how God changes the way we handle conflicts.
Bear with one another.

This means we put up with other people in spite of our differences. It is not giving up on people or holding grievances against other people. After we get to know people, we discover what is annoying in their lives. We can choose to make an issue of their issues or we can bear with it.

Let me give you an example — snoring. When your spouse snores, you can make a huge issue of it or you can figure out a way to put up with it. You can become critical of them and shove them on the couch in the next room or you can bear with it and wear earplugs.

When we bear with people, we allow our relationship to continue even despite differences. In the modern church, bearing with other Christians is not a strong suit. When we read the Bible correctly, we will love people, even if we don’t agree with them. A number of years ago I pastored a church working in our local ministerial on a community outreach project. One church in town refused to work with us because we didn’t use the King James version of the Bible. It broke apart from other Christians because of our differences. That church couldn’t bear with our differences.

Does this mean issues don’t matter? No. It simply means we need to keep relationships and issues separate. Issues are important but relationships among Christians are most important. If someone is wrong, you won’t be able to help them unless you have a relationship with them. If you invest in a relationship with people, the relationship you have with someone will be strong enough to deal with an issue when it arises. If issues are more important than relationships, every issue will blow up your Christian friendships. Loving relationships are the mark of a healthy Christian. Loving relationships allow us to deal with issues. In conflict, we bear with people, we do everything we can to not break up a relationship.

If there is a complaint, forge like we have been forgiven.

Have any of you had a complaint with another person because he or she did something weird, hateful or stupid? When there is a complaint or a problem, between people, how do we solve it?

We start by forgiving them — as the Lord forgave us, so we must forgive. When someone is frustrating us, annoying us or offending us and we feel like we have a legitimate complaint against them, the first thing we need to do is remember all of the things God forgave us of, then forgive them. When someone is driving you crazy, stop and think of all your own wrongdoing, not their wrongdoing.

Most of the time it doesn’t work that way. We like to think about everything someone has done wrong to us, not everything done wrong by us. When we start by remembering everything done wrong by us we can begin to forgive others for what they have done, even if they aren’t asking for forgiveness. Before we think
of what somebody else needs to be forgiven of, think of what we have been forgiven for.

Since forgiveness is such a big issue, let me explain a little more about forgiveness.

**Forgiveness is putting the case in God’s hands.** It is letting the issue between you and another person go. You leave it in God’s hands. You are no longer the judge. It is in God’s hands to handle the outcome. You let God be the judge. He is a just judge. When we forgive someone, we need to let the case go. Let God take care of it.

**Forgiveness is not the same as trust.** Forgiveness is a gift. Trust is earned. Forgiveness can happen in a moment. Trust takes time. In a marriage, if someone is unfaithful, forgiveness can happen in a moment of time. Regaining trust will take a long time.

**Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same.** We can forgive someone and still part ways. Maybe you are friends with someone and he or she violates you by accessing your personal information in your desk. He or she learns your income and serious numbers. The act is border-line criminal. You can forgive the person but it doesn’t mean you need to have the same kind of relationship you had with him or her before he or she violated your trust.

**Forgiveness often needs to happen more than once.** While forgiveness happens at a point in time, what often happens is the hurt and pain of what someone did to you comes back. You need to forgive the person again and again. Sometimes we learn more about a situation and the scab is picked open. We need to forgive someone again. Sometimes we may need to keep forgiving because we are struggling to put the issue behind us. That is the way forgiveness works.

**Forgiveness frees us from demonic torment.** Satan and demons love to torment people who are hurt. Some of you live tormented lives where you can’t stop thinking of what was done to you. You are haunted by it. When the Bible talks about forgiveness, many times it talks about Satan and demons in the same context, such as Matthew 18 and Ephesians 4. Satan and demons never forget anything. They never forgive anything. They bear a grudge, and they keep a record of wrongs. If you bear a grudge, keep a record of wrongs and don’t forgive, you are acting demonic. You are opening yourself to demonic influence.

When we refuse to forgive, it is saying, I am forgiven but I won’t be forgiving. It is saying I want God to give me the gift of forgiveness but I don’t want to share the gift of forgiveness with anyone else. It is saying what someone has done to me is worse than anything I did to God.

**Love**

The key to getting through a conflict is love. The only way we can work through a conflict is to genuinely love our enemies. If we don’t love people, it
doesn’t matter how eloquent our words are in a conflict, everything we say will be noise.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 1 Corinthians 13:1 (ESV)

As Jesus genuinely loves us, we are called to genuinely love people, especially with those we have a difference. Think of the people where you have a conflict, do you genuinely love them? We were enemies of God, but God genuinely loved us. He didn’t just love us in words. He loved us by actions. He sent his own son to die for us. When we are in a conflict with someone, ask God to help you love him or her, not just with words but in actions. The only way to work through conflict with someone is to love him or her. Even if you can’t work through the conflict with him or her, by genuinely love and showing actions of love, we will have done as much as we possibly can to bridge the conflict between us. This is not the way the world works. It is the way Christians work.

Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

This is saying that in relationships, when things go south and our emotional temperatures start to rise, we need to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

This means we let the peace we have with God through Jesus govern and control the emotional temperature in our hearts. Instead of getting wild, yelling and being irritable, as we have peace with God, we let our peace with God govern and control the way we operate in a conflict.

We all know that when words get louder and people start raising their voices, there is no more progress being made. We put up our defenses. Dialogue goes away, and our defenses go up. That is not the way Christians handle conflict with the spirit of Christ controlling their hearts. We let the peace we have with God control our emotional temperature.

Be Thankful

When we are in a conflict, it is easy to become critical. The Bible describes this as having a critical spirit. We start to see and remember every flaw with everyone. Sometimes we become archaeologists. We dig up flaws from the past. Next we start using absolutist language. “You always do this.” “You never do this.” A lack of thankfulness for people justifies our hatred.

Paul said, instead of making a list of everything someone did, make a list of everything someone did right. Make a list of the things for which you are thank in the life of a person with whom you disagree. In a conflict, the first thing we need to do is remember the things we admire about someone. Before we talk about things we need to correct, we need to talk about things that are correct. The problem is, when we are in a fight, we get hurt. We get emotional. We don’t remember the things we’re thankful for. We only remember the things we don’t
like in people. That is not Christian conflict. We begin with thankfulness for people.

How do we cultivate this character and conduct in our lives?

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 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. Colossians 3:16–17 (ESV)

Let the word of Christ dwell in me richly.

Jesus said man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Just as our bodies need food, our souls need the Word of God. People are healthy when they are fed by the Word of God. If you feed people spiritual junk food, they grow up unhealthy. The world is filled with junk food teaching. The Word of God isn't always what we want, but it is always what we need. Years ago, I heard Alistair Begg say, we don't give our kids whatever they want for dinner. We give our kids what they need to eat, not always what they want to eat. In the same way, the Word of God is what we need to eat. Like broccoli, it is not always what we want to eat but it is what God uses to grow the character of Christ in us.

Teaching refers to imparting knowledge. In good Bible teaching, we should be growing in our knowledge of God. Admonishing means to give correction. While we can study the Bible on our own, teaching and admonishing takes place best in the church. In the church we experience the correction of God's Word and growth from God's Word.

Growing a Christian is like growing a Christmas tree. It involves both feeding and pruning. In the same way, the Word of God builds us up and it cuts us up so we start to look more like Jesus.

Singing songs, hymns and spiritual songs

One of the ways we learn God's Word is by songs, hymns and spiritual songs. The point is we learn the Word of God by singing the Word of God. Singing is a part of the church. Singing is one of the big ways we learn the Word of God at church. The words are a big deal in Christian music. It is also the way we learn about God and the character of Christ is nurtured in us.

Men, in our culture we don't sing. When you go to Menards, there isn't a song leader in the plumbing section because it isn't cool for men to sing. In church, it is cool for men to sing. Most of the men miss this. As men, when we go to a sporting event, do we cheer? Absolutely! We hoot and holler for our team and celebrate when it scores. Church is like a sporting event. It is our weekly celebration of Christ's victory. Jesus scores. Jesus reigns. Satan is defeated. Jesus wins. Men, we get to cheer! That is why men sing at church.
Whatever I do, do everything in the name of Jesus.

This is serving. We serve because of what Christ has done for us. It is healthy and helpful to serve. We live in a world where we exist to be served. The kingdom is not about being served but about serving others. That is what Jesus did when he came to earth. He didn’t come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for us.

Serving is also the fastest way to spiritual growth. It allows us to take all of these things and put them into practice as we work with people.

Conclusion

Since we are the most blessed people in the universe, we live out the character of Christ because we have Christ living in us. That changes the way we do relationships. We genuinely care about people in need. We are kind and considerate of others. We don’t think of ourselves as big, we think of ourselves as small, like Jesus. We are meek. That means being tough and tender. We are patient with others like Jesus is patient with us.

In conflicts, we handle ourselves differently. We put up with other people. We forgive other people when they hurt us. We genuinely love our enemies. We let the peace of Christ control our emotions. We are thankful for the good things in people; we don’t just focus on the bad things in people.

This Christmas season, as we face all the pressure of the holidays and the friction of families mixing together, let our new identity in Christ change the way we treat people. Amen.
December 3, 2017

Good morning. It is great to get together as a church family. This morning, we continue our study of the book of Colossians. This week, we are learning how Jesus changes marriage. Next week, we are learning how Jesus changes parenting. The following week, we will see how Jesus changes the way we work. We have a lot of practical stuff on the horizon for December as we prepare for Christmas.

Typically, we look at larger sections of Colossians. Today, we are slowing way down and looking at only two verses. Let's read them before we study them.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Colossians 3:18–19 (ESV)

Last week, Paul talked about the way Jesus changes our character. The whole theme of Colossians 3 is that as Christians, we are now different people. We have Jesus living inside us. We now live out our new identity in Jesus. We are completely new people in Jesus. Paul wanted us to act like who we are, not who we were before Jesus changed our lives. Earlier in Colossians 3, Paul said we were to put away sexual immorality, anger and lying because that is not who we are. That is who we were. Since we are new people with Jesus living in our hearts, God is cultivating the character of Christ in our lives. We covered that last week. We now have compassionate hearts because of Jesus. We have kindness toward others. We are humble, meek and patient. We bear with other people’s idiosyncrasies. We forgive other people like Christ forgave us. We love other people like Jesus loves us. That is who we are with Jesus in us. Paul said to lean in to who we are in Jesus, not who we were before him.

Just as sin formerly ruled our character, sin also ruled in our marriages. Sin controlled the way a husband and wife lived together in marriage. Just as Jesus changed our character and we lean in to what he is doing, in the same way, Jesus changes our marriages. We are to lean in to who Jesus is changing us to be so in our marriages we reflect the character of Christ.

Let's dive into our study and begin with some preliminary information.

Paul’s words on marriage were shocking.

Some of the things Paul said about the way Jesus changes marriage were shocking. Paul said wives are to submit to their husbands. That wasn’t shocking. That was common in that day. What was shocking was Paul told husbands to love their wives. In that culture, nobody told men what to do in their marriages. Nobody exercised authority over men in their homes. Men did what they wanted. They were rulers of the home domain.
There is no ancient household code, outside of the Bible, that commands men to love their wives and children. In the ancient world, wives belonged to their husbands like property. When ancient non-biblical writers described duties in a marriage, all the duties were given to the wife. Men had no duties. Paul addressed husbands and wives equally. Both husbands and wives have duties in marriage. What Paul did, by giving husbands duties in marriage, was elevate women and their status in the ancient world.

Remember, what we find offensive about Paul’s words — that a wife is to submit to her husband’s leadership — is what they considered normal. The part that we find normal — that a husband is to love his wife — is the part they considered offensive. Paul said that in marriage both a husband and a wife have duties. That was shocking. The husband was to love his wife and the wife was to submit to her husband’s leadership.

**God intended marriage to reflect the Trinity. Marriage is equality with hierarchy.**

The way the Bible describes marriage is equality with hierarchy. This pattern comes from God. There is equality and hierarchy in the triune God. For example, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all called God, but there is a hierarchy between them. The Father planned creation but the Son made creation. The Father planned redemption. Jesus submitted to his father’s will and carried out redemption by humbling himself to take on a human body and die on the cross.

Just as there is equality with hierarchy in the Godhead, there is to be equality plus hierarchy in marriage. A wife is equal to her husband in personhood, value and worth, but she is under his headship and is to be submissive to his leadership in their marriage.

Recognizing equality in personhood but submission in leadership is essential for a marriage to succeed. If this doesn’t exist in your marriage, it will be difficult. Remember sin doesn’t just influence our hearts; it distorts our understanding of marriage and the way it works. These short verses are instructions on how Jesus redeems and restores marriage to be what God intended it to be.

