

Spiritual Renewal at Cornerstone

Part Twelve-The Revealed Life

WEBSITE VERSION

Col. 3: 12-17

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January 30, 2011

Text: Colossians 3:12-17 (NIV) ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

We begin this morning with a statement that's been said so many times from pulpits that it is almost meaningless. Just about everyone has heard some preacher remind God's people: "Whenever we see the word 'therefore' in the Bible...we must ask what the 'therefore' is *there for!*" Sounds a little silly but actually it is a terrific expression of truth. The New Testament Greek word "therefore" [ouoon] actually appears 526 times and simply means..."So..." In other words, it is a very simple word that can be translated "therefore" or "so" or "now then" ... as if to say "In view of what we just heard...we really ought to..." Not at all complicated. Someone says "Hey, there are tremendous thunderstorms on the way...therefore...so...let's close the windows!" That makes perfect sense. It follows the previous assertions. It's a word that really means "Do something!"

Therefore...Paul says to the Church in Colossae:

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

In our short journey towards spiritual renewal, we have reached the point where we should be saying "OK now...so what? Is Christ being revealed in my life? Do people see Christ in me?" That is what Francis Schaeffer asked years ago in his great book "How Shall We Then Live?" Paul says "Therefore....clothe yourselves..." Let's look closely at this question: how shall we live once we've come to Christ? But first let us pray.

In 1998, a remarkable movie came out called "**Saving Private Ryan.**" It starred Tom Hanks playing the part of an Army Captain named John Miller. Miller and a small squad of men are assigned to go behind enemy lines in France and locate a young Private named James Ryan played by Matt Damon. Ryan's three brothers have all been killed in combat and the Secretary of the Army has decided he must be brought home lest his parents lose all four of their sons. Eventually, they find Ryan and rescue him but not without tremendous cost. Miller and several of his men will be killed themselves in order to save Ryan. There is a remarkable scene at the end of the film where Captain Miller lays dying and Ryan leans down by him. Miller has given his life for this young man and he has only one request to make of him before he dies. Miller does not resent his own sacrifice but he wants Ryan to make the most of his life now that he has been saved. This clip runs just a minute or so...[play film clip].

Miller told Ryan to "Earn this!" I am not suggesting that there is an analogy between the soldier played by Tom Hanks and the Lord Jesus Christ. Even soldiers dying for each other cannot save a man from sin. But there is remarkable parallel to what God the Holy Spirit is saying to us here in this portion of Colossians. We can almost see Jesus on the Cross bearing death saying "I've saved you...now live your life accordingly!" Or as the Holy Spirit says thru the Apostle Paul "**Live a life worthy of your calling in Christ!**"

This raises a question. If you've walked with the Lord say thirty four years as I have as of next week...and you stood before him today...how would your life be assessed? Would Jesus say "Christ has been revealed in you! Well done!?" How would you and how would I measure up after we were saved? Would it be said of us that Christ was revealed in our lives by how we lived? Could it be said by others even non-Christians that we lived lives of Holiness? We saw earlier in Colossians that our lives are

"hidden" in and with Christ. The ungodly can't really see us for who we are. But as the great Divine counterpoint today we see that our lives are to be revealed as Holy not to get saved but because we are saved. In other words, when Jesus saves us Jesus changes us! And Paul by the Holy Spirit describes that changed life...a life revealed that others can see.

When Captain Miller looked at Ryan and said "Earn this!" what did he mean? I think he meant "Make it your business to live a life worthy of what has been done for you!" That is exactly what Paul says earlier to the Colossians. We read:

Colossians 1:10 (NIV) ¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

I must ask myself "Is the life I am leading and living honoring to God who saved me? Am I responding to this great salvation by living consistently for His reputation and Glory?" One of the worst moments of my ministry years was a conversation with a man who had been a strong leader in the church but who fell into an adulterous relationship. He left his wife and family and he could only see what his flesh wanted. And I remember saying to him "If you are a Christian then this behavior is beneath you! It is unworthy!" He told me he did not care anymore and perhaps this just proved he was never really a Christian! What did his life reveal? Unworthiness that made the Gospel seem like nonsense! Paul goes on to say we were actually rescued!

Colossians 1:13 (NIV) ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves...

Do you live and do I live like people who have been rescued? Do we really grasp what was done for us by Christ? At the end of "Saving Private Ryan" there is a scene where Ryan, now an old man near the end of his life, goes back to Normandy and stands at Captain Miller's grave. Ryan is still thinking about Miller! Are we still thinking about Jesus as we set out to live the revealed life? After all, look at what is said about Jesus in this same letter!

