

October 22/23, 2022

Take Off...Put On

Rooted in Christ Series

Colossians 3:1-11

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I suppose there are lots of different words we could use to describe our culture today. One of the words I would use is desperate. Our culture has all the earmarks of a desperate people. We've kicked God to the curb, and now we don't know what to do. We have all these social problems; we have all this violence; we have all this stuff that's unraveling, but we can't figure out what to do. People are searching desperately for something that will give life meaning and purpose, something to make them happy, something to make life worth living, but they can't figure out what it is. And everywhere you look, there are the earmarks of a culture that is desperate and doesn't know what to do.

So, let's imagine a huge warehouse. And in this warehouse, it's kind of dingy. It's dirty, it's hot, it's humid, and it's packed full of tables. And on these tables are piles of clothing—most used and dirty, some new—and the warehouse is packed full of people. Each item of clothing represents something that people are seeking after, to try to find something to satisfy, something that will give life meaning. So they're trying to find the right outfit. They're trying to find the right fit; they're trying to find the right color; they're trying to find that something that will ultimately satisfy, but they can't find it. It's just chaos, and there's pushing and shoving. And the more it looks like they can't find it—it's not in there—the more desperate they become.

To me, that accurately pictures the culture in which we live, which perhaps raises a question. Some of you may be wondering, just wondering, “Why are you wearing those dirty old clothes this morning?” That's a good question. I kind of had the same question for some of you. I'm kind of wondering: if you've truly found new life in Christ, why are you still wearing the old dirty clothes? That's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible turn with us to the New Testament book of Colossians. We've been working our way through the book of Colossians. Josh took us through to the end of chapter two last week, and we learned that the false teachers are confusing the Colossian believers. They're telling them that, “Jesus is okay, but Jesus isn't enough. You need something more to really experience what you're looking for, and it has to do with things that you're doing, and things that you're not doing,” like the Law keeping, following the rules—what Paul finally calls self-made religion. But at the end of chapter 2, there's a huge problem, and that is he simply tells us self-made religion doesn't work. That's the problem. He says *...but are of no value against fleshly indulgence*. So, if our lives are truly going to change, and self-made religion can't change us, then what does change us? Well, that picks up with the word **therefore**, chapter 3, verse 1:

Therefore, since that doesn't work, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (*NASB, Colossians 3:1-2)

Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ. This is a technique Paul uses often. If you have been raised up with Christ—and we know that you have been—third class subjunctive for

your first grammar lesson of the day. But it's actually a technique. Some of the translations use the word, *since*. But writing it the way Paul writes it, causes you to double down on what's true. If it's true you've been raised up with Christ—and we know that you have been—so you're doubling down on the truth. That's the point of the technique. So when he's talking about **things that are above; where Christ is**—things that are heavenly—it's basically a review of everything we've learned in chapters 1 and 2. If chapters 1 and 2 are true, if you have new life in Christ, if you're filled with the fullness of Christ, if Christ is enough, if Jesus is sufficient, if all these things we've talked about are true, then keep **seeking** them with all your heart. The Greek word translated **seeking** is actually a word that means *with your heart*. So keep seeking them with all your heart.

Verse 2, and with your **mind**, *focus on the things above, not on things below*. So with our hearts and our minds, we focus on what is true of us, now in Christ. So think of it this way. You're in the warehouse; it's hot, it's crowded, it's chaotic. You're trying to find that something that will ultimately make you happy, that will ultimately satisfy, and you're pushing and you're shoving. And over in the corner of the warehouse, there is a mirror. So every time you find something that you think might work, you put it on, you look in the mirror, you don't like what you see in the mirror, so you go look for something else. You find something else; you look in the mirror, and you don't like what you see in the mirror. As long as you're looking in *that* mirror, you're never going to be happy; you're never going to be satisfied; you're never going to find what you're looking for. Those are the things of this *earth*; those are the things that are *below*.

