

Colossians 3 vs 1-2

On Saturday we read about Paul urging the Colossians not to be restricted by people telling them what they should and shouldn't do! This passage in my Bible is entitled, "Rules for holy living"!! More rules? Paul has finished his criticism of the false teachers and now turns to encouraging the way of life taught by Christ.

Paul says, "set your hearts". This is a call to action. God relies on us having a desire to impose rules on ourselves because, despite the fact that we have been raised with him, God knows that we still retain that human tendency to sin. We are urged to live now with the mindset that our sinfulness was buried with Christ. Our motivation to live holy lives comes from thinking of ourselves as dead to sin but alive to Christ. Since Adam, who was created without sin, we have all inherited that tendency to sin. Before a Derby County home game a bloke shouts over the P.A. system, "It's in your DNA. Come on you Rams". DCFC is definitely in the DNA of every cell of my body but, as Ian pointed out yesterday, so is the tendency to sin!!

Keeping the rules cannot earn us our salvation but our salvation produces in us a desire to keep them!!

Jesus said the greatest commandment was, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10 v 27)

Paul is echoing that here when he says set your hearts and minds on things above. If the heart and mind is set, the soul and strength will follow.

Paul stresses 'things above' rather than earthly things. He reminds us that Christ is seated at God's right hand (above). This is where our focus should be but the Bible is full of advice and teaching about how to live in this world. The remainder of the letter is actually devoted to it!

Paul doesn't want us to be 'pie in the sky' Christians who think that God will just sort everything out while we sit back, sing choruses, read the Bible and pray. Paul is in effect saying that we should get on with our God given lives in our God given situations but that we should also make sure our hearts and minds are centred on Christ and his teaching rather than the things that people of the world place their importance in.

We only really need two dates in our diaries. The first is the day when we meet God after physical death when he will say one of two things to us. "Well done good and faithful servant" (Mat 25 v 23) or "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Mat 7 v 23). The second date is today! We can never be sure of tomorrow so pray for God's wisdom and motivation in our hearts and minds to live lives worthy of him!

Colossians 3 vs 3-6

As Christians our lives are now 'hidden with Christ'. Hidden means concealed and safe. In a sense our relationship with Jesus is a very private thing. We can make a show of virtue for the world to see but God knows how we really are. True faith results in a salvation that is safe. It can't be touched by any other power or principality. Like our Italian wine that Lynda has hidden away. It's safe from me and hopefully it's maturing too!!

The Roman culture at the time was very hedonistic. Sexual perversions and depravity of all kinds were practised widely. Paul, however, is addressing the church and he gives two lists of five sins that do not fit in with the fact that 'Christ is now our life' (v4). These sins spring from our earthly nature. There is a war going on within every saved person. The earthly nature desires one thing, the newly created spiritual nature desires something else. The battle is reinforced by Paul's words that we must put to death what should be considered the enemy. These are strong words. We are to deal with these sins so that they cannot come back to haunt us.

Sexual immorality is the top of the list. Among evangelical Christians, viewing pornography is widespread. We'd be lying to ourselves if we didn't acknowledge the power of sexual desire within us. God created us with it and the intimacy it produces between a man and a woman in marriage is celebrated in Song of Songs and is what Paul in his letter to the Ephesians describes as a mystery (Eph 5 v 32).

Paul wants us to kill off the wrong and impure outlets for this built in drive! With time on our hands and the internet so accessible are we taking this as seriously as God wants us to.

I read this recently from C.H. Spurgeon.

"If you are living now in sin and yet pretend to be virtuous, remember that if your hypocrisy is never found out in this life, it will confront you at the Last Great Day"

Greed, or covetousness, gets a special mention as it is linked by Paul to idolatry! This is a sin very few of us are free from but Paul still says we need to put it to death. Advertising and TV shows like "Escape to the country" or "Grand Designs" feed our desire to want more! We work long hours and chase promotion in order to get the wealth to fund our idols, be they holidays, new clothes, good food (and wine-sorry), better cars, better homes, etc, etc. Greed is a form of selfishness and when it becomes more important than living in a Christ-like way becomes something that needs to be put to death!

We should try to cultivate the attitude that Paul himself wrote about in his letter to the Philippians. "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (Phil 4 v 11)

Colossians 3 vs 7-8

Someone has coined the dubious phrase 'respectable sins'. The people of this world don't give a second thought to gossip, bad language and even anger. It's easy to slip into the mindset of those around us. These sins take on a veneer of respectability and become part of our lifestyle! We may even become blind to our 'respectable sins'!

