

December 14, 2008

# THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

## *Putting Off the Old and Putting on the New*

Colossians 3:8-15

In view of the fact that you have been born again – in the light of the truth that you have experienced new life in Christ – if you consider your old life dead and buried and have been raised to new life in His resurrection – with the understanding that one day what Christ has done in us will be on display for all the world to see and we will be revealed with Him in glory – Paul gives us a therefore: *'Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...'* As wonderful as the truth is that those who have been born from above are united with Christ in His death and resurrection and our life is hidden with Christ in God, the fact is, there is still a lot in us that is very earthly.

And Paul begins to lay it out for us: *'...sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.'* as we saw last week. And Paul's uncompromising statement of what it means to be a Christian says this: ***'To be a Christian means that you are actively engaged in putting these remnants of the fall to death. If you are not – then you are not a Christian.'*** To be born again means that you have been united by the Holy Spirit to Christ in such a way that you die with Him to the world, the flesh and the devil. *'For you have died...'* he says in verse 3. That is the objective truth. And in light of that truth, the convictions, values, impulses, affections, passions and drives that governed our lives in the past are subjectively being put to death by the Spirit as we turn to Christ.

The objective truth that we have died when we were united to Christ at our conversion, must be coupled with the subjective truth that we are putting to death that which is earthly in us. They are two sides of the same coin. ***We are putting to death all that is earthly in us because we died.*** The objective truth is that we have been crucified with Christ as Paul tells us in Galatians – and now we apply and experience that truth subjectively. ***Objective truth is only valuable to us subjectively.*** It is like the law of gravity. There is an objective truth that objects dropped from a height will fall – but until gravity operates subjectively on you and you find yourself on the ground – it only remains a theory. Because we know the truth that we have been united to Christ in His death – we can begin to put those things to death.

The word Paul uses here is very particular. He says *'But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.'* Colossians 3:8 The word translated ***'put them all away'*** is the Greek word that means ***to take off, to lay aside, to rid yourself of – to renounce.*** In Paul's mind, this is how to kill sin. Take off that thing called anger -lay aside wrath – get rid of malice- renounce slander and obscene talking. This is only possible if first you have died with Christ. People without Christ have no choice – they can't lay these things aside – they are chained to them and unless God in His mercy visits them with salvation – they wear these things to the grave. But with Christians it is not so.

Put away ***anger*** he says. Now many of us might not have seen ourselves in the picture Paul painted in verse five talking about sexual immorality – we might have even patted ourselves on the back – until we got to verse eight and Paul started talking about where we live. ***Anger*** here has the idea of a *settled attitude of angry living*. ***Wrath*** refers to a *violent outburst of anger*. Years ago lady came to Billy Sunday, the energetic evangelist of the early part of last century, and tried to rationalize her angry outbursts. ***"There's nothing wrong with losing my temper,"*** she said. ***"I blow up, and then it's all over."*** ***"So does a shotgun,"*** Sunday replied, ***"and look at the mess it leaves behind!"*** ***Malice*** is a *tendency of mind that wants to do other people harm*. ***Slander*** is to *injure others with your words*. ***Obscene talk*** is the *use of abusive language*. And Paul says, 'Renounce all this – put it away – quit wearing those clothes.'

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices* Colossians 3:9 Literally Paul says, 'Because you are renouncing anger and wrath and malice and slander and abusive speech – ***stop lying to each other.***' In other words if it is true that you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God – if it is true that you have put off the old self with all its evil practices – then how can you continue to live in a lie? How can you continue to live in sexual immorality – how can you continue live in anger and wrath – how can you continue to harbor malice toward one another? If this is true of you, if you have put off the old self with its practices – why would you continue to live as though you had not? ***To put it plainly, stop living the lie.***

Paul states this more positively in Ephesians: *Therefore, having put off the lie, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.* Ephesians 4:25 The Bible makes some truth statements about those who have been born again that we need to speak to ourselves and rehearse with one another: **Forever saved by grace through faith – forgiven, accepted, beloved of God – a new creation in Christ – dead to sin, alive to God – holy, blameless, righteous – partakers of the Divine Nature – seated in the heavenlies with Christ.** Because we have put off the lie – we need to live in the realm of the truth – and that means speaking the truth to one another.