But there is another mirror, but that mirror isn't in that warehouse. You have to **look above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God**. This is all that's true of you now in Christ. You have been made alive in Christ; you have been made a new creation; you've been radically changed from the inside out. God is in the process of making you into something utterly magnificent, as a trophy of His grace. And if you discipline yourself with all of your heart and all of your mind to look into that mirror, that's actually the mirror that is true of you now. Why is that so important? Verse 3:

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Vs. 3-4)

You have died. There was a time when I shopped in the warehouse. There was a time when I was in there, desperately trying to find something that would make me happy, something that would give life meaning and purpose, something that would ultimately satisfy this longing within me. There was a time when I was there, but that person **died**. I died to my belief that there's anything in that warehouse that could ever make me happy. That old me died and has been replaced with a new me, with new life in Christ. So he says **you have died and your life is hidden in Christ**.

That word **hidden** is a very interesting Greek word. It carries two basic ideas to it. One is the idea of something that is hidden away. So in an ancient culture, if you accumulated some level of wealth, the issue was always what do you do with that? You couldn't put it in a bank. There wasn't a safe or vault. You couldn't just lock your door at home. Doors didn't lock, and it was easy to dig through the walls. So what do you do with your treasure? The only option on the table is you hide it. You find someplace to stash it, where it's hidden; it's safe. It kind of carries the idea of being burglar proof. So it carries the idea that what you now have in Christ is not at risk. Nobody's going

to steal it. Nobody's going to take it away from you. Nobody's going to diminish it. There's no government, there's no politician, there's no false teacher that can take it away. It's yours! **Hidden in Christ!** So there's no reason to be fearful, no reason to be anxious. God's got it. Everything's safe.

But the second idea of **hidden** is the idea that it *is* hidden, meaning people don't know where it is; people don't see it. So think of it like this. I am a citizen of heaven. I am a new creation in Christ. He is making me into something utterly magnificent. It's not based on anything I've done; it's based on who I am in Christ. That is true. But when I leave the service today and I go into a restaurant, or I go into a store, nobody's going to look at me and go, "Whoa! Whoa! Citizen of heaven there! Unbelievable!" That's just not going to happen. It's just going to be like, "Ordinary Joe". But what if the moment we trust Jesus as Savior, something actually happened, like I glow in the dark or I radiate beams of light. Then I go into the restaurant; I go into the store and people are like, "Whoa! I don't know what that guy's deal is, but something's going on there!" It's not like that now, but it will be some day! That's what he just said. It's hidden now, but it's true. Whether you understand or believe that this morning, it's still true of you.

So he says in verse 4, one day Christ is going to be **revealed**. There are four or five different words that describe the return of Christ. This is one of them. It carries the idea of something that's going to be put on display; it carries the idea of the veil pulled back, and Christ being put on display for all to see. Jesus isn't going to sneak in and sneak out and people are going to be like, "Oh, I wonder what happened?" He is going to put Himself on display as the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the One who rules over all powers and authority and all creation. He will appear as the ultimate triumphal Victor, spectacular for all to see. But He's not the only one put on display. Verse 4 says, **you also will be revealed**—exact same word. You too will be put on display. The *you* that looked like ordinary Joe in the grocery store, is suddenly going to have the curtain pulled back and you are going to appear with Christ, and you will be utterly magnificent as a trophy of His grace. And people will gasp at the wonder of what you have become, not because of your great performance, but because of what Christ has done for you. So if that's true—and it is—why would you still be rummaging around in the warehouse, trying on old dirty clothes that don't offer you anything. It's so incredibly inappropriate to be wearing those clothes, understanding who God has made you to be in Christ.

So, for your second grammar lesson of the day, Paul consistently writes with a pattern. It has to do with two moods: the indicative mood and the imperative. The indicative is a statement of fact; the imperative is the command. Paul writes this way all the time. "This is true"—statement of fact—**therefore**—command—"live this way." Because this is true, live this way. So that's where he's going with this. Picking it up in verse 5:

Therefore, in light of the fact that you will be revealed with Him as this magnificent trophy of His grace—command—**consider the members of your earthly body as dead to...**

That phrase, **members of your earthly body** is kind of odd. There's lots of discussion around it. It's possible that part of the false teaching was an early form of Gnosticism, where the Gnostics preached that your spiritual life was completely disconnected from your physical life. So you could

be spiritually on track—really spiritual—all the while living a very immoral life with your body. Somehow the two were completely separate from one another. What Paul is saying is that is not true in the Christian worldview. Who you are in Christ—the spiritual—is deeply connected with the physical, so that with my body, I should be living out this truth in a way that is pleasing to God. So he's going to launch into two lists of sins. One is sexual sins, and one is a list of relational sins. So he says we should be dead to what?

...immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

These terms have a lot of overlap. But generally speaking, **immorality** is the Greek word from which we get our word pornography. It's probably the most general term of sexual immorality. **Impurity** gets into thoughts and words as well as actions. **Passion** and **evil desire**...so **passion**—this Greek word is always negative in the New Testament. Coupled with **evil desire**, it has to do with this lustful passion that now defines my life. It's this idea that I'm out of control. I have this appetite; I can't satisfy it. We'd probably use the word addiction. It's like I'm getting more desperate. I'm getting more and more energy trying to somehow figure out how to satisfy this monster. It's now controlling my life; I'm living in bondage. This thing is out of control. That's the idea of those terms. And then the last one, **greed**. We don't typically think of greed in such a list, but it makes perfect sense. Greed is this insatiable appetite. Nothing will satisfy; I always have to have more...I always have to have more...I always have to have more. I get to the place where I'm willing to use anybody and anything necessary in order to get more, because I can't be satisfied.

So again, you imagine this scene in the warehouse, and now I'm getting pretty desperate. I'm pushing and I'm shoving. Every time somebody holds up something that they think they want, I'll grab it out of their hand; I'll do whatever is necessary to get what I think I need to be happy. And all of this, ultimately, amounts to **idolatry**. That's what he says. This is a consistent message in the Bible, that sexual sin is a form of idolatry.

Here's the logic to it. So to start with, sex was God's idea; He's the one that came up with it. And God's plan and purpose is that sex would be experienced between a man and a woman in a one-flesh lifelong relationship called marriage. Any sexual behavior outside of that is an act of rebellion. Paul makes the argument like this in Romans: *...that we end up suppressing the truth. We choose to believe a lie, and we end up worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator.* Sexual sin is an act of rebellion because what I'm saying to God is, “I won't do it Your way. You're not in charge anymore; don't tell me what to do. I'm going to do it my way.” And so I'm choosing to serve and worship myself as the creature, and rebelling against the Creator, which is an act of idolatry. So that's what he's talking about there. He goes on in verse 6:

For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

(Vs. 6-7)

What he's saying there is it makes perfect sense that before you knew God, that's what you were doing. You were in the warehouse. You don't know where else to turn, you don't know where to find life, you can't find something that fulfills, so you're desperately trying to find something that will satisfy. I expect that behavior from people in the warehouse, and he says that's where *you used*

*to live. That's where you used to shop. That's how you used to live life. But that reflects people that don't know God, those people that are under **the wrath** and condemnation of God.*

But it seems incredibly inappropriate that that would define someone who now has new life in Christ. That's the behavior from people who don't know any better and are in rebellion against God. That's not you anymore. So, here's the question. If that's something you struggle with, what are you looking for? What are you missing? What is it you think you're going to find in that warehouse that is going to finally make you happy...it's finally going to satisfy...it's finally going to make the pain go away? Why isn't Christ enough? If you're filled with the fullness of Christ, why isn't that enough for you? What are you missing? What do you like? What are you looking for? Because the truth is: you're never going to find it there. That's not where you're going to find it. You're going to find it *when with your heart and your mind, you believe that Christ is enough.* He goes on in verse 8:

But now you also, put them all aside... This is the Greek language that means: take off the old clothes; it's a clothing metaphor. These are the clothes you're used to wear. It's understandable why you used to wear them, but what's confusing is why are you still wearing them, now that you have new life in Christ? So the imagery Paul uses is, "Take the old clothes off." And then he moves to the second list of relational sins. **...but now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another,** (Vs. 8-9a)

Again, these terms have a lot of overlap. **Anger** is the emotion; **wrath** is acting out on that anger. **Malice** is the intent to do harm. **Slander** is harmful speech, speech intended to do damage to other people. When it says **abusive speech**, we would think of speech that's crude, that's foul, cursing, swearing, just language that doesn't seem appropriate for someone that has new life in Christ.