**Wives are to submit and help their husbands.**

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Colossians 3:18 (ESV)

When women hear these words, they immediately freak out and picture authoritarian abusive leadership. That is a misunderstanding. As we learned last week, husbands are to display the character of Christ in all their relationships, especially in their relationship with their wife. A husband is to have a compassionate heart toward his wife. He is to be filled with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience toward his wife. He is to bear with the idiosyncrasies of his wife. He is to forgive his wife like Christ forgave him. He is to love his wife like Christ loves him. That is the kind of husband a wife is called to submit to. A wife
is called to submit to a husband who cares about her, loves her and joyfully sacrifices for her.

**The Christian life is one of submission.**

While women bristle against the idea of submission, we must remember that the entire Christian life is one of submission to authority. Submission is not just for wives. Romans 13:1 tells us that as Christians, we submit to the governing authorities. 1 Corinthians 16:16 tells us that as Christians, we are to submit to our church leaders. Titus 2:9 tells us Christian slaves are to submit to their masters, even if they don’t like them. Luke 2:51 tells us even Jesus submitted to the leadership of his parents when he was a child because submission is the proper thing to do. As Christians, the way we live out our faith is we gladly place ourselves in submission to those in authority God placed over us. That includes men and women. Sin is a desire for rebellion against the authority God establishes over us for our love, protection and care.

**But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.** 1 Corinthians 11:3 (ESV)

**Nobody can be saved without embracing submission.**

I know some of you are still struggling against the idea of submission. Remember submission is so core to the Christian faith that nobody can be saved without it. The way people are saved is by submitting to Jesus as their Lord and master. It involves accepting Jesus’ authority over us and submitting to Christ’s leadership in our lives. It is impossible for someone to say he wants the salvation offered by Christ without submitting to the leadership of Christ.

It is impossible to say, “I want to submit to the leadership of Christ but when Jesus talks to me about submitting to the leadership of my husband, I refuse to listen.” The rebellion you have is not first against your husband, it is against Jesus.

Please understand submission is not giving permission for a husband to bully or abuse his wife. We submit to those who have authority over us because those in authority over us should care, love and protect us.

In the second half of this message we will see that a husband has a responsibility for making his wife’s submission to his leadership a good and joyful action.

**A wife’s submission is hard because of sin.**

The reason submission is hard is because of sin. Sometimes there is sin on husband’s part because he doesn’t treat his wife with the respect and love she deserves. Often there is sin on a wife’s part because she has an innate desire to rebel against her husband’s leadership. We see this in Genesis. Look what the relationship was like between a husband and wife before sin entered the world in Genesis 2.
Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Genesis 2:18 (ESV)

I want you to notice in Genesis, before sin entered the world, Adam was given his wife to be a helpmate. He was not given a wife to be a leader over him but a helpmate for him. A wife as a helpmate to Adam was not a sinful thing. It was a good thing. It was a needed thing. This is before sin entered the world.

Look what happened when sin entered the world in Genesis 3.

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” Genesis 3:16 (ESV)

I want to focus on where it says, “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband.” Some other translations say, “Your desire shall be for your husband.” The Hebrew word for desire means desire for your husband’s position. This is why the ESV says the curse of sin creates a desire in a wife to be contrary to her husband. The way sin manifests itself in marriage is a wife — who was created by God to be her husband’s helpmate — will have a desire to be rebel against her husband and be the leader over her husband instead of a helpmate. Sin gives a wife the desire to manipulate and rule over her husband in their home. Of course, many men encourage this by their own sinful, selfish behavior, but we will deal with that in a few minutes.

This is why Paul said a wife is to submit to her husband’s leadership as is fitting in the Lord. When Christ comes into a wife’s life, it is fitting for a wife to desire to be the Genesis 2 helpmate that God originally created her to be, not the Genesis 3 woman who seeks to undermine her husband.

Every time I talk about a wife submitting to her husband a bunch of you freak out and I get lots of mail. Hoping to head this off, let me take a few minutes to explain what submission does not mean.

What does submission not mean.

1. **Submission is not for single women.** This command is for married couples. As a single woman, you do not need to submit to the leadership of another man that is not your husband. Many women have a good, God-given innate desire to be helpmate. They find themselves becoming submissive in an inappropriate way to a man that is their boss or their boyfriend. That is not biblical submission. This only applies to your husband, not all men.

2. **Submission does not apply outside the home (and the church).** This does not speak to politics or the workforce. Our governor is a woman. We need to submit to her leadership. Your boss may be a woman. Since she is your boss, you submit to her leadership. This is limited to marriage, which is for home, and to the church, which is God’s home.

3. **Submission to a husband is different than obeying a husband.** In the next few verses children will be told to obey their parents. Slaves will be told
to obey their masters. Wives are not told to obey their husbands but to submit to their husbands. Why did Paul use a different word? There is a subtle but important distinction. The idea of obey means giving orders. They are commands be obeyed. They are not matters to be discussed. A parent tells his child to clean her room. Those are orders to be obeyed. Submit means to voluntarily place oneself under another’s authority. The idea is that when a husband and wife don’t see eye to eye, there is a discussion. There is high value to both the wife’s and husband’s opinions. If, after discussion, you cannot reach an agreement, that is when a wife voluntarily submits to her husband. Ninety-nine percent of the time, after discussion between a husband and wife they will either see eye to eye or the husband or wife will joyfully give up his or her desires to honor his or her spouse’s desires. Most of the time, it is the husband that will joyfully submit. If you are a husband pulling the submit card all the time in your marriage, there is something wrong in your marriage. I can only think of two or three times in my marriage where I pulled this card. One time is when we were engaged, and I needed parts to repair my car. Some of you know Cindy used to work at an auto parts store. She knew the owners well. They loved her and always gave her a generous discount whenever she came in. Unfortunately, the only time she could pick up the parts for my car was on Saturday, when her old boyfriend worked at the store. She assured me she had no affections for him, but as a man, I know what men are like. Her old boyfriend wasn’t happy when she broke off the relationship. I didn’t want him around my fiancé. I asked her to not take advantage of the discount because I didn’t want her seeing him or talking with him. I didn’t trust him. My woman is a penny pinching wife. Telling her to not get a discount is like telling her to eat rotten fish. Everything in her wants to save money. Thankfully she chose to submit, and it set a great precedent for our marriage. That is the kind of stuff where you pull the submit card. It isn’t for something trivial.

4. Submission does not mean a wife is less valuable, intelligent or competent. One of the first things that happens in a healthy marriage is a husband realizes there are a lot of things his wife is much better at than he ever realized. He quickly becomes grateful she is around. In fact, he starts to wonder how he survived so long without her. He starts to realize his wife is very smart and gifted. She is different from him and gifted in ways he needs. God was right when he said it is not good for a man to be alone. A husband does need a helpmate. It doesn’t take long for a smart husband to realize his wife is highly valuable, intelligent and competent even if he scored higher than she did on the ACT. A smart husband will wake up every morning praising God for the good gift of his wife.

5. Submission does not mean a wife can’t influence her husband. There is a difference between influence and manipulation. Manipulation is evil. Influence is wise and respectful. It is appropriate for a wife to insert herself in a loving and respectful way to help her husband make the best decisions. As men, we sometimes get on a project like a bloodhound on a scent trail and we
don’t stop to think things through. If a wife thinks her husband needs her opinion and he hasn’t sought that opinion, she needs to wisely influence him. Ladies, you know the best time to talk to your husband. It is usually after dinner. You also know the right attitude to use when you talk with him. You need to be gentle and respectful when you share your opinion. Many times, when a wife approaches her husband with love and gentleness, he will thank you for your great idea. There is nothing wrong with seeking to influence your husband in the right way. Peter even told wives to seek to influence their husbands for Jesus by conducting themselves in a respectful and loving way.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 1 Peter 3:1–2 (ESV)

6. Submission is voluntarily given, not forcefully taken. While submission is a command given to wives, it involves a wife voluntarily wanting to place herself in the position of being the helpmate of her husband. It is the willing attitude of her heart, not the forced demeanor of her life. The key to a wife voluntarily submitting herself to the leadership of her husband is the word relationship. A wife will voluntarily place herself under the leadership of someone else she loves and trusts.

7. Submission is not following a husband into sin. If a husband asks his wife to do something sinful, she is not obligated to follow his authority. Let’s say a husband and wife work together and the husband asks his wife to call a client and tell him the company will ship a product on Monday when she knows full well the product won’t ship until Friday. That is lying. You don’t submit to your husband’s leadership if he is leading you in sin. You tell him you have a higher leader whose name is Jesus.

8. Submission is not being domineering or overbearing. In our culture, men are known for being domineering and overbearing. Domineering and bullying is not gender specific. Women are capable of being this way. Sometimes it is the volume, the emotion, the screaming. Sometimes it is threatening to divorce your husband, take the kids plus half his resources unless you get your way. (That is not called marriage. That is called hostage negotiation.) A submissive wife has gentle conduct and doesn’t act like a beast or bully.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 1 Peter 3:1–2 (ESV)

9. Submission is treating a husband with respect around the children. If you are a wife frustrated with your husband, be careful about venting your anger against your husband to your children. If you model disrespect of authority to your children, they will learn to disrespect their father. They will also learn to disrespect other authorities, including you! If you want your
children to respect authority, you need to begin by modeling respect toward their father, even when you are angry at him.

**Husbands are to love and cherish their wives.**

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Colossians 3:19 (ESV)

As I mentioned before, wives submitting to their husbands was not shocking in the Colossian culture. Requiring a husband to love his wife was shocking. No other household code in the ancient world required a husband to love his wife.

What makes this especially shocking is the word used for love. We have one word for love. The Greek language has numerous words to describe the different types of love. There is *eros* love, from which we get our word erotic love. It is sexual love. Men, I know you are disappointed but this is not the kind of love a husband is required to show to his wife. There is *phileo*, which means friendship. This is also not the kind of love God requires a husband to show toward his wife. The word used here is *agape*. It means love of choice. It is choosing to love someone irrespective of how you feel or how attractive she is.

It means someone may be very unlovely but you choose to love her anyway. Romantic love is a good part of marriage, but it does not work as the foundation of a marriage. Agape is a cold, emotionless choice to love someone in spite of what you may feel. That is the foundation of marriage. Many men divorce their wives when they think their wives are no longer lovely. Paul said husbands are commanded to love their wives no matter what they may feel about their wife and no matter how lovely their wife may look or not look.

Agape love is the kind of love Jesus has for us. Jesus loves us when we are unlovely. Jesus’ love is consistent toward us, even in our sinful choices and bad moments. Jesus doesn’t have a bad day and sometimes withdraw his love from us. Husbands are to love their wives with the same kind of love Christ has for us.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)

A wife doesn’t struggle to submit to the leadership of a husband that she knows loves her no matter what she looks like and no matter how she may feel or act.

**What does it mean for a husband to love his wife?**

1. **Before a woman is a wife, remember she is a daughter.** I have one daughter. I pray for her future husband every day. I want him to be a loving, life-giving man who helps my daughter become more than she could be on her own. I want him to treat her with the utmost respect and tender love. I want her to have a husband that when he disagrees with her, he will disagree with her lovingly and gently. Fathers, you know how you want a man to treat
your daughter. You know that if a man starts yelling at your daughter, slapping your daughter in the face, cussing your daughter out, shoving her around the room or striking her on the floor; you load the hunting rifle. She is your little girl. Your wife is a daddy’s little girl. You treat your wife the way you want another man treating your precious daughter. Even more thought-provoking is that even if your wife’s earthly father is not around your house to see how you treat her, she is the precious daughter of her heavenly father. Your heavenly father does see how you treat your wife behind closed doors. Some of you feel uneasy right now. It is good if the Lord gives us a little rebuke. Repent and treat our wives better.

2. **Remember the difference between being the head of a wife and the boss of a wife.** The boss of the wife means you tell her every little thing to do. The head of wife doesn’t mean you control her but you gently, love, lead and care for her. One illustration I ran across said a husband should think of his wife like a garden. As a husband, you are the gardener. The gardener must be gentle with the plants because they break if you are rough. In the same way, you must be gentle with your wife. A gardener needs to weed the garden every day. If he ignores his garden, it won’t take long for weeds to overrun the garden. In the same way, a husband needs to tend to his wife every day and weed her emotional world. Caring for a garden is hard work. Loving a wife is hard work. Here is the payoff. If you take care of your garden, it produces an abundant harvest that blesses you. In the same way, when you take care of your wife, she will richly bless you in the end.

