

Colossians 3:12-17

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Good morning. Are we well? Good to see you today. If you've got your Bibles, turn back to Colossians chapter 3. This is where we're going to be this morning, or this afternoon, rather.

And to these verses in Colossians chapter 3 that... Let me just whet your appetite for today. We're just going to call it today. So much to teach us about what a church that brings glory to Jesus Christ what it looks like.

What it looks like. So much to teach us this morning, and we need God's help. So why don't we still our hearts and let's pray together. John chapter 6.

So Jesus said to the twelve, You don't want to go away too, do you? Simon Peter answered, Lord, to whom will we go?

You have the words of eternal life. And we have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God.

[1 : 10] And so, Heavenly Father, it's our prayer this morning that You would help us fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus, who has and is the word of eternal life.

Help us by Your Spirit, we ask in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Well, to get us back into Paul's logic, the logic that we've seen over the past few weeks, let me introduce you to Irene Ritchie.

Anyone met Irene Ritchie before? Anyone's met Irene Ritchie before? I was wondering, there's like 1% of your brain that thinks, what if Irene Ritchie is here? But she's not here. So there she is. She's a nurse who lives in Broxburn in West Lothian.

And in 2005, she was named the Scottish Slimmer of the Year. Irene Ritchie. Because she lost an incredible nine stone.

And she dropped from a size 30 to a size 12. Now, I'm not going to stand here and pretend I know what that means, right? I'm a guy, and the fashion industry seems to think that we can only think in letters.

[2 : 11] We've got S, we've got M, and we've got L. That's what? XL. There's two. But she has dropped from a size 30 to a size 12. And I understand from speaking to a few people, but that's quite good going.

This is Irene Ritchie. Here's what I want you to imagine as we begin our time together in Colossians, that you walk out the doors at the end of today, and you walk up the street and you go to the links.

And on the links, you see Irene Ritchie. And you see her, but she's looking pretty odd. And what's odd about Irene is that she's still wearing her size 30 clothes.

Picture that on your heads. So she's got her belt on the last buckle, trying to hold up her baggy jeans. She's wearing a t-shirt like it's a duvet cover. And frankly, she just looks ridiculous.

Now, here's what I want to ask you. What would you say to her? What would you say to her? You would say, come on, Irene. New you, new clothes, wouldn't you?

[3 : 16] New you, new clothes. And that's exactly been, that's been Paul's logic when it comes to the Christian. If you remember verses 1 to 4, Paul has said, new you, hasn't he?

New you. New you. Jesus Christ, verses 1 to 4, has claimed you for himself. You are his. This is what he's been saying. He's dealt with all your sin on the cross.

Your life is hid in him as he sits at the right hand of the Father. And one day you will gloriously appear with him when he appears and returns in glory.

Your life, verses 1 to 4, Christian, has been a total transformation. Because you're Christ's. You are in Christ. It's Paul's favourite description for the life of the Christian.

You should see it all the way through his letters. It occurs more than 100 times. In Christ. The old you has been crucified with Christ. And the new you has been raised with him. And Christ is your life.

[4 : 17] That's what he's declared. Doesn't get much more total than that, does it? But Christ is your life. New you. And because of that, verse 9, follow his logic.

He says, put off the clothes. The behaviour that went with the old you. Get rid of the clothes. And verse 10. Put on the clothes that go with the new you.

The one saved by and raised with Jesus Christ. And the one so important for us to see, verse 10. The one that's being renewed in the image of its creator.

And so here's the subtle shift that goes on in our verses today. You see, God hasn't just saved individual persons to himself. He's called out a people for his own possession.

A people for his own possession. In these verses, you'll see Paul's corporate focus all the way through this little section. And it's indicated by that phrase, look for it, one another.

[5 : 21] Do you see it? One another. One another. All the you's in there are plural. So he's talking to the church. And he wants them to be a Christ-like counter-cultural community who together are putting off the old and are putting on the new.

Here's his vision for this church. This church. And I think as we eavesdrop in here, if you like, on what he's saying, we're going to find a wonderful vision for our church community.

Wonderful vision for what we are to be. As Jesus calls us to be, that city in the hill. The community of salt and light that makes him glorious to the world. He's a wonderful vision for our church community. And I think what we see here is that these words are both wonderfully inspiring and beautifully realistic.

