

Spiritual Renewal at Cornerstone

Part Eleven-The Hidden Life

WEBSITE VERSION

Col. 3: 1-11

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Text: (NIV) ¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

As we begin the New Year, it is good to be reminded that at Cornerstone we believe the Bible is the Word of God. It is infallible in all that it teaches and the writers were each led of the Holy Spirit to record their thoughts or narratives using real words and real impressions. We also realize that at times the Word of God requires a good deal of interpretation as it includes different types of writing both literal and figurative but always inerrant, without error, in the sense that everything it says...God meant for it to say! These writers were real people and not to be confused with human word processors sitting in a trance writing down what the Holy Spirit gave them. Rather the Holy Spirit in His infinite wisdom and might used the Biblical writers knowing their styles and thoughts to record what He wanted recorded! As Jesus himself said "**The Scripture cannot be broken**" [John 10:35.] For Jesus, what the Bible said God said! Thus, we take it to be the Word of God! The Apostle Paul even made this point explicitly:

Romans 15:4 (NIV) For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

That means that these words are as alive and active and relevant to us today as they were to the early churches that received them. We must treat them as if they were written last week and we just got them in the mail.

With that in mind, we come today to the Apostle Paul, prompted by the Holy Spirit, writing to his Christian friends in the ancient City of Colossae. Now...an unbeliever looking in at us might ask "What in the world do these people care about what someone wrote two thousand years ago to some folks in a long dead city thousands of miles away?" But, considering what we just said about the authority of the Bible, we have a sensible reply. That person would need to be told that we care *immensely* what was written two thousand years ago because we believe that God wanted us to read it twenty centuries later. Why? Because it is still true and applicable to our lives today as Christians! So...what *was* the main thing Paul was saying to the church at Colossae? Simply this: ³ **"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."** Right away we are faced with the interpretative question. We might want to say to Paul "Huh?" We might want to say "Excuse me Paul but I feel very much alive! I am reading this right? What do you mean saying I died?" Good question. Let's consider it. But first let us pray.

Now that we've closed out the first decade of the twenty first century, we are looking forward. Everyone has something from these last few years they'd be happy to forget. I'm fascinated with very forgettable expressions that hopefully will go away with the new year. As they usually do at this time, the English Department at Lake Superior State University in Michigan's Upper Peninsula has issued its "Annual List of Banished Words and Phrases" for 2011. This is amusing. The list includes all kinds of overused vocabulary such as:

"Viral" as in "The video went viral"

"Epic" as in "Epic proportions"

"Wow Factor" "Ah-ha Moment" "Man-up!" "Um just sayin'" and that most mangled mix of nouns and verbs known as "Google it!"

I have my own personal favorite expression that is finally going away. It was actually quite useful even if it was misunderstood a little. Ready? We don't hear much anymore about something called a "Paradigm Shift!" What in the world did that mean? It was quite useful really.

Remember a "paradigm" is a model or pattern. Something that represents a way of doing things. For example, this worship bulletin in a sense is a paradigm of the service we are engaged in today. The elements in it represent real actual elements in the service. It is a word picture of activity. We have a paradigm for how we run our families and our checkbooks. And the church. And our lives. If a man decided to pay all of his bills electronically instead of by writing checks, he would have a shift in his paradigm for money management. If a couple decided to home school their kids, they would have engaged in a paradigm shift for education. Life, after all, is filled with paradigm shifts over the years. My suggestion for the most overused phrase would be the "Paradigm Shift!" That's what Paul is saying. He is saying to the new Christians: "You are acting now under a totally different paradigm and your actions should reflect the shift!"

A couple of weeks ago, I said that I'm convinced that the Holy Spirit is "hovering" over Cornerstone. I referred back to this passage from Genesis:

Genesis 1:1-2 (NIV) ¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

This word "hovering" is the Hebrew word "rakapf" meaning to "sit over" and the theological point is that when God's Holy Spirit hovers He is getting ready to do something. Some folks wrote and asked me exactly what I think God might be getting ready to do at Cornerstone. I've been saying "I'm simply not sure" but my prayer as I prepare for the pulpit is simply "Oh Lord Jesus please...show me what your Holy Spirit wants to do at least at the moment at Cornerstone. Hover over us!" And when I pray that way the clear impression that I receive is that the Holy Spirit wants us to go back over the critical basics

of our faith once again. Perhaps with greater clarity than ever before. Thus, we find ourselves in today's text.