3. **A husband will get from his wife the love he gives to his wife.** Men, your wife is a mirror. She will reflect back to you what you give to her. If you are cold, uncaring and distant, expect her to become cold, uncaring and distant toward you. A wife will model back to you what you model to her. If you wish she took more of an interest in health and fitness, you need to take more of an interest in health and fitness and ask her to join you. If you wish she took more of an interest in cooking, you take more of an interest in spending time with her in the kitchen. Many men complain their wives don’t love them or have an interest in them. When I talk with them, I discover these men are not loving their wives or having an interest in their wives. They are just getting back from their wives the kind of love they are giving to their wives. A wife reflects back to her husband the love or the lack of love, she receives from her husband. Paul wisely put it this way:

   *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* Ephesians 5:28 (ESV)

4. **Loving your wife means making her life better with you than apart from you.** In every relationship there are times when we feel we are more of a giver than a receiver. That is natural. Husbands, our goal is that our wives should feel their lives are much better with us than they could have ever been apart from us.
Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25–27 (ESV)

Who feels his life is much better with Jesus than it could have ever been without him? All of us say our lives are so much better because of Jesus. He saved us from our sin and made us into much better people. In the same way, a Christian wife should feel that having her husband makes her much better than she could be on her own. She has a husband like Jesus that sacrifices for her. Like Jesus, her husband is committed to sacrificing for her. She is a more beautiful person with him than apart from him. Just as a wife wakes up every morning saying thank you Jesus for transforming her life, as a husband, our goal is that our wives wake up every morning and say the same thing about us because we make their lives so much better.

5. **When a wife hears that a husband must love her, she hears “be my best friend.”** The secret of a lasting marriage is having a marriage built on a great friendship. The June 1986 issue of *Psychology Today* did a survey of what makes marriages last. The No. 1 factor in lasting marriages is that spouses were best friends. The best marriages happen between best friends. This is what we learn in the Song of Solomon.

   His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. Song of Solomon 5:16 (ESV)

   **What does it mean for a husband to be harsh with his wife?**

   Husbands are also told to not be harsh with their wives. Why would Paul say this? The word harsh means to make bitter. It is also used to describe someone that feels sick to her stomach.

   Earlier we saw in Genesis that the curse of sin gives a wife the desire to rebel against her husband’s authority over her in marriage. There is a similar but opposite influence sin has on a husband in marriage.

   To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” Genesis 3:16 (ESV)

   The word for rule means harsh authoritarian rule. Sin influences men in marriage by giving them a heart that desires to harshly rule over their wives. It is the kind of rule that a hammer has over a nail. When a nail doesn’t move into place, a hammer beats it into place.

   Paul said Genesis tells us how sin works in a marriage. It leads a husband to be harsh toward his wife. That is who you we were before Christ. That is not who you are now in Christ. Christ in us makes us loving toward our wives. Lean in to your new identity in Jesus. Love your wife. Don’t be harsh with her.
How can a husband be harsh toward his wife?

1. **Making more emotional withdraws than deposits.** Think of your wife like a bank. Criticisms are withdraws. Affirmations are deposits. It takes five or more affirmations to cancel the debt of one criticism. You have to be careful to not run a negative balance. Men, you don’t want to run a negative balance in your wife’s emotional bank for any length of time. If you run too much negative balance for too long, wives tend to shut down the bank. They close out their emotional account with you and move on. It is called divorce. That is not biblically right. I am telling you what typically happens. Women get to a point in a relationship where their emotional banks are too far in the red so they shut down and walk away. Most men never see it coming. Make lots of emotional deposits. Don’t be harsh with your wife.

2. **Stop yelling, cursing or physically shoving your wife.** Getting loud or getting physical makes some serious withdraws from a wife’s emotional bank. Men, when you raise your voice, you typically shut things down. You may not think you are yelling but if your wife thinks you are yelling or your kids are shaking like a leaf, you are yelling. Men, you are bigger and scarier than you realize. Let me give you some wisdom I try to put into practice. Go down in volume when you want to go up in force. Don’t go up in volume to go up in force. When you have a serious point to make, talk slowly, deliberately and calmly. You will make much better traction in making your point and your relationship with your wife will be maintained.

3. **Never publicly humiliate your wife, especially on social media.** If your wife does something foolish, even though all your friends at work are talking about the dumb things their wives did, you don’t talk about the dumb things your wife did. You always protect her reputation. You are the guardian of her galaxy. Never put her in a bad light, unless she says you can share the story. One of the things that is getting more common is to humiliate a spouse on social media. Don’t put unflattering pictures of your spouse online. If your wife doesn’t approve of the picture, don’t post the picture.

4. **Remember the difference between a sin and a mistake.** A few years ago — I do have permission to tell this story — in the busyness of life, I came home to an upset wife. She sat me down to tell me she really messed up. My heart was in my throat. What great sin had she done? I braced myself for the worst. It turns out she forgot to send in our quarterly taxes. She felt terrible. She was busy and just forgot. That was an opportunity to get upset, but it was not a sin. It was a mistake. Men, every marriage crisis is an opportunity to either take a big step forward or backward in your relationship. How you handle those times will either strengthen your marriage or ruin your marriage. Thankfully, I think I handled that one well. There are plenty I haven’t handled well.

5. **Your wife needs a husband, not a roommate.** In our busy world, it is easy for a husband to become detached from his wife. He works all day. He comes home, eats dinner then he picks up his laptop and goes back to work.
Sometimes he heads out to the garage to work on a project. Finally, he comes to bed at night and hasn’t spent much time with his wife. The next day it happens all over again. That is being a roommate to your wife. It is not being a husband to your wife. A wife needs time and attention. If being a roommate is the way you treat your wife, you are being harsh toward her.

6. **Don’t be boring.** Some of us are overworked and stressed. We come home and to calm down we stare at a blank wall just to settle our nerves. That is me. Not only do some of us men want to stay home but we never want to go on a date. We never spend money on our wives. We are part of the boring men club. Like many of you, I can be a cheapskate. It is important to be creative and date your wife. Take her to the YMCA and work out together. Join a YMCA class together. Go for a Starbucks date together. After you both drink enough caffeine, you will find something to talk about. It works every time.

   *Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.* Ecclesiastes 9:9 (ESV)

7. **When a man is harsh with his wife, it affects his relationship with God.** One of the fastest ways to frustrate your relationship with God is to be harsh with your wife.

   *Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.* 1 Peter 3:7 (ESV)

**Conclusion**

Sin didn’t just infect our hearts, sin infected our marriages. Sin is what gives a wife a desire to not be a helpmate to her husband but to manipulate him. Sin is what gives a husband the desire to not love his wife but to be harsh with her.

We are filled with gratitude to Jesus. He didn’t just make us new people on the inside but he transforms our marriages by restoring husbands and wives to the delight and joy in their God-given marital roles. Men, lean in to the husband Christ has recreated you to be. Be a husband that is not harsh with your wife but joyfully loves and sacrifices for your wife, like Jesus did for you. Women, submit to the husband that loves you and be the helpmate he desperately needs. That is the woman Christ recreated you to be.

We are going to close with communion. Communion is a time when we reflect on our relationships with God and that it is only possible through Jesus. If you are married, when the communion is passed, take the time to reflect on your marriage. Are you being the kind of husband Jesus remade you to be or are you living like you did before Jesus and being harsh with your wife? Ladies, during communion time ask Christ if you are being the kind of wife Christ has re-created you to be, the helpmate your husband desperately needs?
We practice open communion, which means if you have trusted in Jesus as your savior, you are welcome to join us. We do want to remind you that if you are a believer living in intentional rebellion against God, 1 Corinthians 11:29, urges you not to take the Lord’s Supper without repentance.

If you are single, use this time of communion to reflect on the kind of man or woman you are growing into. Will you be the kind of husband or wife in Christ that your future spouse desperately needs?
December 10, 2017

Good morning. I hope everyone is enjoying getting ready for Christmas and celebrating the birth of our savior. It will be here before we know it. This morning, we continue our study in the book of Colossians. Today, we learn how Jesus changes parenting. Next week, we will see how Jesus changes the way we work. On the morning of December 24, we take a break from Colossians and learn where we find Jesus before the manger. On Christmas Eve, I will share a devotional on what happened when Jesus was born in the manger. We have a lot coming up in December.

Last week, we slowed down our study in Colossians to look at two verses on marriage. This morning, we will do the same thing as we look at the next two verses in Colossians which talk about the Christian home. Let’s begin by reading them.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Colossians 3:20–21 (ESV)

What is the biblical background?

We need to understand these commands in their biblical and historical contexts. First, let’s look at their biblical context. In Colossians 3, Paul taught us how Jesus changes a life. He changes lives from the inside out. When Jesus comes into our lives, he gives us a new set of desires that are Jesus' desires mirrored in us. He gives us a new way of thinking that is Jesus’ way of thinking mirrored in us. Paul’s point was the Christian life is living out of us the new life of Jesus that is in us.

Paul was not telling us to act like someone we are not. He tells us to act like the new people we are because of Jesus in us. In these verses, Paul's point was that Christian children and Christian parents think differently. They act differently because Jesus is living in them. The biblical background of these verses is Paul told children and parents to be who you are in Jesus, not to pretend to be someone you are not.

What is the historical background?

The next thing we need to understand is the historical background. In the Roman Empire, just as a husband held absolute control over his wife so she could be treated like a piece of property, in the same way a father had absolute control over his children. Your children were considered part of your estate. They were another form of livestock. This means a father could abuse his children and nobody could stop him. A father could legally kill his children. In fact, when children were born, they were placed at their father’s feet. If the father decided
the child would be kept, the child was welcomed into the family. If the father didn’t accept the child at birth, it was brought outside the city where the infant died of exposure to the elements and was eaten by animals. People of the worst sort of character patrolled the fields around Roman cities at night to find discarded children. The discarded children were picked up by sadistic people and used as slaves, prostitutes or for other twisted purposes.\(^6\)

If a father found himself short of funds, he could sell his children into slavery. Children had no rights. If you had a good dad, things went well. If your dad was weird, things did not go well. There was nothing you could do about it. When Paul said parents are not provoke or discourage their children, that was not the cultural norm of the day. That was uniquely Christian.

Paul also said children are to obey their parents in everything. In that day, obedience to parents was normal. It was expected. Disobedience to parents could be deadly. Today, things are different. Disobedience to parents is considered normal. Children are expected to rebel. By the time children reach puberty, it is expected they will become obstinate toward their parents and defy parental authority. We see this all the time in movies and television. The classic movie about this was Ferris Bueller’s Day Off.

Today, teenage rebellion is so common, we think it is a stage every young adult passes through. Teenage rebellion isn’t a stage children pass through. Rebellion may be normal for many teenagers but it is not normative for all teenagers. All teenagers do not need to rebel and break their parents’ hearts. Teenage rebellion is rooted in sin, not maturity. This morning we will see some of the dangers that go with rebellion, especially for Christians teens.

The key thing to remember is in the first century, it was common for parents to be harsh with their children. Today, we have the opposite where most parents live for their children. In the first century, children rarely rebelled against their parents. Today, it is the opposite. Rebellion is considered normal. That is the historical background for these verses. Let’s study them.

**Children** honor Christ by obeying their parents in everything.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Colossians 3:20 (ESV)

“Children” refers to ones living in dependence on their parents.

Let’s work through this verse. The first word is “child.” This word in the Greek typically refers to a younger son or daughter still living in dependence on their parents. Since it is a child living in dependence on their parents, in one sense it can address children from ages 2 to age 22 if they are living in dependence on their parents. Obviously, younger children live in more dependence on their parents than older children. That is normal. If you are out of high school and still living in dependence on your parents for your cell phone bill,

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your car insurance, your health insurance, your life insurance, and your college tuition, this means you are still under your parents’ authority and you need to listen and obey your parents. Granted, you enjoy more independence than when you lived at home, but you are still dependent on your parents and need to listen to them. The typical full transition from childhood dependence to adult independence usually takes place at marriage. It can also take place when you are living on your own and financially supporting yourself.

What is the difference between young children obeying their parents and older children obeying their parents?

When children are young, they need to obey their parents primarily for their own safety. When kids are young, Mom and Dad tell them not to climb the bookcase so they don’t die. Mom or Dad tells them to stop playing with pots on the stove so they don’t get burned. Younger children are given commands, and they need to obey.

As children get older, they still need to listen and obey their parents until they are on their own, but instead of safety, the discussions are more around wisdom and how to make good choices. Instead of short commands to obey, they are discussions in which you try to help a son or daughter think rightly and wisely. Obeying Mom and Dad begins by focusing on controlling a child’s behavior for their safety. As children get older, obedience moves to discussing topics that teach children to increase their wisdom.