We have not only put off something – the Bible says that as Christians we have put on something as well. *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.* Colossians 3:10 In our putting off the old self that lives in the lie – we also have put on the new self that Paul says is in the process of being renewed **according to a true knowledge of the One who created him.** Paul says it another way in Ephesians 4 again: *'... put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* Ephesians 4:22-24

All those negative things of the old self belong to the old life without Christ, and there is no redemption possible for the old self. Redemption happens in the new self that is created after the likeness of God. And notice how that happens. Paul says that happens **as we are being renewed in the spirit of our mind.** What that means is that all of us, for a time, some a long time, some a short time, were living our lives according to the old convictions, values, impulses, affections, passions and drives that governed our unregenerate minds – the old self. As a result, our minds were ingrained to certain ways of thinking which affected how we lived. But when God in His mercy saved us – we were born again into a new life of righteousness and holiness according to the truth – notice those words: *the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* **The old self was according to the lie – the new self is according to the truth.** But in so many places, our patterns of behavior are still conformed to the lie and so we need the truth to wash our minds and hearts and help us begin putting off the lie and putting on the truth.

Paul says, *Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.* Colossians 3:11 In other words, it does not matter where your heritage is, what your past is, whether your parents were kind or were monsters, whether you have a history of addictions or were a choir boy, whether you come from the gutter or the palace – from whatever circumstance or condition or situation you have come – **Christ now is the sphere and circumference of your existence.** You are no longer characterized by your upbringing, your life experiences, by either tragedy or triumph – **Christ is all and in all.** When we believed the truth claims of Christ, He performed radical surgery on us – taking out the heart of stone with its evil tendencies and inclinations – and giving us a heart that matches His, beat for beat. Our tendency is now toward righteousness, not unrighteousness, toward holy desires, not unholy desires – and to feed those tendencies we need the word of truth, filling us, saturating us, overflowing in us – so that we are putting off the lie and embracing the truth.

Again, you need to note that objectively we have put off the old self and subjectively we are now putting off those habits and behaviors that it gives rise to. And we have objectively put on the new self and subjectively we are putting on those new habits and behaviors that it engenders. Listen to Paul: *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 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.* Colossians 3:12-13

Instead of anger and wrath Paul says, **'Put on compassionate hearts'.** The meaning of this word in classical Greek denotes the lamenting that occurred at the death or misfortune of another. It is as though you yourself were visited with the tragedy and as a result it manifests in some kind of assistance toward that person. Putting on compassionate hearts means that we do something in response to the compassion we feel. It is not just feeling sorry for someone – **but it is feeling their pain so keenly that you are moved to help.** Willing hands to serve moved by tender hearts.

Instead of malice, Paul says, **'Put on kindness'.** Kindness here is the virtue of the person whose neighbor's good is as dear to him as his own. Another translation refers to this as **'a sweet disposition'.** Put off the rags of slander and **put on humility.** Humility is not self-deprecation, or cowering back, it is not even a self-disgust at our sometimes shabby lives or a downcast, brow-beaten stance. **Humility is having an accurate estimation of yourself in the face of Christ.** Those who are truly humble know the source of their power is not of themselves but of Christ.

**Put on meekness** – which is another way of saying, 'Be gentle with each other'. And **put on patience** – which is the refusal to be upset by perverse people. All of these are not qualities we find in the old self, because at the bottom of that old nature is the desire first and foremost to please ourselves and not God, or one another. It is true that there are some people who are just naturally more compassionate, kind, humble, meek and patient than others. But there is a limit to human kindness and compassion and patience. At some point our compassion runs out – at some point our patience snaps – at some point our kindness turns to malice. So Paul is not talking about human qualities but **divine qualities**.

That is nowhere more evident than in these last two: *bearing with one another and... forgiving each other...* **Bearing with one another** goes hand in hand with **forgiving one another**. Bearing with one another means that as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, we must not only bear one another's burdens but **bear with** one another when we fail, or disappoint, or hurt, or offend, and wound each other. Proverbs tells us that *'A man's discretion [understanding] makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.'* Proverbs 19:11

Transgressions against us are hard to overlook. It is not easy to suffer silently when you are wronged. I don't mean to imply that we should never speak up when someone sins against you. There are times we must. But most of the time we are offended and hurt because someone gets in the way of our dreams or desires or direction. And the context of these verses make it clear that **Paul was not talking about those things that happen between us that require confrontation**. *On her golden wedding anniversary, my grandmother revealed the secret of her long and happy marriage. "On my wedding day, I decided to choose ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook," she explained. A guest asked her to name some of the faults. "To tell the truth," she replied, "I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him that's one of the ten.'"*