Beautifully realistic. Because Paul hits two paradoxical truths about God's people. Ready for these? Verse 12.

Here's the first one. What are they, their saints? They are God's chosen ones. Follow the description, verse 12. And if you're a Christian here this morning, then these truths are gloriously yours.

[6 : 33] They are God's chosen ones. Do you see it? They are called to be holy. They are set apart to live for him. They're his. And they're dearly loved.

Dearly loved. And what he's done is he's taken Old Testament terms that God had used in the Old Testament to refer to Israel. And he's transferred them and said they're applicable for this little church in Colossae.

That's what you are, he's saying to them. That's what you are. That's what God thinks of you. Not because of who you are, but because of who you are in Christ. And as amazing as that is, what's just as amazing is what he has made you corporately.

Verse 15. Do you see? He's made you one body. One body. Verse 11. Those earthly barriers that should, in one way or another, deeply divide you.

Do you see them? Your background, your social standing, your religious tradition. Well, God has brought you together to form one body. One body. Friends, the church is an amazing thing.

[7 : 41] And if you don't believe me, look around you. Look around you. The world looks on at this motley crew and it declares weird. Right?

Let's be honest. It's strange. How has this happened? This is weird. Why would they come together on a Sunday morning and sing and read the book? This is weird.

This is weird. But God looks on and says to the world, you say weird. I see wisdom. I declare my wisdom.

Something that the angels in heaven look on and exclaim in glorious wonder as we meet here together this morning.

How has God done that? How has he done that? Bringing people together from different parts of the world, doing different jobs from different backgrounds, male and female.

[8 : 34] And he's brought them together as one. How has he done that? And of course the answer is he's done it gloriously through the cross of Jesus Christ. I was chatting on the phone last week with a guy called Lefraz.

Lefraz works down in London and he's developing an evangelistic resource called the Word One to One. He was just asking me what I thought about it. Now I've never seen the guy and I've never spoken to the guy before.

He's South African. I'm Scottish. So we're on the phone. We're sharing some ideas. We're joking and laughing away. He's inviting me down to his in London for a braai. That's what a braai is. It's an African barbecue. He's inviting me down for a braai. I'm inviting. I'm up here for some haggis and iron brew. Let's get some sheep intestine and some orange stuff into you. We know how to treat our visitors in Scotland, don't we?

We're laughing and joking away. And then do you know what we did? We just prayed together. Never met this guy before. Never even spoken to this guy before. Let me pray together. And he signed off.

[9 : 35] He said, thank you so much for your time, dear brother. Friends, the church is an amazing thing. The thing that God has done in birthing the church, friends, it should never cease to blow our minds.

We are saints. We are his. It is absolutely incredible. And the second thing about the church, we are saints, but we are sinners.

What does he write in verse 13? Bear with one another. See, it's straight off the bat. You're dearly loved. A few words later, bear with one another.

Forgive one another. Now, here's my question. I asked you, I was reading it this week. Why would he need to write that? Would it not be simply because he anticipates that because of the lingering sin in all of their hearts, the battle that they're in to put off the old and put off the new, that inevitably at times they're going to rub each other up the wrong way?

The church is saints and sinners. But the church, this context, the local church, is the place that God in his wisdom has put in place for you and I to grow alongside one another in the Christian life.

[10 : 55] Let me just speak pastorally here for a minute. I do worry for some of you who are settling for what I would deem, I would call a hokey-cokey Christian life, right? You're in, you're out, you're in and out and you don't even stay long enough to shake it all about.

You're just playing with this church thing. And you're robbing yourself of the beauty of being part of God's corporate people. This is where we'll grow, the local church.

Right here as we live our lives together, as God's brought together body, this is how we'll visibly show the world the transforming power that the gospel has. Church in all its messiness, in all its unslickness, friends, this is where the action is.

Right here. This is God's wisdom. Now let me ask you, I wonder whether you believe that to be true. Because I wonder whether that's the reason Paul wrote it.

Were these false teachers, we've seen them all the way through this letter, were these false teachers in the background with all their talk of their fine-sounding, mystical, individual religious experiences, were they looking down their noses at the unglamorous nature of these Colossian Christians' life together?

[12 : 07] How on earth could you think that this is where the power of God is? But Paul says, as you live your Christian lives, as this new heavenly community, you display the power and the wisdom of God to the watching world.