When a child gets to be 18 to 22 years of age, if you are not on your own financially, while their parents shouldn’t treat you like they did when you were 2 years old, parents still have a right to speak into their child’s life while you are still in a state of dependence on them. That means if you are 20 years old and your parents are helping with car insurance, college bills and a cell phone but you one day decide to buy a motorcycle, your parents have a right to say, “No.” When you can take care of your own bills, then buy your motorcycle. In general, the principle is, as a child gets older you move from telling them what to do to teaching them how to make wise choices.

There is a difference between honoring parents and obeying parents.

Exodus 20:12 tells us to honor our parents. Exodus 20:12 is primarily, but not exclusively, directed to adult children honoring their aging parents.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Exodus 20:12 (ESV)

Paul’s command for children to obey their parents in Colossians is directed to younger children still living in dependence on their parents. When you are an adult child, you make your own decisions. You make your own choices. Adult children have a responsibility to honor their parents but once they are living in
independence, they do not have a responsibility to obey their parents. Adult children should still seek their parents’ counsel and their prayers but adult children make their own decisions. Obeying is what we do when we are dependent on our parents. Honoring is what we do for all of our lives toward our parents.

**What does a child’s obedience NOT look like?**

Let me take a few minutes to explain what obedience to parents does not look like. This is geared toward younger children. Many of these I learned from a book called *What the Bible Says About Child Training* by Richard Fugate.

1. **Obedience is not counting.** When our kids were young, Cindy would tell them dinner was ready, but they would keep watching VeggieTales or playing their games. Finally, she would say, “I am going to count to three and you must be at the dinner table.” They would wait until she said “Two,” then run to the table sliding into their chairs like a baseball player sliding into home plate. We were teaching our kids obedience is not required until we counted to the number two. They were only in trouble when we said the number three. That was not teaching obedience. It was teaching disobedience and procrastination. Cindy and I eventually changed our strategy. Cindy would say to the kids, “It is time for dinner. What did I say?” If the kids didn’t come a few minutes after telling us they heard the dinner time message, we took care of discipline. At first, they freaked out and said, “You didn’t count to number three!” We don’t need to count. When mom says, “It is time for dinner,” you need to obey. Obedience is not counting.

2. **Obedience is not yelling.** Sometimes we teach our kids they do not need to obey until we raise our voices. They can get away with doing what they want until Mom or Dad gets angry. That is not obedience. Let’s take the dinner example. Mom says to her children, “Dinner is ready. What did I say?” If they don’t come after a few minutes after telling us they heard the dinner time message, we took care of discipline. At first, they freaked out and said, “You didn’t count to number three!” We don’t need to count. When mom says, “It is time for dinner,” you need to obey. Obedience is not counting.

3. **Obedience does not always require an explanation.** Children need to learn to obey without explanation. This is especially true with young children. Some of us have future lawyers for kids. Whenever we ask them to do something, instead of obeying us, they keep asking the question, “Why?” We need to teach our children that obedience to parents doesn’t always need an explanation. Sometimes the, “Why” question is a stall tactic to delay or avoid obedience. Sometimes the answer to the “Why” question is legitimate but the answer can come later. Sometimes the reasons are too complex for young children to understand. Children need to learn to obey their parents even if they don’t understand why their parents tell them to do something. The same is true for us with our heavenly father. There are many things in God’s Word where God does not answer the “Why” question. God doesn’t always give us
the answer why he lets tough times in our lives. He often doesn’t tell us why we get sick. He just tells us to trust him and obey him in those tough times. That is the story of Abraham heading to the Promised Land. He didn’t tell Abraham all the reasons why he was going to the Promised Land. Abraham had to learn to trust and obey God’s word without all his “Why” questions being answered. The same is true with our children. They need to learn to trust and obey their parents even if they don’t have all their questions answered. That being said, as a child matures, we handle him or her differently. As a child gets older the emphasis moves from obedience to his or her parents to a greater explanation. Even though parents can ask for complete obedience, for the sake of our kids’ growth, we spend time answering the “Why” questions.

4. **Obedience is not reverse psychology.** Some parents are tempted into this with strong-willed children. If you want them to do something, you tell them to do the exact opposite so they do what you want them to do. This is telling your children not to eat their vegetables because vegetable are bad for you. You hope that just to spite you, your kids will eat their Brussel sprouts. Sometimes this actually works. You get the results you want out of your children because you tricked them into obedience. The problem is that while they did the right actions, those actions didn’t come from the right heart, which is more important than eating their vegetables. You end up training a child’s hearts to disobey their parents. A disobedient heart is a more serious problem than not eating Brussel sprouts.

5. **Obedience is not bribing.** Bribing your children to obey your words is not obedience. If you clean up your room, I will give you an extra dessert after dinner. If you stop hitting your brother, you can have a candy bar. Our former president tried bribing North Korea. He paid it money to not develop nuclear weapons and missiles. How well did that work? Bribing a child to obedience doesn’t address the problem of the disobedient heart. When your child asks you what he will get if he will obey you, tell him he gets to live. You don’t need to bribe a child to obey you.

6. **Obedience is not tolerating situational manipulation.** In our culture, everyone is afraid to discipline their children in public. We are worried someone will turn us into DHS, especially if we spank our children. Even if we discipline our children in a controlled, calm manner, everyone is worried the government will take away their kids. Somehow, kids learn early that in public they can get away with more than home. They use it to their advantage. When Mom and Dad are in the grocery store or the mall, kids love to act up because they know Mom and Dad can’t stop them. I was blessed with a very good wife who caught onto the situational manipulation trick. When our kids threw a fit in the grocery store and she whispered in their ear, “Do I need to take you to the car?” At first, the kids didn’t believe she would do it but they don’t know her like I do. She would calmly leave the full grocery cart in the store. Then she walked the child to the car. We call this the walk of shame. Then she sat with him or her in the back seat. What happened next is a
secret but let’s just say her Ford Explorer had tinted windows. After one or two walks of shame and back seat talks they learned not to go crazy in the grocery store.

7. **A child’s obedience should be in all things, not just some things.** Every kid has areas where they are more compliant and areas where they are more defiant. Paul was clear — Christian children display their faith by living in complete obedience to their parents. Some kids are great at coming to dinner on time because they love food, but they refuse to do their chores around the house. It is easy to begin cheering for children with a 50 percent completion rate on obedience. That is not obedience. The Christian child displays his faith by living in obedience to his parents in everything, not just some things. Jesus was a child. Jesus grew up in a Christian home. Did Jesus obey his parents on some things or in all things? All things. When Jesus was 12, his parents left him behind in Jerusalem. His parents eventually found him at the temple. Look how he conducted himself around his parents as a preteen.

   And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. Luke 2:49–51 (ESV)

8. **Obedience means the home is not a democracy.** There are some parenting books that tell you everybody in the home has a vote and the home is run like a democracy. There is nothing wrong with giving children the opportunity for input on some things but that doesn’t mean your house is a democracy. Children need parents, not peers. Parents have a God-given responsibility to be in charge. We set our kids’ schedules. We don’t let our kids do whatever they want. We control where they go and what they do. We are responsible for how long they stay at a friend’s house. At times, we need to be heavy and say, “No.” If we function like peers of our children, not parents for our children, we will raise little tyrants that think the world revolves around them. It doesn’t. Of course, there are times when children can vote on family decisions, but parents are still responsible for the family. Parents can always overrule. I like the way a father instructs his son in the book of Proverbs on what happens to children that are not disciplined by their parents.

   He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray. Proverbs 5:23 (ESV)

   **Why is a child’s rebellion serious?**

   I mentioned earlier that childhood rebellion and teenage rebellion are considered a normal part of our culture. They are considered a right of passage. It doesn’t have to be that way. For Christian children, it shouldn’t be that way. When Paul told children to obey their parents in everything, he was writing to Christians parents and Christian children. Jesus didn’t rebel against his parents.
You don’t have to rebel against your parents. Look what the Bible says about rebellion.

1. Rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft.

   For rebellion is as the sin of divination… 1 Samuel 15:23 (ESV)

   In this passage, King Saul rebelled against God. He went from being the king to offering sacrifices on the altar. He did this because he had rebellion in his heart. I simply want to point out that rebellion against the authority God establishes is taken seriously by God. Rebellion against parents may be what everybody else does, but it shouldn’t be what a Christian teenager does. Teenage rebellion doesn’t come from a heart that is mature in Christ. It comes from a sinful heart. As a result of his rebellion, Saul lost his kingship.

2. Rebellion leads to a tragic death.

   The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. Proverbs 30:17 (ESV)

   This Proverb graphically illustrates that young adults who disobey their parents are literally on a dead-end road. This should be taken literally. How many teenagers end up as drug addicts because they disobeyed the pleading warnings of their parents to get away from drugs and away from the group of friends giving them the drugs? How many teenagers die of opioids because they wouldn’t listen to the dire warnings of their mother and father against the drug? I have done the funerals of young adults who chose to disobey their parents and ended up in substance abuse that killed them. Their deaths were violent and shameful. Where did their problems begin? It wasn’t with the drugs. It started with the sinful rebellion in their hearts that wouldn’t listen to the pleading advice of parents. Young adults, you have no idea how much your Christian parents love you and how much they will do for you if you stay connected and obedient to them, not rebellious against them.

3. Rebellion promises to take away future blessing.

   “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Ephesians 6:2–3 (ESV)

   Notice the promise. When you honor your parents, it will go well with you. This means the opposite is also true. When you dishonor your parents, it will not go well with you. This is not a proverb about the way life usually works, it is a promise about the way life always works. It is always to your benefit to honor your parents, especially when you are still dependent on them. This means you tell the truth to your parents. You remember your parents’ birthdays. You remember their anniversaries. You always speak about them and to them respectfully. You call them. You go out of your way to spend time with them. This is always to your benefit.

4. Rebellion breaks a parent’s heart.
The proverbs of Solomon. *A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.* Proverbs 10:1 (ESV)

Nothing makes a parent more proud than to see their children making good and wise choices in life. Your parents don’t care if you are a brain surgeon or a plumber. They just want to see you making good and wise choices as you follow Jesus. Nothing breaks a parent’s heart like watching his or her child make foolish or wasteful choices. If you are a teenager or young adult, understand your parents are not against you. They want you to succeed. They are not perfect. Nobody is more committed to your success than your parents. Your parents want you to be independent. They want you to be on your own. They want you to make good choices.

Now let’s look at Paul’s words to parents.

**Parents are not to provoke or discourage their children.**

*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.* Colossians 3:21 (ESV)

The first thing to notice is he began by talking to fathers. The reason he talked to fathers is because in this culture, fathers headed the home. While Paul talked to fathers pointedly, he talked to both parents principally. Moms, while you are not directly addressed, in principle you are addressed in this text because you are raising your children under your husband’s authority.

The word provoke means to create anger or bitterness. Let’s see how parents can do this.

**How can parents provoke their children?**

1. **Making more emotional withdraws than deposits.** Last week, we learned a wife is like a bank. She needs plenty of emotional deposits, not just withdraws. In the same way, children are like a bank. If you find most of what you are saying to your kids is correction and you are short on compliments, you could be provoking your children. When your child thinks he or she can’t do anything right because every time you talk to him or her you are critical, you are making too many withdraws. Your children need to know you believe in them, love them and are proud of them. They need more than correction. They need love.

2. **Losing control when we are angry provokes our children.** All parents have times when their kids do things that sets us off. When we are out of control in those times, we produce anger and fear in our children. They don’t feel safe. The operative emotion in their mind moves from guilt and remorse to fear about what their father or mother will do to them or the family when they find out.

3. **Correction without instruction provokes children.** This is when your child does something wrong and you respond like a bolt of lightning from the sky. Whack! Your child doesn’t know why you hit them. Before we correct, we must instruct. The purpose of correction is to change behavior, not make a
children pay the debt of their crime. When I was a youth pastor, I had one family in the youth group with a weird parenting style. The mother would ground her teenage sons but not tell them why. When I asked the sons what they did, they didn’t know. I asked their mother what they did and she said, “If they don’t know what they did, that is all the more reason to ground them.” I am sorry. That is just weird. Before you correct a child, you must explain why you are correcting them. Remember punishment is not the goal. Change in behavior is the goal. If your child is not crystal clear on why they are being disciplined, your punishment will not lead to correction. It will provoke anger.

4. **Failing to discipline children provokes their anger.** Avoiding discipline communicates to children that you don’t love them or care about them.

   *Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.* Proverbs 13:24 (ESV)

   *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*” Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)

   The source of all discipline must be love. If we fail to discipline our children, it is ultimately because we don’t love our children. God disciplines us because he loves us. We discipline our children because we love them and want to turn them from evil. If we don’t discipline our children, it is because we love them too little, not because we love them too much. Discipline is work. It is never fun. It is hard for children and hard work for parents. It comes out of love.