Let me say this plainly. The Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be understood as simply an offer to go to Heaven to which we can respond "Yes" or "No." The Gospel is not a decision but a life change! The Gospel, the "Good news" is this: the Kingdom of God has come down to Earth in the person of Jesus the Son of God, the Christ. Thus, all mankind is invited to follow Jesus into His Kingdom. But following him means much, much more than just saying "OK, I believe. I believe that Jesus went to the Cross for me and I admit I'm a sinner. So I asked him to save me." Those elements are part of receiving Christ to be sure. But when we ask him to save us...we are saying to Jesus "I want to die to a life that is centered on the flesh and be born again into a life that is centered on the Kingdom of God." In other words, if we really come to Christ we do not just sign a document but rather we go thru a gate. In effect, we die to the life we have known!

What does that mean...die to the life we have known? Well, that is the hard part because we live right here and we drive cars and watch movies and take our kids to the game. It does not mean that we stop living and go hide somewhere on a mountaintop and wait until Jesus returns. But it does mean that we live differently! We live now with a view to the Kingdom of God instead of to the material world. We live in the material world and we enjoy it but our deepest joy is in the Kingdom of God. In fact, you can tell where you stand with Christ by simply answering this question: "If I lose everything material, will I still be content and joyful?" If not, you probably have not died to your rights in this life.

The problem we have is this. We try to follow Jesus while still living as if we are independent of God and as if we can do things our way. Consider this exchange between Jesus and Peter:

Matthew 16:21-24 (NIV) ²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Peter just said to Jesus "No way! I don't agree! It can't go like this!" Why? Because Peter was following his own paradigm and his own way of looking at things. Notice the very stiff rebuke that Peter receives from Jesus:

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

In other words, "Peter you must put to death all of your own ideas and priorities and fall into line with the things that God is doing! You must die to your natural rights to call the shots and come under my Lordship." Friends, it is this aspect of dying that we tend to minimize because we just don't get it.

Let me suggest that the biggest and most dramatic paradigm shift that a human being can experience would be death! If I die tonight and no longer live here in the flesh, my whole paradigm would obviously shift from physical to totally spiritual even to the very different location from Earth to Heaven. That would be a completely life-changing and drastic paradigm shift! Now...the Apostle Paul is trying very hard to say something to the Colossians. He is saying to them nothing less than "You folks at the church in Colossae need to understand the following truth: you have had a paradigm shift! When you gave your lives to Christ and asked to be saved you died! And people who have experienced a paradigm shift live differently!" And the Bible is saying the same thing to us if we are really Christians!

Let's look at Paul's words:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

I can't be raised with Christ without first dying. For Paul, following Jesus meant turning our aim towards Heaven as those who have died and been resurrected spiritually with physical resurrection to follow. It requires a turning or setting our hearts differently. Let me illustrate. Last summer, we were up at Indian River at a cottage owned by some good friends in the church. It was in July and we read in the paper that for the next couple of nights there would be a spectacular show in the skies above North America. But to view it we had to go outside about 1 AM and settle in for some forty minutes looking straight up into the night sky. It took that long to adjust our vision to see the shooting stars. We also had to adjust our view and directional aim. All of that took concentration and it paid off! At one point we saw shooting stars and flashing lights every minute for nearly a half hour! But we could not have done it if we were looking out across the lawn or even at the pretty lake. No, we had to look to the heavens! We had to look to things above!

Paul goes on to say:

² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Of course we have to go to work and enjoy life as God has given it to us. But our priority should be the things above. The things of the Kingdom of God should eclipse the things of Earth. That will require an ongoing process of decision making...over and over. Will I watch this sensual presentation? Will I spend my money on this needless item? Will I fall into cruel gossip?