Colossians 1:15-16 (NIV) ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

This Jesus is no Army Captain! He is the Captain of Heaven! The Christ, the second person of the Trinity, came and took human form in Jesus of Nazareth and when we see him we see God! In fact, the Christ...the logos...the power of God was and is that invisible force and Divine power that created everything from the Moon to the molecules in this chair! Everything we see and everything we do not see was created by the Christ and also for him! Yet, he loved us so much that...because this truth had been lost and forgotten...he settled into the womb of a young virgin named Mary and he became one of us! That means the day will come when every single earthly power will bow before him! They will see him and they will look upon the one they crucified! Having been rescued by the Christ himself from our lost estate...we should live lives worthy! We should reveal him in our lives!

In fact, when we are saved he does the same thing in us that he did in Mary! He comes to live in us and starts to live his life in us! Remember, Paul said:

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

The desire of God is that once Christ is hidden in our lives, he will not be hidden in our actions! The hidden life of loving Christ first must reveal an outward life of Holiness. So, Paul tells us that the revealed life, the outward life, the obvious life, the visible life will be one that is clearly changed and Christ-centered:

¹² "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

But let's be brutally truthful. Sometimes our faith fades. It wears off. Sometimes it goes away. Sometimes we grow cold and indifferent. Sometimes we lose our zeal. Church becomes an incidental. The sermons all sound the same. There are other things to do on Sundays anyway. Life is full and busy and reality is that we can't just live for the eternal and unseen all of the time. Besides, if we're saved we're saved right? So, we will have seasons of indifference. We will drop out or just sort of drop

over...there somewhere. And we may even wonder...was I ever really saved? Or was that just an idea...an emotion that served me for a time? And we grow distant from the Son of God. That's bad news.

Here's the good news about that bad news. It is an old problem and that is why Paul said these words to the Colossians:

Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV) ⁶ "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him..."

Jesus put it this way:

John 15:5 (NIV) ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

The revealed life in which Christ is reigning and Christ is obvious is a very dedicated and committed life. We lose our zeal because of our own choices. I recently heard Pastor Hunt say something interesting. He reminded one of his daughters that she had to keep her gas tank very nearly full in the winter because a half empty tank invited condensation. And one day she'll come out and the car will not start! Good advice! Well, that's exactly what happens when we do not keep our spiritual tanks filled up with the Lord Jesus Christ! Spiritual dampness and mold will grow and one day we will come out and we simply will not start!

Continued Christian growth in the revealed life requires a decision to stay daily in the Word of God and to stay daily in prayer and to worship regularly and to sit and learn and use our gifts to serve God. Then the tank will remain full. But we have to keep our eyes upon the fuel gauge. Recently, Donna and I heard a fine teacher and a great Christian writer named Ken Boa. He was speaking of zeal in the Christian life and how we can lose our passion for Christ. And he said something I'd never thought of. Namely, this: if we drop out of our Christian faith it will not be blowout but rather a small leak! We won't go from all excited about the Lord and the Gospel and the Kingdom of God...to total disinterest. No. What will happen is that we will slowly and steadily and quietly go to Christ less and less until we simply stop going.

Like a car with a tire with a slow leak. One day you come out and it is too flat for you drive on! What does the revealed life look like?

12 “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

If we think about it, that's a life filled with the Holy Spirit. A life that reflects time invested in the Word of God and prayer and the infilling of the Holy Spirit! I like that story about a revival meeting long ago in Chicago. I forget the name of the preacher but he had quite a crowd! As he implored the people to be filled with the Holy Spirit many came forward for special prayer. People eager to simply experience more of the Holy Spirit in their lives. People who remembered that Jesus had said [Luke 11:13] that the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those who asked for him to do so! Then suddenly the preacher's eyes fell on a familiar face. A man had come up to be prayed over for more of the Holy Spirit but that man was Dwight L. Moody the very famous evangelist. The preacher was puzzled so he reached out to Moody and said politely "Brother Moody...I'm surprised to see you here! Surely you are filled with the Holy Spirit already!" And Moody said simply "Yes...but I leak!"

We all leak! We all need to keep in mind that revealing Christ in ourselves to the world is an ongoing work of grace and requires constant filling! And some things cause leaks. I am more and more convinced that UNFORGIVENESS is to the soul like NAILS in the driveway are to a tire! Unforgiveness is the great cause of leaks!