   Children usually do not feel love at the time they are disciplined, but when they look back on their parents, they will see the love shining through..

5. **Allowing a child to face consequences that are too severe for the lesson learned by the mistake.** As parents, we want our children to discover the world for themselves. We want them to learn. At times, we even allow them to fail to teach them a lesson. For example, we can tell our kids staying out late the night before a test is a bad study strategy. They won’t believe us until they see all the red ink on their papers. Sometimes we need to insert ourselves into a situation to protect our children from the consequences instead of letting them learn on their own because the consequences are too severe for the lesson learned. I didn’t grow up working on cars. In college, I tried to save money and change my own oil. At the time, I had an old Camaro. It was low to the ground. It was so low, I couldn’t crawl under it. I went to the campus garage and asked to borrow a hydraulic lift. I pumped the car up and went under it to change my oil. When the mechanic from the garage saw me under the car, he ran out and told me to get out from under the car immediately. He said, “Where are your jack stands?” That was the first time I ever heard of a jack stand. I learned you always use jack stands under a car. If the car came down from the hydraulic lift while I was under it, I would have died. That would have been too high a price to pay for the lesson learned. I am thankful the school mechanic intervened! Let your kids learn through mistakes but don’t
hesitate to jump in if the consequences are too severe for the lesson that could be learned. If the severe consequence happens and your children learned you didn’t step in so they could learn the hard way, that provokes anger.

6. **Overprotecting a child instead of training a child provokes them to anger.** This can happen with some homeschool parents. Sometimes, in a good-hearted effort to protect children from the negative worldly influences, parents remove a child so far from the world that they never teach their children how to handle the world when they have to face it. This is what I call raising a boy in a bubble until he grows a beard. It doesn’t work. We must teach our children how to handle the curves in the road. We cannot always straighten the road for them. Many times these children are fine until they get to college. When they get the freedom of college, they go off the deep end. While we need to protect our kids from the world, we want to teach them how to handle the world.

   **How can I discourage my child?**

   Discourage means to break someone’s spirit. One of the books I referenced described it like the breaking in of horses. There were two ways horses are broken. There is a slow way and a fast way. The slow way takes time. It involves a saddle, patience, getting thrown from the horse and hard work. The result is an obedient horse but a good-spirited horse. The other way they break horses is they simply beat the horse to its knees. This is quick. It makes the horse obedient. Breaking in a horse by beating it didn’t just break a horse’s will, it breaks a horse’s spirit. The horse will never be the same again. Paul said parents are to train their children but not break their spirits as they train them. Let’s look at how this works out in practice.⁷

1. **Avoid public humiliation.** Avoid negative talk about your children in public, especially when they are around to hear it. This is mothers getting together and talking about their children in a negative way. It is fathers getting together and talking about their children in a negative way. It is especially bad when your kids are around to hear you talk about them. Kids remember hearing you talk smack about them around your friends. It discourages them. They won’t forget.

2. **Negative nicknames discourage a child.** This is another form of publicly humiliating your children. As parents, we can see patterns in our children’s behavior. It is easy to make negative a nickname out of it. Don’t do it. Don’t call one child Stubborn Steve and the other Lazy Larry. Those names hurt. They sting. The kids won’t forget.

3. **Showing favoritism discourages a child.** We saw the problem of favoritism in Genesis with Jacob and Esau and how it divided Isaac’s family. Don’t let

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one child be favored over the others. Not only does this build resentment between you and your children but it builds resentment among your children. After you are gone, your children will continue to live with the resentment you created.

4. Unreasonable performance expectations in school and sports discourage a child. It is hard not to live your dreams through your children, especially in sports. When your children succeed, there is great joy. Remember, your kids are not you. They don’t have to be like you. In addition to feeling like they need to measure up to their parents, sometimes children feel they need to measure up to an older brother or sister. Let each child be himself. Celebrate your child’s gifts. Don’t force them to measure up to someone else’s gifts. When my kids were in junior high, I remember taking them to a wrestling tournament that had a little kids competition. I remember one father in particular because he was huge. He was a tank. He was solid muscle, probably 6 foot 5 inches with a beard and tattoos. He was scary. His son was probably 5. When it came time to wrestle, his son was crying uncontrollably in fear. The father kept coaxing him to get on the mat. It was three or four minutes of this huge father coaxing his little tear-filled boy to get on the mat. Finally, this little boy went to the center of the mat with tears running down his face. He shook hands with his opponent and the whistle blew. Instead of wrestling, this little kid turned and began running. He ran in circles around the edge mat to stay away from his opponent. After a while it was obvious, unlike his dad, this boy did not want to wrestle. Making him wrestle was discouraging him. The good news, it is obvious this kid had a future in track. Don’t expect your kids to be you.

5. Parenting by rules instead of relationship discourages children. This is setting rules for our kids but being eager to discipline when rules are broken instead of understanding why rules were broken. For example, let’s say you have a curfew of 10:30 p.m. on a Friday night. If one of your children came home at 10:35, rule-based parenting would mean an instant grounding. Relational-based parenting means you ask why he was late. Maybe you learn your son was shuttling other kids home and due to unforeseen circumstances, he was held up. Relational-based parenting means your son or daughter gives you a call if he or she is going to be late. She doesn’t feel like she has to speed like Mario Andretti to get home to shave one or two minutes off her arrival time and avoid a grounding. Relational-based parenting is better than rule-based parenting. Do we still have rules? Yes! We apply those rules in a relationship.

6. Not repenting of my own sin discourages my children. Every parent needs to say “I was wrong.” We need to model humility and repentance. If we want our kids to think we are always right, we aren’t teaching them what to do when they aren’t right. We need to be able to say, “I disciplined you wrong. Daddy shouldn’t have yelled. Mommy shouldn’t have flown off the handle. Please forgive me.” This teaches our kids we are not perfect. It teaches them
what to do when they are not perfect. It teaches them to extend grace to you so they learn to extend grace to others.

**Conclusion**

As we wrap up, I want to leave you parents with two thoughts.

1. **Children are our responsibility.** It is not the school, church or government’s responsibility to raise our children. They are our responsibility. Nobody will care for your children more than you do. Our greatest responsibility is not to get our kids to recreational sports at the YMCA. It is not to get them involved in extracurricular activities in school. It is to teach them about Jesus in our home, not just take them to church. This is what the Bible teaches us.

   And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 (ESV)

2. **Children are our blessing.** Psalm 127:3 tells us that children are a blessing from the Lord. Children, no matter what you may feel about yourself, every single one of you is a blessing from God. You are a special blessing to your mom and dad. Mom and Dad, even when there are days your kids feel like more of a burden than a blessing, remember they are a blessing.
December 17, 2017

Good morning. Today is our last study in the book of Colossians for the year since next week is the day before Christmas. We will have one service in the morning at 10 a.m. The message will be “Where was Christ before the manger?” I want us to know what Christ was doing in the Old Testament before he took on flesh in the New Testament. In the evening, we will have a candlelight service at 5 p.m. The next Sunday is December 31. Pastor Jordan and I will have that Sunday off. Pastor Stephen will preach on the prodigal son for both campuses. In January, we will return to Colossians for one week to finish off the book. For the rest of January we will study the short companion letter to Colossians called Philemon. It should take us two weeks. After that we will go Old Testament and study the book of Malachi, which will take us to Easter.

This morning, we are in Colossians 3. In this chapter, Paul shows us how to we live differently because of Jesus. When we ask Jesus to forgive our sin and be in charge of our lives, in the Gospel of John it says we are literally born again. A supernatural transition takes place. We are made into a completely new person. The Holy Spirit of God lives inside of us. The Holy Spirit gives us new desires and a new way of thinking that shadows Jesus’ desires and Jesus’ way of thinking.

For the last few weeks in Colossians 3, Paul told us to live out the new person of Jesus living in us. He tells us to simply live like the new people we are. Don’t go back to acting like the old person you were. Paul then taught us how Jesus changes different areas of our lives. He told us that Jesus changes our character. Jesus changes the way we live in marriage. Last week Paul taught us the way Jesus changes our home and the way we parent. This morning, we will see how Jesus changes the way we work. Christian employees and bosses are different because we have Christ living in us. Let’s read the text and see how God changes us on the job.

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 3:22–4:1 (ESV)

I want to teach this passage a little differently than I would typically approach a text like this. This sermon will be two small sermons. I will spend the first half of the sermon dealing with the first word, the word bondservants. I will spend the second half of the sermon handling the rest of the text.
Some of you have translations, like the ESV, that use the word bondservants. Others of you have translations, like the NIV84, that use the word slaves. Many people that have not done in-depth study on the topic of slavery in the first century, get hung up on the word slavery. It appears that the Bible condones slavery. This is one of the reasons many people reject the Bible. Since the Bible appears out of touch on the issue of slavery, why should we trust it in other areas such as the place of men and women in marriage and the church?

For some, when the Bible appears to endorse slavery, they use this as a reason to reject the Bible lock-stock-and-barrel.

This morning, before we go further, we need to understand the topic of slavery in the first century world when the New Testament was written so we can understand why Paul appears to have endorsed it.

**American slavery and ancient slavery were different.**

The reason some translations use the word slavery is because modern slavery is the closest cultural equivalent we have to reference the institution of slavery in ancient Rome. The problem is when we think of slavery, we think of American-style slavery that resulted in the civil war. That was a brutal style of slavery that treated human beings like animals.

Roman slavery was different than American slavery. I will detail those differences in a moment. Since slavery in Rome was not like American slavery, other translations use the word bondservant to show there is a difference. The problem is nobody today knows what a bondservant lived like. If I was to ask you to describe the life of an ancient bondservant, most of us couldn’t do it. In short, there is no perfect English word to translate the category of Roman slavery in the first-century world without producing misunderstandings. That is why some translations use the term slaves, while others use bondservants.

**The Bible condemns American-style slavery.**

The kind of slavery that took place in America is clearly spoken against in the Bible. American-style slavery is called slave trading or enslavers.

...understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine... 1 Timothy 1:9–10 (ESV)

In 1 Timothy, Paul listed gross, over-the-top sins. They are sins the Old Testament law was created to curb. His examples of over-the-top sins include those who practice homosexuality, and those who are sexually involved with people outside the marriage covenant, that is premaritally or extramaritally. His list includes those who physically strike their parents instead of honor them. He also included enslavers. Some translations say “slave traders.” Slave traders were people who sailed ships to Africa. In the middle of the night they raided homes and took husbands, wives and children into captivity. They forced them
into confined spaces in the hull of a ship for months at a time to take them to a foreign land. They sold off husbands, wives and children, breaking apart families. When their slaves rebelled, they whip them into submission. Those were the deeds of a slave trader. The Bible says that is one of the most heinous sins. That was American slavery. The Bible does not condone American slavery. It condemns American slavery and calls it one of the great sins against God. The kind of slavery or bondservant life that Paul talked about in these verses is not the slavery of a slave trader.

In addition, American slavery was almost entirely racial. Ancient Roman slavery wasn’t racially based. American slavery didn’t consider slaves fully human. If you remember from your American government class, slaves were only given 3/5 representation under the law.

Some people claim the Bible has a low view of humanity because it doesn’t condemn slavery. They claim we have a high view of people today because we don’t tolerate slavery. Actually the opposite it true. According to the Bible, there is God, man and animals. Man is different from animals because we are created in God’s image. No matter what our race, color, age, mental capacity or country of origin, all of mankind is created in the image of God and has dignity, value and worth. Modern evolutionary thinking says no God exists. Evolutionary thinking says there is only a continuum of animals. Some animals are more highly evolved than others. Man is just a highly evolved animal. Some human beings are more highly developed than other human beings. Since some human beings are more highly developed, they can treat the less developed human beings like animals, because that is what they are. Evolutionary thinking says there are sophisticated and highly-evolved human beings, then there are the savages, which are closer to animals. It is evolution that allows you to rationalize having slaves and keeping them in the cargo hold of a ship like an animal for months because your slaves are not humans. They are animals. That is why slaves were only given 3/5 representation.

Evolutionary thinking is what leads to racism and discrimination against people groups. Evolutionary thinking is what allows some people to say other people are not worthy of dignity, respect and value. They are less developed animals. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that man is different from animals. Man is made in the image of God no matter his skin color, age, ethnic background or intelligence. All mankind has worth and dignity, because only human beings were created in the image of God.