Then he talks about *lying to one another*. In the ancient cultures, it was a way of life to lie to one another. That's what they did. And, sadly, that's who we've become as a 21st century American culture. It's shocking how much we have rejected the concept of truth, and people will say whatever they need to say in order to get what they want. We lie as a way of life. Our leaders lie; our politicians lie; the media lies; there are preachers that lie; we lie as a way of life. And what's crazy about this is that it doesn't seem to bother anybody. But as long as we have forfeited the importance of truth, there is no chance for flourishing in relationships. Whether you're talking about a marriage, a family, a business, a dorm, friendships, a community, a nation, there is no chance for flourishing if you do not value truth, because there is no trust. But shouldn't we, as the people of God, be different? Everything we've talked about, everything that's in that heavenly mirror, everything that defines us now in our new life in Christ, is based on truth. I can't prove this to you. I believe it; I see it with eyes of faith; but all of it's based on believing that's true. And if that's correct, shouldn't we of all people be people of truth? And with that, then we experience the flourishing in relationships that will always be elusive to those lost and desperate in the warehouse.

So when you think of that list: **anger, wrath, malice, slander**, all of that makes sense to me in that warehouse. The more desperate you become, the more angry you become, the more that anger

manifests, the more you slander, the more you yell, the more your language gets vulgar, the more all of that happens, it's like, "Of course it does." You can just feel the tension getting greater and greater in that warehouse. But I'm not in the warehouse anymore, so those shouldn't define me anymore. I have new life. It's hidden with Christ, in God, safe and secure. I'm at peace; I'm at rest. I don't want to be angry all the time. I don't want stuff coming out of my mouth that destroys other people. I don't want to live that way. I don't have to live that way. I'm not in the warehouse anymore. What I now have, what I now believe, gives me peace. Everything is going to be okay. I'm at rest with that. I don't act like that anymore. If those relational sins define you, it's like, "What...where is that coming from? Why does that define you?" It seems incredibly inappropriate if you really do believe that you have new life in Christ. He says:

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside (clothing metaphor) the old self with its *evil* practices...(I'm not in the warehouse anymore with its evil practices. I've put on new clothing) and have put on the new self who has been renewed. My thinking is being changed; I'm being renewed to a true knowledge. (In chapter 1, we defined that as *super knowledge*), according to the image of the One who created him— (Vs. 9-10)

With all of my heart, with the discipline of my mind, I am looking in a different mirror. And the more I'm understanding, the more I'm believing, the more my mind is being renewed, I don't live that way anymore. I've taken off the old clothes and I've put on new clothes that now rightly represent who I am in Christ. It is likely that in Colossae, there was a lot of conflict between different groups of people. That was true in almost all these Roman cities. So the last thing he talks about in this paragraph is it's a renewal; a changed way of thinking...

...in which there is no *distinction* between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.
(Vs. 11)

All these divisions—they were not only true of them, but true of us today—all these ways we divide and attack people. Ultimately, what's going to bring us together? I can assure you, it's not the government. It's not one political party or the other. I can absolutely assure you it's not the latest theory, the latest idea, the latest philosophy, the latest manmade thing that's going to solve the problem. As a matter of fact, the more we try all this stuff, the more divided we've become. Hello, it's not working. There has to be a basis that is rooted in truth, that convinces people we can come together—old, young, rich, poor, black, white—as one people equal in every way. And the only message that can do that is the message of the gospel, because in Christ, no matter who you are, since it's not based on your performance or mine, but based on what Christ has done for us, nobody's *more than*; nobody's *less than*. We all come together as one people in Christ. It's the gospel; it's the only message that can do that.

So as we wrap this up for this morning, here's the question. Do you believe chapters 1 and 2 are true? Do you believe you have new life in Christ? Do you believe Christ is sufficient? Do you believe Christ is enough? Do you believe you've been filled with the fullness of Christ? If so, why are you still wearing some of the dirty old clothes? What is it in the warehouse that you still think you need? What is it you think still is going to make you happy, you still think you lack? What is it that Jesus can't be trusted for, and you feel like you have to go back to the warehouse and find it

there? With all of our hearts, with a disciplined mind, we need to look into the heavenly mirror that rightly pictures who we now are in Christ, and realize those dirty, old clothes from the past just don't belong on us anymore.