Little wonder Paul writes:

13 “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

We may think that forgiving others is the fruit of a Christ-centered life. And that is true. But forgiving others is also a cause of a truly Christ-centered life. If we really want Christ to be revealed in us...if we really want to live in such a way that Jesus is obvious in our lives, we cannot go forth saying we love Christ but not forgiving our neighbors. It's interesting that our forgiveness capacities more than any other quality will show us where we stand with Jesus! Simply stated, when Christ is revealed in us we will be eager to forgive and reconcile! In fact, failure to do so may well prove we are not his!

Who can help but be terrified by the parable Jesus told about the unmerciful servant in Matthew's Gospel. You'll remember how Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God. Here's how it operates:

Matthew 18:23-30 (NIV) ²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go."

This underserved mercy should have so affected the heart of the debtor that he himself became forgiving. But his pride was hurt by having to ask for mercy. He probably left there seething because he was humiliated. And he made a foolish pledge by saying he would pay everything back. He could never do that. If he could have paid the King back he would not have to beg for forgiveness! But now he had to go forth in his pride and try to keep his impossibly arrogant promise. So, he begins to calculate where he will get the needed monies and then a man comes along who owes him one hundredth of what he owes the King. And, he pounces:

²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. ²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' ³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt."

What did this reveal about the man? It revealed that people can ask for the forgiveness of Christ and receive it for a time but remain unsaved! He had not been converted to salvation but he had gained a temporary reprieve! You know the rest:

Matthew 18:32-35 (NIV) ³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Does your life in Christ reveal forgiveness? Because if it does not according to Jesus you are not in Christ! Then Paul goes on to summarize his message:

¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Look with me at this list of revealing characteristics of the deep and renewed Christian. He or she is loving and peaceful and thankful. He or she is filled up with his word and he or she is in fellowship with other Christians so they can encourage each other. That's the other part of the slow leak. The first part is we can drop out of prayer and time in the Word of God. But for a while we will still come to church. But in the absence of the Bible stirring within us, we soon lose interest in coming to church. Then we begin to judge everyone else and our most revealing gift is fault-finding. We get sour and self-absorbed and unforgiving...and we forget that God puts us in difficult situations so that we may become stronger Christians and Christ may be revealed in us.

And one last thing. We listen to the lie of the devil who says "You know...you'll never be one of those great spiritual all-stars! You'll never be great in your love for Christ! You'll never overcome unforgiveness and your flesh! Really great Christians reveal Christ all the time every day in every way. That's not you!" So says the evil one...but that's not so!

I'll close with a story. Next week, we begin missions Month at Cornerstone. I'm excited to re-visit what it means to think in a missional way. Some years back, we had a visit from Hudson Taylor the fourth, the great-grandson of the famous missionary to China in the mid-eighteen hundreds. Saying the very name Hudson Taylor is to missionary historians is like saying "Babe Ruth" to baseball fans. We might think that Hudson Taylor could do no wrong. But that's not true. Actually, he nearly fell away. He was saved in the summer of 1849 and he immediately became an extraordinary witness for Christ! One could say Christ was revealed in him most dramatically as he led others to faith and he shared the good news at every opportunity. Hudson Taylor said "The presence of God became utterly real and blessed."

Time passed. Hudson Taylor was still a rather young man and as summer came he began to feel distant. In a few weeks, he grew cold in his heart and altogether indifferent to time with God and the Word of God. By the next winter, his family was off to church without him as he sat alone in a quiet house. He knew he was leaking badly as unforgiveness and self crowded his heart. In his journal he wrote:

"Oh that God would take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh!"

And God brought him back. But that of course is the key to spiritual renewal. Desire for God! How about you? Do you desire real renewal? Do you desire Christ to be revealed in you? Are you willing to apply yourself to the Word of God in study and meditation? Are you willing to change or modify your priorities to make time for the Holy Spirit to work? Do you want to live the revealed life in which Christ himself is revealed in you?

The Private Ryan movie ends with an elderly Ryan weeping at the grave of Captain Miller. His wife of many years comes over to comfort him and he says "Tell me...I've lived a good life. Tell me I'm a good man." And she affectionately says "You are." He wanted reassurance that he had made the most of being saved. That he had lived a life worthy of Miller's sacrifice. We want to be reassured that we have lived a life worthy of Christ and his sacrifice. A life worthy of Christ who has saved us for eternity! And perhaps when we meet Jesus we will ask "Tell me you were revealed in me Lord Jesus!" And we will want to hear him say these words: "Well done good and faithful servant!"

Let us pray.