In American slavery, humans were considered a master’s property. In America, a slave was a slave for life without the chance of freedom. In America, people left slaves in their wills to other relatives when they died, just like they left their livestock and property to relatives when they died. In addition, when your slaves had children, their children were considered your property, just as when a cow had a calf, it was considered the property of its owner. Let me be clear, the Bible does not approve of American-style slavery. It condemns slave trading as one of the worst of sins.
The closest thing we have to American style slavery in our country today is sex trafficking. This is when young women are taken captive. They are forced into slavery for the pleasure of others. Those young women are not considered people. They are considered objects to be used. The Bible condemns American slavery just like it condemns sex trafficking. Both are evil, wicked and wrong because they don’t treat people like they are made in the image of God.

Lest we think we have the moral high ground on this over our ancestors because they treated slaves like cattle instead of human beings, we must realize that today there are people we still treat as less than human beings. We have people whom we deny rights under the law. We have people we treat like nothing more than a piece of property to be used and discarded. Who are these people? They are the unborn. Our ancestors treated some people as less than human because they were racially different. In our culture, we treat the unborn as less than human because they are still in the womb. More unborn Americans have died in the wombs of their mothers under our watch than slaves died by the brutality of their masters under their watch. The truth is, we haven’t made moral progress. We have only switched those we consider to be less than human.

What was Jesus’ attitude toward bondservants?

While it is clear the Bible is completely against slave trading and American-style slavery, what does the Bible tell us about Roman bondservants, which were similar but different to American slaves?

Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 1 Corinthians 7:21 (ESV)

The Bible says if someone became a Christian when he or she was a bondservant, that is OK. If they could gain their freedom, they should seek it. God does not want us living in servanthood to others.

You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. 1 Corinthians 7:23 (ESV)

The Bible also says that if you are not a bondservant, do everything you can to avoid becoming one. God says it is not his desire for anyone to be in slavery to someone else.

If you are a bondservant and you can get out of being one, go for it. If you aren’t a bondservant, do what you can to avoid becoming one.

How did someone become a bondservant?

The ancient status of being a bondservant or slave is a complicated category. A bondservant was someone that became someone’s slave for a period of years. You bonded yourself to someone to work for him for an agreed upon period of time. It was similar to signing up for the military. For example, you join the military and you are the property of Uncle Sam for six years. In that day, you could agree to become someone else’s slave for a period of years. How did people become bondservants?
Debt — Sometimes people became bondservants because of debt. It was an ancient way of handling bankruptcy. If you started a business, you went to someone wealthy and asked to borrow money. Just like a bank, the wealthy man wanted collateral. You could put yourself and your family up for collateral. “If my business doesn’t make it, my family agrees to be your servants for the next four years.” Bondservants were a way of handling bankruptcy and paying back money when you couldn’t pay back money.

Life Disaster — Everybody faces times when the bottom falls out in life. Maybe you are sick and can’t work. Maybe you can’t get a job and you are on the brink of starvation. In the ancient world, there was no social security system to pay your bills and provide for your needs. When you had nothing left, you went to a wealthy family and offered to become its bondservant. The family members took you into their home. They gave you food and shelter in exchange for working to help them for an agreed upon number of years while you got yourself back on your feet.

Prisoners of War — In the ancient world, when Rome conquered a people, they took some of the conquered people and used them as slaves. Prisoners of war were forced to work for Roman citizens for an agreed upon number of years.

Unwanted Children — Last week, I mentioned the plight of the newborn in the ancient world. While they did have abortion drugs in the ancient world, they were expensive. It was more common for a poor woman to carry a baby to full-term, give birth, then the husband made the decision to discard the child because the family had more mouths than they could feed. As I mentioned last week, unwanted children were typically placed in the fields surrounding Roman cities where the children died of exposure or were eaten by animals. In addition, people of the worst sort of character would patrol these areas at night to find the unwanted children. They would take these children and raise them to be prostitutes or bondservants. If you couldn’t buy a bondservant or pay a bondservant, you could take one of these children and raise a bondservant.

The exciting part of this dark scenario is if early Christians found an unwanted child, they didn’t pick them up to raise them as slaves or prostitutes, they adopted them into their own families. Early Christians were known for large families because some of their children were the unwanted children that were turned into their adopted children.

Bondservants was a huge group in the ancient world. A third to a half of all people in the city of Rome were bondservants. That is approximately 60 million people.

While American slavery was primarily racially based, bondservants in the ancient world were not racially based. It was economically based. Bondservants were all kinds of people who couldn’t fend for themselves so they bound themselves to work as the slave of a wealthy person for an agreed upon number of years.
Bondservants had few rights. If their master was good, life was good. If their master was evil, life was bad.

While American slavery was a lifetime status, most bondservants were freed by age 30. They were typically given some money when freed to help them start their lives of independence. If a bondservant was able to earn enough money while serving their master, he could purchase his own freedom.

**Apprenticing** — Becoming a bondservant was also a way that some people learned a trade. It was a way of apprenticing. If you became a bondservant of a blacksmith, you could learn to be a blacksmith.

While the Bible does not condemn ancient slavery — also called bonded servitude — it encouraged people in this category to get out of being bondservants, and if they were free, not to become a bondservant of another. This status of being an ancient bondservant was not all bad. It served as a social security system in the ancient world. While the Bible doesn’t condemn ancient slavery or bondservants outright, it sows the seeds which led to the eventual collapse of ancient and modern slavery. Many of those seeds are sown in the book of Philemon, which we will study in January.

Now that we understand ancient slavery — also called bonded servitude — we can get into the text. In short, an ancient slave and master relationship is similar, but not identical, to a modern-day boss and employee relationship. As we study what Paul said, we will use those categories to apply what he said to our workplaces.

**How does Jesus change an employee?**

1. A Christian employee is obedient to his or her boss.

   Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters…
   Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

   Obedience means we get done what our bosses ask us to do. The boss doesn’t need to ask you three or four times. A Christian sees himself or herself as under the boss’ authority while at work, so respect the boss and respond to his/her authority.

   **Obedience means we do not talk poorly about our bosses behind their backs.** Employees are known for disliking their bosses. Christian employees do not undermine their superiors either in casual conversation or in intentional work. We have loyalty.

   **Obedience means we do the job the way our bosses tell us to do it.** It is easy for employees to think they know better than their boss about their work. They cut corners or do work they way they want, not the way the boss requires. That is not obedience. Sometimes your boss tells you to use safety equipment. You wear it when your boss is there but discard it when he leaves the job site. That is not obedience. That is rebellion. Christian employees don’t act that way. We do what the boss tells us to do, not what we want to do.
**Obedience means we are on time.** If work starts at 6 a.m., as Christians, we don’t want to be late for work. We strive to be on time because we want to obey our boss in everything, even the start time.

**Obedience means we do not let our task list grow cold.** Each of us has tasks we push off. The problem is, if our boss still needs them done, they need to get done. It is easy to work on the things we want to get done, not the things that are hard to get done. Obedience means we work hard on everything.

**Obedience means we go above and beyond the call of duty.** A few years ago, I had a friend that worked in the nuclear industry. His nuclear plant was shut down for routine maintenance. His boss asked him to work nights and weekends until the plant went back on line. He worked for months without a break. I wondered if he would quit. He didn’t. Why did he work so hard? He explained that every day the plant was down it cost the company millions of dollars. To stay competitive and keep the plant open, the work had to be done and it needed to be done as soon as possible. As an obedient employee, he was willing to work above and beyond the call of duty when called upon to do that work.

Jesus was an obedient employee of his father, even when his father asked him to go above and beyond the call of duty by humbling himself to take on human flesh and die on cross for our sin. Like Jesus obeyed his father when it was hard to do, we obey our earthly bosses in everything.

2. **A Christian employee doesn’t just work when the boss is looking.**

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers… Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

This is gym class. Everybody does push ups when the gym teacher is looking but what happens when he turns his head? Everybody starts slacking. This is working hard when the boss is around but when the boss goes to the next job site you start resting.

**A Christian doesn’t do on the job what he wouldn’t do in his boss’ presence.** Would you check your Snapchat when the boss is in your presence? No. Don’t check your Snapchat when your boss isn’t next to you. Would you have a conversation with a fellow employee about your weekend when the boss is around? Don’t have a fun but distracting conversation when the boss isn’t around.

**A Christian employee seeks work, they don’t just complete work.** Sometimes our boss asks us to do a job. When we finish the job, we stand around until we are told what to do next. To some degree, that is being an eyeservice employee. If we look around, we can see things that need to get done. Do what we can do while we are waiting until our boss tells us the next thing to do.

**A Christian employee has a focus on his job, not flattering his boss.** Some people take this the other direction. Instead of only working when the boss
is looking, they try to flatter their boss by their words. “Boss, you are the best boss. Can I get you a coffee? I love my job, can I pick up donuts for everyone on my shift?” Christians don’t try to impress their bosses by flattering them. They impress their bosses by doing their jobs and doing it well.

3. **A Christian employee works without hidden motives.**

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

The word sincere means being honest and straightforward. It means not having hidden motives or agendas. In the office, the Christian focuses on his job and doing it well.

**A Christian avoids office politics.** Office politics are when you try to make someone else look bad to make yourself look good. Maybe you are working with a coworker on a project. They make a mistake. You tell your boss they made a mistake but you also tell your boss not to worry because you are taking corrective measures. That is office politics. At work, Christians are not trying to make someone else look bad. They try to make God look good by getting the job done.

**A Christian avoids office gossip.** This is spreading information about other people that could be detrimental to them and their jobs. Christians avoid gossip at work. They focus on their work.

**A Christian employee doesn’t bully or backstab.**

In Jesus’ disciples, Judas was the one who had hidden motives. The Bible tells us he helped himself to the money bag. When it came to extravagant gifts, like the woman that anointed Jesus with perfume before his crucifixion, Judas was opposed to her anointing Jesus because he wanted to sell the perfume and put money in his hands. He was not there to serve Jesus’ company. He had a hidden motive to serve himself through the Jesus company. This colored his decisions so he made choices that were best for him, not best for Jesus.

One modern day example where they made a television program of behind the scenes politics is the “Survivor” television program where people are voted off the island. Behind the scenes alliances and manipulation determine who gets voted off, not contestant performance.

4. **A Christian employee serves a greater boss.**

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men… Colossians 3:23 (ESV)

No matter what we do, we remember we are not working for our earthly boss. We are working for Jesus. When I grew up, there was a saying I heard my older relatives use. They would say, “That’s good enough for government work.” The idea is that a job can be done second-rate because it was for Uncle Sam. It was a way to justify second-rate.
The problem is nobody is ever simply working for the government. As Christians, we are always working for Jesus. Jesus is evaluating our work. Nobody may notice how we work, but Jesus will notice. The question we need to ask is, “If I was doing this job for Jesus, would I do it better? If I was mowing this lawn for Jesus, would I do it better? If I were plowing this driveway for Jesus, would I do it better?” Many times we slack off in quality and enthusiasm because we don’t like our bosses. In those cases, don’t work for your boss. Work for the boss that is over your boss in the organizational chart. His name is Jesus.

There is a story of a janitor that cleaned toilets. When somebody saw him work, they noticed he cleaned the back of the toilets. Somebody asked him, “Why do you clean down there? Nobody can see the back of the toilet.” He said, “I work for Jesus, and he can see the back of the toilet.”

How would our attitude change if we did our homework like we were going to turn it into Jesus? How would we do a sales call differently if we were doing it for Jesus? How would we handle our customers differently if Jesus is watching and evaluating our work? If we would find ourselves working harder or smarter if we were working for Jesus, remember that as Christians, we are working for him.

5. A Christian employee works for an eternal paycheck.

Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:24 (ESV)

As Christians, we are not just working for an earthly paycheck. We are working for an eternal paycheck that Jesus will give us when we stand before him. Even if we don’t think our boss is paying us what we are worth, we work hard because Jesus will one day pay us what we are worth. Jesus is watching how we work. He will reward us accordingly, even if our earthly bosses don’t. This reminds us that it is never to our benefit to skimp at work or to do less than our best. As Christians, one day Jesus will reward us for the quality of our work.


For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Colossians 3:25 (ESV)

Just as Jesus will reward us for how we worked, nobody gets away with anything at work. Jesus is watching, and he will repay us for what we have done. Some of us have experienced being passed over for a job promotion because someone lied about us or smeared our reputation. It may look like they got away with it but justice is never thwarted, it is only delayed. Remember that justice is never thwarted. It is only delayed. Nobody gets away with anything. One day everyone will stand before Jesus and give an account for what they have done in their lives. As Christians, we will be in heaven by the grace of God through Jesus, but we stand to gain and lose rewards based on how we lived and worked for Jesus. Those who do not know Christ will also have their works judged to determine the just appropriate response to their sin in the Lake of Fire.
Enron executives who padded their wallets so they landed with a golden parachute while the workers of the company were penniless will not get away with their crime. Those who play dirty politics to get elected may get elected, but one day they will stand before Jesus to answer for what they have done. When we work for people and they refuse to pay their bills, they may get away with cheating us but they will not get away when they stand before God. There will come a day when they will wish they paid their bills. There will come a day when everyone who is dishonest or manipulative will wish they had done the right thing.