This is what we want to be, is it not as Bruntsfield, evangelical church? Otherwise, we're just playing at this. This is what we want to be, the kind of community that baffles the world.

How on earth has God done that? And so he says, isn't he, verse 12, you've got the text, Paul says to them all, as they live their lives together as one body, he says, put on.

So there's our language, right back to Irene Ritchie, get off the old clothes, get on the new clothes, put on. Look at these virtues, compassion, kindness, humility, patience, what wonderful Christ-like virtues.

And Paul says, get it on. Get these virtues on. And from there he says, here are four things that I want you to do as a church community, as together you pursue Jesus Christ.

[13 : 19] Here's the first one, I want you to make forgiveness normal. He implores them, do you feel his heart in this language? He implores them to work hard, to be one with one another, be right with one another.

Look what he writes, bear with one another. Do you feel the longevity in that word? Bear with one another. In other words, in your life together, commit to sticking it out with one another.

Commit to working it out with one another. And in the text, do you see how he uses the word forgive three times in quick succession? Forgive, forgive, forgive. And he draws a direct link between the forgiveness that we have received, the mercy we have received from God, and the forgiveness that

we extend to others.

And notice the term that Paul uses there all the way through this letter, when he's been talking about Jesus, he's used the term Christ. Christ all the way through this letter. Now for the first time in the letter, do you see what term he uses?

Lord. Not capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, the covenant name of God. Not that one.

L-O-R-D, Greek word, kurios, master.

[14:32] Master. So if the master has forgiven you the enormous debt of your sin, and he's not just forgiven you, but he's absorbed the penalty of your debt upon himself, who are you to withhold that same forgiveness from others?

I feel the challenge of what he's saying there. But oh, how God is glorified, and how you and I will grow, as we practice putting aside our pride and our differences, and we bear with one another, and we move towards each other in forgiveness and love, and how Satan rages, and how the world stands in shock when a disciple of Jesus decides that bitterness and hurt will not reign in his heart, Christ will.

Jesus will. I want a testimony to the transforming power of God at work in the family of God. Let me ask you, do you need to act to put, as he terms it there, act to put a grievance with somebody right today for the glory of God?

Think about it. If we are not at peace with one another, then we are going against the very grain of the oneness that Jesus Christ accomplished for the church on the cross.

You know, the late John Stott was once asked how he loved the unlovable Christian. Don't ever ask me that, okay? But this is what he was asked. How do you love the unlovable Christian? And he simply replied, I remind myself who they are.

[16:13] If God the Father chose them, and God the Son died for them, and God the Spirit lives in them, then who am I not to love them? Now I know, for many of us, the very mention of that word forgive is a terrifying prospect.

Some of us will have been hurt and betrayed and scarred in ways that I don't even want to know. To pretend that I understand. But maybe this morning, Jesus would invite you to take his hand, and to walk with him on the long road towards the destination of forgiveness.

Because in him, gloriously, not only do we have one who knows what it's like to be the sinned against party, but we have one who promises to be to his people, one who sticks and walks closer than a brother.

Paul says, make forgiveness normal. Secondly, make unity essential. Verse 14. See how he opens it? Above all. Above all. Which I take it is his way of saying, here's the most important thing that I need you to get for everything that's about to follow.

Above all, put on love. Put on love. Not in a kind of hippie, green peace, make love not war kind of way. He's saying, love the Lord and love the church.

[17:36] Love his church. Love his people. Love your brothers and sisters. Love them. Now, let me ask you this point. I've asked myself all week this question. As you look around here, friends, do we love one another?

Do we love one another? Exactly how Jesus said to the world, said to his disciples, that the world will know that we are his disciples by the way that we love one another.

You know, a great way for us to practice that this week, let me give you a little challenge, is to pray for one another. Now, hopefully you got, as you came in, you got the sermon note sheet. Some of you might be scribbling away on that.

You'll notice at the bottom of it, it says, my prayer request for this week. A little perforated strip.

Here's my challenge for you today. I want you to fill that in. And you can do two things with it.

First, one, you can give it to somebody. You can swap it with somebody. Say, I want you to pray for me this week. How can I pray for you this week? And put it in your Bible and pray for them this week. And the second thing I'd love you to do is that there's a box in the foyer outside marked prayer.