Bearing with one another can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit in the believers life, because bearing with one another must end up by forgiving each other and that is divine. This is clear from the context of Paul's statement as he says *'...as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive...'* Literally this means, **'If anyone has grounds for a quarrel with anyone else, don't stand on that ground but move toward forgiveness'**. Grounds for a quarrel imply that someone has trampled our rights somehow and we have the grounds or a right to be angry or hurt or offended. And it is only fair that we exact some measure of retribution, or that we let them know how hurt we are, or that we set them straight somehow. But the question to ask ourselves in these situations is this: 'Will exercising my rights here to be offended, hurt, angry or whatever, **bring glory to God and show the power of the gospel in my life?**' 'Will Christ be magnified in my body by choosing to be offended and angry and hurt?'

The Bible gives us a course of action here that can only be followed by those who have put on the new self. *'...as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive...'* And just how did the Lord forgive us? First of all, **He took the first step**. Forgiveness, real forgiveness is not natural. It is not a feeling. It is an act of the will. In love, God knew that we needed forgiveness and Christ went to the cross willingly in order that forgiveness might be accomplished. In other words, the one who was wronged took the first step. Too often, we are waiting for the person who wronged us to take that first step – but the example is that Christ went first.

Secondly, **He absorbed the punishment for the offense**. When we put on forgiveness, in essence we are releasing that person from liability to suffer punishment or penalty. When someone sins against you, they owe you a debt and you can either take payments on the debt or we can make payments on the debt. We take payments by withholding forgiveness, by dwelling on the hurt, inflicting emotional pain, by lashing back or in a hundred other ways. But that is like drinking poison in hopes the other guy will die. Making payments on the debt is what Christ did for us. He bore our sins on the cross so that He might bring us to God, as 1 Peter 3:8 tells us. We make payments on the debt when we bring it to God first.

Finally, the Lord forgives us in such a way that the Bible says that **He remembers our sin no more**. This does not mean that it is possible for God to forget our sins. Forgetting is a passive action – like 'I forgot to feed the dog this morning'. It just slipped your mind somehow. Nothing slips God's mind so His forgetting is an action of His will that says, 'I promise not to hold your sin against you or bring it up between us anymore'. If we truly forgive one another from the heart, we need to make four promises: **I will not dwell on this incident. I will not bring it up again and use it against you. I will not talk about this to others. I will not let this stand between us and hinder our relationship.**

Finally Paul says: *And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.* Colossians 3:14 Love makes sense of compassion, kindness, humility, patience, meekness, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. It is love that gives the accurate estimation and adequate supply to another's need. **Love binds all these things together** because when we truly love one another, our first impulse is the welfare of our brother. Without real love, it would be impossible to overlook one another's faults or to take the first step toward forgiveness. **Love means seeking the best for another.** Put on love – clothe yourself with love – let the love of God shine through you in all the other virtues.

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.* Colossians 3:15 Literally, Paul says, '**Let the peace of God be the umpire in your heart.**' Our hearts are arenas of conflict and competition – all kinds of feelings clash in there: fear and hope, jealousy and trust, indifference and concern, cynicism and goodwill. All kinds of issues arise in our hearts when we deal with one another. Who will settle the issues? Who will umpire in your heart? Let the peace of God settle all your issues. Follow the peace. **Where you experience the peace of God – that is the right course.** Do you experience peace when you react in anger or wrath or malice or nurse your hurts and dwell on your injuries? God will not give you peace, the Holy Spirit will not let you rest where you harbor malice and anger and hurt – **but the peace of God always steers a course of love.**

Put off the old self with all of its practices, and habits and ways of doing things. Put on the new self which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.

*Our good and gracious Father,*

*Have mercy on us in our continual struggle with the old self with all of its evil practices. Grant us the grace to put off all that is contaminated by the Fall and put on the new self created in righteousness, holiness and love. Let us wear compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and forgiveness as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved. Grant us forbearance to live with each other as those who have together been rescued from lives of sin and rebellion. Give us we pray, the will to put to death all that is earthly in us and show us more of the infinite all-satisfying glory of Christ so that we will run after You and run from sin. Grant that we would see and savor and embrace the truth that we who are Christ's have died and our lives are hidden with You in God. And may we be those who have been made glad in God and live to make the nations glad in You we pray in the life-transforming name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.*

***May the Lord bless you and keep you  
and make His face shine upon you.  
May the Lord be gracious unto you;  
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you  
and give you peace.***