While God promises to hand out full justice when everyone stands before him, many times God begins to hand out justice against those who are dishonest in business in this life.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. Galatians 6:7 (ESV)

How does Jesus change a boss?

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 4:1 (ESV)

1. A Christian boss treats employees morally right.

The word justice means anything regarding law and morality. A Christian boss provides safe working conditions. He or she protects against the abuse of women. A Christian boss protects against harassment. A Christian boss provides fair vacation time, benefits and a fair wage. Even if the law doesn’t require a boss to do something that is morally right, as a Christian, the boss will do what is morally right for his or her workers.


The word fairly means equitably. The Christian boss treats his employees equally and doesn’t play favorites. He or she doesn’t always give some employees the easy jobs and give other employees the hard jobs to make them bitter. A Christian boss strives to be gracious but equal and fair.

3. A Christian boss knows he or she will give an account to God for his or her employees.

Everybody answers to somebody. If you own the company, you will give an account to Jesus for how you treated your employees. Bosses carry a lot on their shoulders as they try to provide not just for their employees but for the families of their employees.

Conclusion

Slavery in the Bible is not slavery as we understand it in America. It was serving as a bondservant. It is working for someone for a period of time. It is similar to an employer-employee relationship today.
As Christians, we let Christ shine through our lives in our workplaces by our obedience to our bosses, the way we work when our bosses aren’t looking, the purity of our motives at work by refusing to play politics, by serving our earthly bosses with the quality and integrity we would give Jesus. Lastly, we remember that God will reward us for our work — even if our earthly bosses don’t. We also remember that nobody gets away with anything at work. Jesus is always watching and one day everyone will stand before him and be rewarded or judged by him.

This week, may the way we work provide a great witness that Jesus changed our lives. When he did, he changed the way we work.
January 7, 2018

Good morning. It is great to be back in a routine after a busy Christmas and New Year. I hope you were able to enjoy time with family and friends as we celebrated the birth of our Savior and hope, Jesus Christ.

This morning, we return to our study in the book of Colossians. We were 11 weeks into the study when Christmas showed up on the calendar. We put our study on hold until the New Year. This morning we return to Colossians. This is our 12th and final week in the book. Next week, we begin a short two-week series on the book of Philemon. Philemon is the companion book to Colossians. As you will see next week, the books are intimately connected. Philemon is the story of how God takes the life of a runaway criminal named Onesimus and turns his life around. God then uses him in a great way for the kingdom of Christ. Once you know his story, you will see why this little letter is in our Bible. Philemon is also a powerful story of forgiveness and reconciliation. If you have someone that hurt you deeply, Philemon will help you when it comes to restoring a broken relationship.

After Philemon, we will move to the Old Testament and study Malachi. Malachi talks about marriage, tithing, and leadership. That will take us to Easter.

In our last few studies of Colossians, we were taking things slow and digging deep as we studied only two verses a week. This morning, we are picking up the pace and covering 17 verses to finish the book.

Paul’s theme in the second half of Colossians is how Jesus changes our everyday lives. In previous weeks, we learned how Jesus changes our marriage, parenting and work. Today, we will learn three more practical ways Jesus changes everyday life. They are: Jesus makes us people of prayer; Jesus changes ordinary choices; Jesus changes the way we speak.

After that, almost like we come to the end of a movie, Paul rolls the credits and gives the names of the friends with him in prison at Rome. We usually skip those credit sections, just like we walk out of a movie while the credits are still scrolling across the screen. We will take a few minutes to study these names. Behind the names of each of Paul’s friends are stories of how God uses Christian friends in our lives. Let’s jump into our study.

**Jesus makes us people of prayer.**

Pray all the time.

*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.* Colossians 4:2 (ESV)
Paul told them, and he tells us, to continue in prayer. We should always pray and not give up. The word steadfastly means persistence. It means holding onto something like a pit bull. Why did Paul say this? Paul knew life is busy. Paul knew prayer gets squeezed out of our days because there doesn’t seem to be enough time to pray. Paul reminded the Colossians, and he reminds us, don’t let talking to God in prayer be something that gets squeezed out of our lives in the busyness of everyday living.

Let’s be honest. Bible reading is easier than praying. Attending church is easier than praying. Eating in the chili cook-off is much easier than praying. Even though prayer is hard, it is an essential part of our life with God.

Jesus told two parables teaching us to persist in prayer. They are in Luke 11:5-10 and Luke 18:1-18. In Luke 11, Jesus talked about someone who goes to his friend at midnight and only because of his persistent knocking on his door in the middle of the night does this friend finally get up and meet his need. Then Jesus said our God is not like that.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Luke 11:9–13 (ESV)

Luke 11 is called a parable of contrast. We don’t need to beat down God’s door in prayer to get him to respond. Our heavenly father doesn’t ignore us when we call to him in prayer. He loves us. He doesn’t always answer our prayers the way we want them answered but he is still a good father that gives us good gifts when we call out to him. Sometimes God will say, “No,” in answer to our prayers. Sometimes he will say, “Not now.” Sometimes he says, “Yes.”

If God says, “No,” to our prayers, it is not because he doesn’t love us or because we didn’t pester him enough. It is because he does love us and he has a better plan for us when he said, “No.”

How many of you have children who ask you for things? Do you always give you kids what they want when they want it? Absolutely not. What our children think is good for them may not be what is good for them. In our love we often say, “No,” or “Not yet,” because we love them. We still want to hear our children’s requests but we also want our children to trust our answer, especially if we need to say, “No.” The same is true with God.

The last thing we want our children doing is shutting down communication with us because we don’t give them what they want when they want. We love hearing our children’s hearts. We love hearing our children’s desires. We love meeting those needs, but we love to do it in the right way and at the right time.
This is why we always pray and tell God our desires but we trust his love for us to meet our needs and respond to our desires in the right way and at the right time.

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. Luke 18:1 (ESV)

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Romans 12:12 (ESV)

James reminded us of the importance of prayer and of asking for things in prayer.

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. James 4:2 (ESV)

James was very honest when he said there are things we don’t have in life simply because we didn’t ask for them. That is why we must persist in prayer. God is our loving father. Keep talking to him and keep asking him. Trust how he responds to our prayers.

This week, the best application for some of us will simply be to make time for prayer and to honestly tell God our fears, our hopes for the future and the desires of our hearts. Then trust him to respond in the way he sees is best.

**Stay awake in prayer.**

Paul also said to be watchful in prayer. Some of your translations say “be alert in prayer.” I love this because it is so practical. In its most basic sense, this means don’t fall asleep when we pray. Does anyone else have that problem? Sometimes I feel like Jesus’ disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Let me give you a few ideas on how to not fall asleep in prayer besides drinking plenty of church coffee.

1. Don’t limit the time you pray to before bed or when you are in bed. There is something about bed that puts us to sleep. That is why bed is not the best place for prayer.

2. Pray during the commute. Turn off the radio and pray in the car. If you are a high school student driving to school, pray out loud in the car on the way to school. People won’t think you are weird. They will think you have someone on speakerphone. You won’t fall asleep. If you fall asleep while driving, that is a different problem.

3. Go for a prayer walk. I don’t recommend this in -20-degree weather but do this in the summer. Walk and pray. It helps you stay awake.

4. Use a prayer journal. I have used one for years. I write out my prayers. It helps me stay focused and awake. I write Bible verses in my prayer journal. A prayer journal helps me put shape to my thoughts when my world is in emotional turmoil.
While being alert literally means not falling asleep in prayer, some scholars point out it can also mean staying alert for opportunities to pray. When you see someone going through a hard time at work, seize the opportunity and pray for them. When you are at a football game and someone is injured on the field, bow your head and pray for them. When your friend is stressed in a relationship, stop and either pray with them or pray for them. When you are studying for a test, pray before you start. If you have a friend whose son or daughter is injured in high school sports, offer to pray for his or her healing. Many times the best time to pray for people and with them is on the spot.

**Pray with thanksgiving, not just requests.**

Paul also said we are to pray with thanksgiving. Our prayer time is not to just be requests of what we need but it is also to be a time of worship, giving thanks to God for all we have. Are your children healthy? Are you healthy? Do you have a roof over your head? Do you know Jesus as your savior? There are so many things for which to be thankful in our prayer time. Paul said don’t just persist in praying for our needs but persist in thanking God for what he has done, especially through Jesus. Prayer time is also worship time.

**Pray for an open door to share about Christ.**

At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Colossians 4:3–4 (ESV)

Paul reminded us that in our prayer, we are not to simply pray for our needs but we are to pray for the needs of others, in particular the opportunity to share the gospel.

Praying for the needs of others is one of the reasons we have the prayer chain at church. How can you get on the prayer chain? First, we encourage everyone to sign up for a free Realm account. That is our church social networking app. All the information to sign up for a free account and to download the app is on our web site at www.crosswinds.tv. Just make sure you create your account in a regular web browser then download the app for your phone. Once you have a Realm account, you can sign up for groups. Join the prayer chain group and you will receive weekly prayer e-mails. We are commanded to pray for the needs of others in our church family, not just our own needs. This helps us pray for one another at church.

How do you share a prayer request? You can either submit them through our website or you can use the tear-off section from the bulletin and leave it in the pew after the service for ushers to pick up.

Another way you can pray for others is to join me at the church prayer meeting. Every Wednesday night at 7 p.m. I meet with people from the church to pray for the needs of the church in the church office. Some of you are already busy on that night with AWANA. That is a good thing. If you can, feel free to join me as we pray for the needs of the church.
Paul had one particular prayer request. It is not that he would be released from jail in Rome but that God would provide an open door for the Word.

This is interesting. When it comes to telling people about Jesus, the Bible tells us there are times when people are more receptive to the gospel than others. There are occasions when God provides an open door in people’s lives so they are particularly receptive to hearing and responding to Jesus. Other times, people’s hearts are closed to hearing about Jesus and the gospel doesn’t make much progress. It is like a bullet off a rock. This is the way evangelism works. The church grows in spurts.

This reminds me of growing my lawn. People told me there are two windows of opportunity to grow a lawn — one in the spring and another in the fall. Don’t waste your time watering it all summer because it won’t grow. I tried to grow the lawn in the summer. I put a lot of water on my lawn but it didn't work. The window of opportunity was closed. When that window of opportunity returned in the fall, the lawn took off without me watering it. This is the way the gospel works. We need to pray for those open doors for the gospel to grow, then lean into them when they come.

But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. 1 Corinthians 16:8–9 (ESV)

And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. Acts 14:27 (ESV)

What we can take away from this is there are times and seasons when we will find people become very receptive to the truth of Jesus because God opens a door of opportunity in their hearts. It may take place after a tragedy in life. It may be something God does supernaturally in a culture or city. We need to make use of those times. They don’t last forever. Secondly, we pray for those times of opportunity because these doors of opportunity for the gospel are opened by God. We pray for an open door for the gospel for our missionaries and for ourselves as we spread the gospel.

Jesus changes ordinary choices.

Use wisdom to make wise choices, not just right choices.
Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Colossians 4:5 (ESV)

When the Bible uses the term “walk,” that means how we live our daily lives. In our everyday lives, Jesus calls us to live wisely around those who are not Christians. I want you to notice how Paul framed this — the Christian life is not just a matter of right or wrong choices which only affect ourselves. The Christian life is a matter of wise and foolish choices that affect people around us who do not know Christ.
Most younger Christians do not understand this. The operative question of many young Christians is “what can I get away with that is not sin? If the Bible doesn’t explicitly forbid it, I should be able to do what I want no matter how it makes others feel about me and no matter what other people think about Jesus from my life.”

As we get older we realize that even if something is not explicitly sinful, that doesn’t mean it is particularly helpful. Something may not be sin but it may not be wise. As we live around people, we want to make Jesus attractive not just by avoiding sinful choices but by making the wisest choices we can to make Jesus attractive to other people.

As I was thinking about this, I thought I should share a little of my own foolishness. As many of you know, we recently built a home. In any building process there is plenty of opportunity to offend the neighbors as the yard becomes an eyesore and a constant source of litter. One day I planned to spread 40 tons of river rock around the house for landscaping. I had permission from the city to use the street as a dumping spot for one day while I spread the rock around the house. It was a project that would be done by evening. In the busyness leading up to the day, I forgot to inform my neighbors that I was blocking off the road. Let’s just say they freaked out a bit. I wasn’t in the wrong. Everything was cleared with the city, but I forgot to apply some wisdom and communicate what was happening to my neighbors. Let’s just say I didn’t make Christ look the best that day, not because of sinful living but because of unwise living where I added tensions to the neighborhood.