[18:44] If you want to rip that off and put that in the prayer box there, on Wednesday night, when we meet together as a church for our prayer meeting, we'll commit to praying for these things that go in that box. So that's what we do when we meet together to pray.

We pray for our world. We pray for our city. We pray for our fellow brothers and sisters in this city. And then we pray for ourselves. Not just the stuff that we do, but way more importantly, the people that we are.

So we'll commit together on Wednesday night. Please come along if you're free. It's a wonderful thing that expresses our unity together when we meet together to pray. But if you can't make it, put something in that box and we'll endeavor to pray for it on Wednesday evening.

This is just a practical way that we can love one another, isn't it? That we pray for one another.

Because Paul says, if you put on love, it will bind you together. Do you see it?

It will bind you together. Now if you were watching the rugby yesterday, you'll know that's how they set up for the scrum, isn't it? One thing to test our unity is we realize that every single nation in the six nations is represented in this church body.

[19 : 42] A great way to represent our unity to the world that doesn't affect us. But what do they do? They get together in the scrum and they bind together. That's what they used to shout to us when we were playing it when we were young.

Bind. Bind. And the forwards have the cauliflower ears, don't they, to prove just how tightly they are bound together. This is what he's saying. Love will bind you together. That's Paul's heart for this church.

That God would work among them in such a way that they would be inseparably and lovingly one.

Do you remember that chorus we used to sing sometimes when we were young? Bind us together, Lord. Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord. Bind us together. Bind us together in love. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. What a wonderful picture, isn't it, of the peace that we enjoy with God our Father through Christ spilling over to the peace, that oneness that we have with one another.

You know the word rule there is the word for umpire. Loved that thought this week. It's the word for umpire. The person whose job it is to say whether something is in or out.

[20 : 50] My imagination has great fun this week trying to picture the peace of Christ as a referee running around the pitch brandishing yellow cards, calling for VAR. But do you see what he's saying?

Let the peace of Christ be your umpire. Is what you're doing or saying, is it enhancing or is it jeopardizing the oneness of the body? Would that word that came out of your mouth, would it see you sent to the sin bin?

This is what he's saying. Would that deeds, if Hawkeye were to come on it, would that be in or out? So true, isn't it? I know this in my own life. We can get lazy with our own words and thoughts about others.

So much so that loose threads begin to emerge in our relationships with one another and it endangers our unity. And the call here to the church is to work so hard to let the peace of Christ reign.

Don Carson writes this, we will see profound spiritual renovation if by God's grace we make it our commitment not to put anyone down except on our prayer list.

[21 : 56] Make unity essential. Thirdly, make the Bible central. Make the Bible central. I remember hearing a speaker a few years ago, he began his talk by asking us the question, what do you need most in your life right now?

And I think I was, we had a newborn at the time so caffeine was my first thought but the answer he was getting at in typical Sunday school style was Jesus. What you need most in your life right now is Jesus.

So true. It's exactly what Paul says in verse 16. The thing that the people of God most desperately need, what you and I most here today most desperately need is what Paul calls here the word of Christ.

The word of Christ. Probably most simply translated as the words about Christ. Who he is, what he's done, what he's doing, what he will do and who you are, who we are in him.

The message, that message, Paul says, let that dwell in you richly. Do you see that word?

Wonderful word. Not blandly, richly. I remember one university summer I worked for a few weeks with a guy down the road who was a joiner.

[23 : 09] So I worked for a few weeks as a joiner's apprentice. And we're working with big units and because there was so much dust sometimes my asthma would flare up. And what happened at the end of the day is the guy, my neighbour, used to take me home and he used to give me what's called in Scotland a hot toddy.

This is what he used to give me, a hot toddy. And basically, if you don't know what that is, it's a small bit of whiskey mixed with honey and it's warmed up. This is what he used to give me to clear my asthma. But I remember every day when I came home struggling with my asthma, I remember he, I used to take it and I could feel it going down my throat, warming my throat and it got to my stomach and I could feel it warming my stomach and I just sat there and just enjoyed the moment. This is what he's saying, isn't it? Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. This is what he's saying. In your life, swim richly in the life-giving words of Christ and allow its truth to bring deep and satisfying nourishment for your souls.

Friends, if you are here today and you're feeling weighed down by guilt, what you most need is not to feel better about yourself. What you most need is to know the forgiveness that's yours in Jesus Christ.

if you're here today and you're feeling like throwing in the towel to this Christian life, you need to know that in Jesus Christ you have something far more glorious than the world could possibly offer you.