Paul addresses this wrong thinking in the second of his two lists of five sins that must be dealt with. He first reminds us of the fact that they belong to a past life. This life has been replaced with our new creation which should display the likeness of Christ!

We are to get rid of these sins. God doesn't do this for us alone! We are the ones who are told to get rid of them! True that the Holy Spirit will point them out and help us but this command is directed to us!

Anger unchecked will often develop into rage. As with the other 3 sins the problem lies with what then comes out of our mouths!

Someone once said, "Speak when you're angry and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret".

I once allowed anger to boil over into rage in an incident with one of my teenage boys. The shame of my actions and my shouting struck me as soon as the episode was over and, to this day, still haunts me!

The Bible has much to say about guarding the words that come out of our mouths. In Mat 12 v 27 Jesus tells us that, "By our words we will be acquitted or condemned".

James writes at length in chapter 3 of his book about taming the tongue! He calls it, "...a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3 v 8).

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians continues the theme. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen". (Eph 4v29)

Proverbs 16v24 says, "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones".

Domestic abuse has taken a turn for the worse during lockdown and I'm sure Christian couples are not exempt from the odd argument or two! (Incidentally, in case you're wondering, I have not come to blows with Lynda over the hidden wine!)

Steve Brady suggests we **THINK** before we speak. Is it **True**, is it **Helpful**, is it **Important**, is it **Necessary** and is it **Kind**? If it's not then don't say it!!

Colossians 3 vs 9-12

Towards the end of my teaching career I got into the habit of coming home, stripping off my smart clothes and putting on my 'comfies'. These were just a t shirt and a pair of pyjama bottoms. This annoyed Lynda and still does!! According to her, I'd gone from well respected professional at the top of his game to lazy slob! I'd taken off old clothes and put on new ones but it didn't really make me a different person!

Paul, here, is using this analogy of changing clothes to describe the change Christ brings about that actually does make a person different. We will look at the new clothes tomorrow but this passage finishes off what Paul has been telling us belongs to the old self and lying is one of those things!

Three things stand out for me in these verses.

Look carefully at the phrase 'the image of its creator'. Notice it is not the 'the image of the creator'. So what does 'its' refer to? I believe it refers to the new self (v10) and therefore that Christ is the one who creates it! What grace and what privilege if Christ has done that in us! At one time we were helpless and probably blissfully unaware that we were unrenewed and living in original sin. (The state we are all born in, also referred to in the Bible, as living in the old Adam. See Romans 5). Then he revealed himself to us and when we realised it was for our sin that he died we put our faith in him. From that moment he started a new creation within us. The new self.

Secondly notice that this is an ongoing process. Paul doesn't write, 'has been renewed' or, 'will be renewed' but 'is being renewed'. For me the process started 37 years ago and clearly therefore is a very slow process! (Lynda will confirm). Our responsibility is to consider our old self to have died with Christ and kill off or get rid of any of our past ways of living. Our new self is gradually becoming the image of its creator. We are becoming more like Christ if we are obedient to his teaching. (The knowledge of Christ is important but needs to be acted upon v10).

Finally some good news for the diversity brigade. The list in v11 is used by Paul to point out that it doesn't matter what the race, social class or background, all are welcomed by Christ. He breaks down all barriers so we also should reflect the same attitude by treating people equally no matter the nationality, race, educational level, social standing, income, gender or religion.

Pray for God's help to persevere with the business of renewal. Albert Einstein was rubbish at school (except in maths). His teacher even asked him to drop out! This is what he said in later years, "It's not that I'm smart; it's just that I stay with problems longer".

### Colossians 3 vs 12-14

When we were very young our parents chose our clothes and dressed us. Then we learned how to dress in the clothes they chose for us. Then we began to choose what we wore. We may have chosen our clothes to portray an image or fit in with the crowd. Harry used to wear his jeans so the WAIST band hung below his backside revealing his Jack Jones pants!!

Here Paul is urging us to choose what to wear so that we fit in with God's crowd!

To contrast his two lists of five negatives he now gives us five positives to put on. Clothes cover what's underneath. At the same time as getting rid of the underneath old self, we are to put on the outer garments of the new self. Doing this everyday will hopefully mean we become what we wear!