The wisdom of our choices will either draw people to Jesus and help open door to the gospel or our everyday choices can be foolish and repel people from Jesus. This is why one of the best ways to open the door to the gospel message in our community is by generously loving people. That is why one of our goals this year is to love our firefighters, police, ambulance crews, school teachers, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources officers. It is not a right or wrong thing. It is a wise thing to put Jesus in the best light.

**Make the best use of time.**

Paul also said Christians should make careful use of their time. This is very important. The way this is worded in Greek is quite vivid. It says “time is in short supply, don’t fritter it away.” When we are 20 years old, it feels like life will last forever. It doesn’t. It goes by very quickly. Paul reminded us we want to use the limited time in our lives wisely. Don’t throw it away.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90:12 (ESV)

We need to consciously think what kind of return on investment we are getting for the way we use our time. This is a conversation I often have with young adults. For example, there is nothing wrong with playing video games. The problem is many young adults spend lots of time on video games. Video games can become a very poor use of your time. Video games are fun but they have
limited eternal value and limited life skill value return. I don’t care how high your score is on a video game, you cannot put that on your resume. Often it is more valuable to get a job and learn a skill than play a video game. At least that can go on your resume. It is more valuable to read a book than play a video game. Books help us grow in knowledge and wisdom. It is more valuable to memorize a Bible verse that God will bring back to our minds when we need to hear it for the rest our lives. It is more valuable to read your Bible than play a video game. It is more valuable to learn an instrument. Video games are not wrong but we need to limit the time we spend on them. Don’t blow too much time on them. Give yourself three-five hours a week on video games then find something else more productive to do with your time.

The same can apply to older adults who have the money and freedom to travel. There is nothing wrong with travel but it can become a way to fritter away time on things that are not of lasting value so we avoid serving others and Christ’s kingdom. Time is like money. Each day we get 24 hours to spend. Spend that limited amount of time wisely. Don’t waste it.

**Jesus changes the way we speak.**

*The grace we received from Christ should be experienced by others through our gracious words.*

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Colossians 4:6 (ESV)

When it comes to living our Christian life, one distinctive quality of the Christian life is the way we speak to others and about others. We are to be gracious. This means people should sense the grace we have received from Jesus being conveyed to others through our speech to them and our speech about them. The easiest way to treat other people is to pick on them or tear them down in conversations. It takes no brains or courage to belittle people. We see this all the time on the news. Everybody is looking for something terrible to say about other people.

As Christians, we are not to be known for tearing others down but for building others up. People should feel the grace of Jesus through the way we speak to them. This is especially true at home. Picking on your brother or sister is not gracious speech. You may think those little fun jabs are just part of the family atmosphere, but they get old. That is not gracious speech. It is demeaning speech. Home should be the place where we are built up, not torn down.

Picking on our spouses with little jabs and snide comments is not being gracious in our speech toward our spouses.

Not only should we extend gracious speech to our families, but we should also be gracious in conflicts when someone does something we don’t agree with. As Christians, we approach them graciously and gently, not vindictively. We use the golden rule. We treat others in conflict like we want to be treated in that
situation. We approach people not in a way to shame them but in a way that allows them to repent and save face.

**Let our speech be attractive, as if seasoned with salt.**

Our speech should also be seasoned with salt. In Greek, this phrase is a little hard to understand, but we have a good idea what Paul meant. In ancient Greek culture, salty speech meant interesting or lively speech. A salty conversation was an engaging conversation where you wanted to stay involved because you enjoyed the conversation. Just as salt makes bland potato chips enjoyable, salty speech is a metaphor for having engaging, enjoyable conversations with others. As Christians, when we talk with people, we honor God and make Christ attractive by giving people our full attention. We honor God by being interested in the life of other people and what they have to say. Even if we are not naturally interested in what somebody does in his or her life, because it reflects on our faith, we become interested in his or her life and ask questions. You may be a body builder that has no interest in knitting but if the person you are talking with is a knitting guru, you learn to love knitting while talking with her.

Another way to be engaging in conversations is don’t answer someone with one-word answers. Answer in complete sentences. Look people in the eye during conversations. Give people your full attention. In conversations, don’t talk about yourself but be interested in other people’s lives and what they have to say about their world. That is how we bring honor to Christ in our words.

**We need good Christians friends.**

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.” I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Colossians 4:7–18 (ESV)

Paul closed by rolling the credits and telling people in Colossae about those with him in prison at Rome. Paul’s friends were the unsung, behind-the-
scenes heroes in the New Testament. We often think of Paul single-handedly reaching the ancient world for Jesus. The truth is his friends were the unsung heroes that made reaching the ancient world for Jesus possible. Like Paul, we also need good Christians friends in our lives if we are going to make a difference for Jesus. Let me take a few minutes to introduce you to Paul's friends.

Tychicus

Tychicus is mentioned five times in the New Testament. He first shows up in the city of Ephesus. He probably became a Christian in Ephesus while Paul preached in the city of Ephesus for three years. Tychicus was known as a man of intense devotion to God and to Paul. Paul called him a loved brother, faithful minister and fellow servant of Christ. As Paul's friend, Tychicus was the faithful behind-the-scenes guy Paul could always trust. When Paul wrote the letters of Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, who did Paul trust to carry these letters to the churches in those cities? Tychicus. Paul knew that if he asked Tychicus to do something, he could trust Tychicus to get it done. Dependability was his middle name.

If Tychicus dropped the ball, we would be missing at least three of our New Testament letters. Tychicus was so trustworthy and faithful that he left his family at home and stayed with Paul during his time in prison in Rome to make sure Paul had what he needed. In Titus 3:12 we see Tychicus was sent by Paul to serve as a temporary pastor to the church of Crete while Titus was gone. At the end of Paul's life, during his second imprisonment in Rome, Tychicus was a faithful friend that was still with Paul helping him. Tychicus was a complete behind-the-scenes guy that was never prominent but was a faithful friend to Paul. If Tychicus hadn't been such a faithful friend to Paul, we might not have three of our New Testament letters. Each of us need a Tychicus in our lives.

Onesimus

I won't say much about him because we begin our study of his life next week in the book of Philemon. He was a runaway slave from Philemon, his master. Philemon was a wealthy man in Colossae. The church met in his house. In Philemon 11, Onesimus is described as a useless slave. He was all hassle and no help. He stole money from his master and ran away to Rome.

He was an escaped slave and a criminal. In Rome, he met the apostle Paul. Onesimus heard about Jesus. He repented of his sin and was born again. His life was completely changed. Then, instead of calling him a runaway criminal, Paul called him a faithful and beloved brother. Next week we will see how Jesus used Onesimus' friendship with Paul to make a big difference for Christ in this world.

Aristarchus

He was a Jewish believer with a Greek name. He was a native of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4). He first appeared during Paul's three years of teaching in Ephesus. That is when he most likely became a Christian. He was also a
faithful friend to Paul that helped him in his travels. In Acts, we learn that when the entire city of Ephesus rioted against Christians they took two new Christians into the amphitheater, where they were likely beaten for their faith and association with Paul. One was Aristarchus. Even when he realized that associating with Jesus and Paul could mean he would lose his life, Aristarchus stayed a faithful friend, traveling with Paul and helping him. Aristarchus was also with Paul on the ship that took him to Rome in Acts 27. The ship was wrecked in a storm where Aristarchus and Paul swam for their lives. Facing hard times in life when you are alone is tough. Aristarchus was the friend God gave to Paul so he didn’t face his hard times alone.

**Mark**

Here is another unsung hero with a different story. Mark was a cousin of Barnabas. Young Mark joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey in Acts 13. Partway through the trip, Mark deserted them because things were too tough. Later, when Barnabas wanted to take Mark on another missionary journey with Paul, Paul refused to let him join. That led to Paul and Barnabas parting ways because Paul didn’t trust Mark to be loyal in the hard times. Thankfully, that is not where the story ends. From what we can tell, Mark — also called John Mark — spent time with the apostle Peter. We read about this in 1 Peter 5:13. If you remember, Peter was no stranger to mid-life failures. He denied Christ three times at Christ’s arrest. Jesus later restored Peter after his failure. Just as Jesus forgave and restored Peter after his failure, Peter helped forgive and restore Mark after his failure.

When Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians, it was 12 years after Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas. Things changed. Mark was then one of Paul’s most faithful companions and greatest helpers. In fact, in 2 Timothy 4:11, which is Paul’s final letter, at the end of the letter Paul asked Timothy to pick up Mark and bring him to see Paul because Mark was so useful.

Since Mark spent so much time with the apostle Peter — who knew Jesus firsthand — Mark became intimately acquainted with the life of Jesus. Mark used that experience to write the Gospel of Mark that is in our Bibles. It is based off the firsthand accounts of Christ’s life told to Mark by Peter in the time they spent together. While Onesimus is the story of how God can take a life far from God, transform that life and use it in a great way for God’s kingdom, Mark’s story is what God can do through Christians even after they have a mid-life faith failure.

**Jesus also called Justus**

We don’t know much about this guy other than Paul pulled into a town and this Jesus had lot of explaining for why he couldn’t feed 5,000 or raise the dead. That was a different Jesus. This is why they nicknamed him Justus to avoid any confusion.
Epaphras

If you were here for the first week of this study, you will remember Epaphras. He was the founder of the Colossian church and its pastor. He was the one who heard about the good news of Jesus from Paul while traveling through the city of Ephesus on business as Paul preached in the city. Epaphras returned to his hometown of Colossae and planted the church. Epaphras was their pastor. Philemon was the man who took care of all the building and ground needs by hosting the church in his home. Epaphras was also likely the one who planted the nearby churches in the cities of Laodicea and Hieropolis, which were only 10 miles away.

What we see in Epaphras is a pastor’s heart. When some false teachings about Jesus began to surface in the city of Colossae, it was Epaphras who traveled 1,800 miles to find Paul in Rome and learn from him the truth about Jesus to protect the church. Even though Epaphras was far from his church, he didn’t stop praying for his church. Paul said Epaphras was always struggling on their behalf in his prayers. This word for struggling is the word *agonizomai*, from which we get our word agony. When Epaphras prayed for his church, he genuinely cared. What did he pray for them? He prayed they would become mature in Christ.

This is a great challenge, not just for myself as a pastor, but for the elders, Life Group leaders and children’s leaders. We are to be good pastors like Epaphras. We are to genuinely love the people we shepherd. We are to genuinely pray for them with authentic concern and emotion in our hearts. When we pray, we pray for what is most important in their lives, which is that they would mature in Christ.

Luke

Luke was Paul’s personal physician and close friend. He traveled with Paul on most of his missionary journeys. Luke was extremely intelligent, like most doctors. He came from Antioch, which was a highly educated city in Egypt. Why would Paul need his own personal physician? If you were stoned and left for dead, five times given 40 lashes minus one, beaten with rods, three times shipwrecked and left a full day and night adrift on the sea, it would take a toll on your body. If you were Paul, you would be thankful for a friend like Luke that could bandage you up after you were beaten for your sermon about Jesus.


If you are somebody that thinks God can’t use you in a big way because you are not theologically educated and you work in the business world, Luke is
your man. God used an ordinary guy to write most of our New Testament. Luke is a great reminder that God loves to use ordinary people in some of the most unexpected ways.

Demas

Demas is an example of somebody who started out well but finished poorly. He made a substantial commitment to the Lord's work. He was with Paul through both of his imprisonments. He eventually deserted Paul.

Look what Paul said about Demas in his final letter.

Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:9–10 (ESV)

Demas started well but eventually threw in the towel on following Jesus when things were too rough for too long. Demas is a sober reminder for all of us that starting well in our faith doesn’t always mean we will finish well. We need to stay faithful to Christ all the way to the end. At times, it will be hard to follow Christ but that doesn’t mean we turn away from him like Demas. Did Demas turn back like Mark? We don’t know.

Conclusion

We learn in Paul’s final words of Colossians how Jesus changes our everyday lives. Praying all the time and taking advantage of any opportunity we have to pray for others helps make Christ attractive and open the door for the gospel.

Not just focusing on right and wrong and how it affects us but living wisely and graciously toward others because we are concerned with how our choices affect others helps makes Jesus attractive. How we speak to others and the gracious words we have toward them helps others taste the grace of Jesus through our words.

We pray for open doors for the gospel, pray for others, live wisely around others and speak gracious words to open that door so people can know about the love of Jesus, our savior.
Bibliography


Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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