[24 : 35] If you're here today and deep down in your soul you think to yourself, how could anybody possibly love me? The very next song we'll sing will be how deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure that he should give his only son to make a wretch his treasure.

Look to the cross. The word of Christ. Paul says, devote yourself to it, listen to it, speak it to one another, get it inside you. Teaching and admonishing, bringing it to bear in each other's lives as you correct, you instruct and you encourage.

You know, I've got a good friend called Andy. A dear, dear friend. I'm so thankful to the Lord for Andy. Just quite often he just texts me Bible verses. That's what he does.

Just text me Bible verses. Remember I got one recently from him. It simply read Ephesians 2, 8 to 10. You can check that out afterwards. Ephesians 2, 8 to 10. That God has got good works for us to walk in.

That's the verse. And every time he does that, I know it's code for, I read this this morning, I've been praying for you and I trust and pray that that's true for you in your own life today.

[25 : 42] Great, isn't it? Good friends. It's such a blessing from God. But it's a wonderful way that we can encourage one another with the word of Christ. Allow it to dwell richly in us. And you know, another way, great way to do that is as we come together on a Sunday during the week, whenever it is, it's singing.

Do you see what it's right in there? Singing. Singing the word of Christ. Psalms. Now I've spent five years studying with dear Presbyterian brothers and sisters at the Free Church College who are well into Psalms.

and they'll tell you that they're devoted to Psalms singing because it's so, it does something so beautiful for their soul when they sing this inspired hymn book that God has given us which tells us the depths of human experience and the towering heights of the truths of who God is.

And it's a blessing for their soul to sing it. And do you know what? And I know this has been recorded. I totally get it. Totally get it. Singing the word of Christ. Allowing it to dwell in us.

Singing Psalms. Singing hymns. And singing spiritual songs. And the truth is, isn't it, in the hardest times in life we need the word of Christ. We need the word of Christ.

[26 : 52] You know, we had a funeral in here on Thursday. A dear saint called Jenny Oliver, she went home to be with the Lord. And the family were telling me that as they sat with her in the last few moments of her life, they managed to get to the care home to spend the last few moments with her.

And do you know what they spent in the last few moments with her doing? Just singing hymns. Singing hymns. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Allow that word to get deep down into your souls and pray that the spirit of God would bring light to your mind and heat to your heart and that our affections for the Lord as we feast our souls on his word would grow.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. This is what he's saying. Make the Bible central. Make the Bible central. And fourthly, and really quickly, make worship total. Verse 17.

Paul is urging them, do you see, not to settle for a limited view of worship. Don't limit it to when you do certain things in a certain place in a certain day in a certain way, which I imagine is maybe what these false teachers in the background are promoting.

[28 : 00] You've got to see worship holistically. Worship is your whole life. Whatever you do, he says, if you do it with the goal of glorifying God, that is worship. Worship. Isn't that a brilliant thought?

I tell you what, it changed the way I changed the nappy this morning. All of it is worship. Worshipping him in the classroom. Worshipping him in the sports field. Worshipping him at your desk. Worshipping him when you're putting the children to bed. Worshipping him on the commute to work. Whatever you do, whether it's word or deed, all of it is worship to God. Acceptable and pleasing to him through Jesus Christ. Paul says, make worship total. And just as we close today, let me take you back to Irene Ritchie. Put off, put on.

Remember, there she is. She's up at the link. She's still wearing her old clothes. She said, come on, Irene. New you, new clothes. Exactly what Paul is saying to the Christian. As they meet together as one body, be that Christ-like counter-cultural community that God has made you and God has called you to be.

[29 : 11] And that's what it's, this is what it's going to look like for you to pursue the things above. This is what it's going to look like for you to pursue Jesus together.

And this is what it's going to look like for you, remember verse 11, to be renewed in the image of your creator. Make forgiveness normal, make unity essential, make the Bible central, and make worship total.

Friends, the church is a glorious thing. Glorious thing. Let's pray and let's thank God for that together. And so dear Heavenly Father, it's our prayer today that you would help us to be the kind of community that lets the peace of Christ rule and lets the word of Christ dwell richly among us. Help us this week, we ask, to seek the things that are above as we gaze on your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Would he dwell richly in us we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.