One of the interesting things about this particular text is the commands, the verbs, are in a form—a tense—that doesn't mean you need to go out there and you need to work on it, and you need to try harder. These are aorist tense verbs which means a moment in time. It means right now, not one day more. The command is very strong: “Stop it, and stop it now, because it's behavior that's completely inappropriate for one who has new life in Christ.” My prayer all week long has been that this auditorium, when we leave, would look like this stage—with piles of dirty clothing that we've made the decision to take off and leave behind. “It just no longer fits me. That's not who I am anymore.” No more excuses, no more rationalizations...it needs to come off, and it needs to come off now.

The last song we're going to sing is the song, *Christ Is Enough for Me*. I want you to understand, as you're singing those words, “What are you saying?” You are saying that you do believe Christ is enough...that Christ is sufficient! There's nothing in that warehouse I need. Therefore I'm declaring that Christ is enough, which means that you are making a decision to leave the dirty clothes here, because they're no longer appropriate in your life. May that be so.!

Our Father, we are so thankful that when we were dead and lost in our sin, You sent Jesus to be our Savior. The old me that used to rummage around in the warehouse, desperately trying to find something to satisfy, that me is dead and gone, and I won't believe that anymore. I've found new life in Christ. Lord, may we truly believe. May we look in the mirror and see, with eyes of faith, that one day the curtain will be pulled back and we will be revealed as absolutely magnificent trophies of Your grace. God, may we believe that so strongly that we will recognize how inappropriate it is to still be wearing the old dirty clothes. God, may we truly declare from our hearts, “Christ is enough.” In Jesus' name, Amen.

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CHURCH-WIDE THIS OCTOBER

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All month we are focusing on loving our neighbors, one way to do this is to **Engage in Conversation**. This can look like asking your neighbors questions to learn more about them. Pay attention not only to common ground but the things in their story that are unique. Try this as a way to love your neighbor!

Introduction

This week in Colossians Paul turns a big corner. In much of the first two chapters, Paul has been establishing what is true – what is true about God, what is true about the world and its system, what is true about the false teachers and what is true about those who are in Christ! This week Paul begins to tell the Colossians (and us) how to live according to what is true.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

- 1) What is one of your favorite items of clothing to “put on”? (Something you wish you could wear every day). Why do you like it so much?
- 2) Is there a family tradition that has special meaning for you? Describe it.

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
 - 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) How did God speak to you as we gathered to worship this week? Was it through one of the songs or the message or a conversation you had with someone?
- 2) What are 1-2 specific truths that you have learned about Jesus or about those who are in Christ from the first two chapters of Colossians?

How do you see those truths making a difference in your daily life? What changes in your life if/when you live based on those truths?

- 3) In practical terms, what does it mean to “keep seeking the things above,” and “set your mind on things above, not things that are on the earth?” What does/would this look like on a daily basis in your life?

- 4) Consider the flow of thought in this passage. What is the relationship between what Paul says is true about the Colossians (3:1, 3, 9b-10) and the commands he gives them (3:5-9a)?

What connection do you see in this passage between what we think (where our mind is set, v.2) and our actions?

- 5) Look again at Colossians 3:5-11. What specifically do you need to “consider yourself dead to” or “put off/lay aside”?

What specifically are you putting on?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Telling Yourself the Truth: Each day remind yourself of what is true of you as a follower of Jesus.

I am one in whom Christ dwells and delights. (Col. 1:27)

I live in the strong kingdom of God that is unshakeable. (Col. 1:13-14)

Because Jesus is risen and ascended, He is able to guide/lead my life today. (Col. 1:15-20)

I have died with Jesus to the ways of this world. (Col. 2:20; 3:5, 8-9).

I will keep seeking the kingdom of God and set my mind on heavenly things. (Col. 3:1-3)

The kingdom is not in trouble, and neither am I. (Col. 1:15-23; 3:4, 9-11).

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

Next Week: Read Colossians 3:12-17