How are we to win those battles? Well, we will never win them with self effort just to impress God. In fact, we cannot win them unless we die to the old life and give our lives over to Christ! Question: do you want...do I want...to turn our lives over to Christ to not only save us but to live in us? After all, did Paul not say:

Colossians 1:27: (NIV) ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Christ will not live inside the person who does not invite him to do so. But that person needs to know that inviting Christ in means cleaning our room for him! Like a permanent house guest! But Jesus brings the mops and soap and disinfectant and he slowly and steadily cleans up the house! And when Christ is at work in you putting to death all of the elements of your sin nature, you have a PARADIGM SHIFT! In fact, your old friends who are still living for the world will not even recognize you! Thus, Paul says:

³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

What does he mean by saying "**Your life is hidden with Christ?**" Interesting phrase isn't it? He uses the word we translate "hidden" [Greek "krupto"] and it means "out of sight" or "buried." Think about it. After a funeral what do we do with a coffin with a body inside? We bury it! What is Paul's point? Simply that worldly people who are living for the world instead of for the Kingdom of God will not see the real you for who you really are. Because the real you will be buried and only be visible to Kingdom people!

Sometimes we struggle with friends and family who do not know Christ. They don't understand us. In fact, when we are with them they'd really prefer if we would not be ourselves but we would be worldly or at least not speak of the things of God. But they never will understand us unless and until they also die to self and turn to Christ. In fact, they cannot see us! I often tell people that those who do not understand them will someday very definitely do so. When? Paul tells us:

³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Christ is also hidden and when he is revealed...when he appears...all will see him and then...they will see us for who we are! This does not mean that we should not share our faith or witness to Christ's reality. It does mean that we are silly to think unspiritual people will value our faith life and admire our spiritual lives. They'll be fine with us feeding the poor or housing the

homeless. Everyone likes that. But they will not appreciate our hidden lives...our real lives! Paul says a little more:

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

What is this part about? Well...did you ever go to a funeral and see a body in a coffin...with all kinds of things also in there? Golf clubs or trophies or other stuff? Like the lady that wanted to be buried in her Corvette? Like the ancient Pharaohs who were placed in Pyramids with great supplies of food and wine and clothing for the afterlife? As if a dead person can take any of those things with them?

OK. I can sense what you're saying because I'm saying it too. You're thinking "Well Pastor Alberta...I get the idea that the real me...the Christian me...is hidden with Christ in that non-Christians can't see me for who I am. I get it. But this business of putting to death certain things...? I'm not sexually immoral and lustful or evil!" But friends, in the material world in which we are living we are all very likely idolaters because of our greed! We are inundated with a tidal wave of vendors telling us we need more and more! And the odd thing is that the more we have the more we want and the more we focus on this world instead of the Kingdom of God.

But here's the truth. We cannot change that impulse. Only Christ can change it and that is why he needs to be in us and that is why the real us is hidden from view...because we are being re-made! When I was a kid my father would sometimes buy old properties with run down houses and have them fixed up and sold for a profit. I can remember working inside a couple of them sweeping and painting. Every room torn apart and being cleaned. But from the outside they looked fine! Well....the work of Christ inside of us Christians is hidden from view but there will be evidence of it! What will that be?

⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put

on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator!

So...here is a question. Has anyone here ever been in a coffin? I ask that because years ago I took a course in death and dying and at one point the class visited a funeral home. The director discussed all kinds of things including the experience of physical death. At one point, he offered to allow the students to actually lie in a coffin to more deeply grasp something or other. [I took a pass on that one.] But I think as Christians we ought to grasp that Christianity is about dying to self. Too often we're like a person in a coffin still sitting up and grasping at things to take to the grave with us! Instead of seeing ourselves as on the way to a new life, we're trying to drag much of the old life with us! It's not a nice word picture but it is worth pondering.

Look one more time with me at the central point:

³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Why does Paul say "**hidden with Christ in God?**" Well...Jesus told a parable using the same language. You'll remember. It was very short:

Matthew 13:44 (NIV) ⁴⁴ "The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

When the man found the treasure, he hid it again and made it safe until the day he could buy it! If you have died to this life by faith and you are hidden with Christ in God, you are safe until the day of redemption! When that day comes, Christ will step out into the world and everyone will see him for who he truly is and you with him! You're not in a coffin but a spiritual vault as safe as you can be for eternity! Let us pray.