First Paul gives us the motivation to dress in such a way. He calls us, "God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved". Ring any bells? Jesus is called the 'Chosen one' (Isaiah 42 v1 and Luke 23v25). God says of him in Mat 3v17, '...my Son who I love'. And he is the only truly holy person to have lived. '...him who had no sin' (2 Cor 5v21). What a privilege that we should be addressed in the same way as Christ. So we should put on these 5 likenesses of Christ.

- Compassion. Several times this word is used to describe Jesus when he saw the needs of the people. (e.g. Mat 9 v 36). It was what moved him to tears when he considered the people of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Do we have this deep concern for others? Thank God that so many people who are all created in his image are displaying compassion in these unusual times. (Managed to resist using that now overused and annoying word 'unprecedented'). Kindness is the action that springs from compassion.
- The word 'meekness' is used in the KJV for gentleness. Alongside humility it is the attitude of elevating the importance of others and lowering our own importance. In these days when we are told we can't have good mental health without self-esteem this might sound like a contradiction but it is still possible to have self-esteem if humility is seen as a virtue rather than a weakness.
- Patience. Some people are like buttons. They pop off at the wrong time. Are we like that? A true measure of patience comes when you're in a traffic jam 5 mins before kick off! Seriously though, think of the patience Jesus has with us when we sin, say sorry then do it again the next day and the next etc. Patience is counting down without blast off!
- Forgiveness. Forgiving someone who has hurt or wronged us can be a tough task. God knows this and he knows that harbouring a grudge can eat into our soul making us bitter and twisted. The same can happen if we don't forgive ourselves. We can claim to be forgiven by God but can't let go of something in our past. To forgive is particularly important for Christians. God wants for us the same attitude of Christ, who called out from the cross "Father forgive them..." (Luke 23 v24). He died that we should be forgiven. How far will we go?
- Love. The outer garment on top of the others. The attitude that holds all the others together. Christ's greatest two commandments both have the word love in them. Love for God and love for our neighbours. Love speaks through the previous likenesses. Can we love like Christ did? His love for us took him to the cross.

"We can do no great things, but we can do small things with great love" (Mother Theresa)

Colossians 3 vs 15-17

A rather dishevelled and dirty looking old lady approached the minister of a dull church to ask for membership. He didn't think she'd fit in so put her off and told her to pray about it. She asked a further 2 times but then a long time passed and the minister forgot about her. One day he bumped into her on the street. He asked her if she still wanted membership. "No", she said, "I've been talking to Jesus and he told me not to bother". "He did?" asked the minister. "Yes" she replied, "He told me even he hasn't been able to get into your church and he's been trying for years!"

Paul now addresses the church as a group of believers. Sadly, many churches don't do what verse 16 says. The message of Christ must be central and it must 'dwell richly'. As you read through the verses compare what Paul is telling the Colossians to do with how we do at Measham.

Peace is mentioned twice in v16. 'Letting the peace of Christ rule in your hearts' literally translates as 'Let the peace of Christ be the referee in your hearts. There can be conflict in our hearts. Fears vs hopes, trust vs distrust, love vs jealousy etc. But we are urged to follow attitudes and then actions that promote peace amongst the body of the church. Church should be different from other secular organizations where people play power games, bicker, gossip and battle against egos. The church should be a peaceful haven, safe from such things. This will happen and a church 'works' if in it, 'The message of Christ dwells richly'.

Roger Carswell in his most recent prayer letter expresses his frustration the gospel message is being pushed out by theological debate and apologetics!

The members of the church not only have the responsibility to teach each other but also to put right those who are in error. Note this is a corporate task not one left to certain individuals.

Paul next turns to our praise of God. Verse 15 and v17 tell us to be thankful. Gratitude towards God is important as it encourages us to realize the material and spiritual blessings we have from God. What a blessing this fantastic weather has been after the months of storms earlier. Locked down maybe but not locked in.

We are also to sing! God created us with the ability to sing for a reason. Singing is showing adoration to God, it is praying to God and because it's usually done with others, it unites us in God. If our purpose on Earth is to bring glory to God then singing surely helps. Singing doesn't just lift our souls; it lifts our souls to him. As God sings over us (Zephaniah 3 v 17) so we should sing back to him. Psalms hymns and spiritual songs are mentioned. A combination of all 3 is good as long as they are 'done in the name of the Lord Jesus'.

This is a quote from Keith and Kristen Getty's book entitled 'Sing'. 'Don't sing primarily because you love singing or keep quiet because you don't. Sing because you love the one, who made you, formed you and enabled you to sing'.