

## **The Mystery of New Life: Part 2**

We continue today exploring this idea of the new life that we have in Christ. Last week we took the time to break down the three aspects of salvation that we receive:

1. Justification: the trade of our life for the perfect life of Jesus, as we are forgiven the debt of our sin.
2. Sanctification: the continuing process of change as our old habits are replaced with us setting our minds and seeking the things above.
3. Glorification: that final day when we are brought to completion and we exist in the presence of Jesus.

This breakdown is important because it reminds us that while we are here on earth we can exist in one of two places: not having received New Life at all, or struggling through the process of sanctification. What we looked at on a macro lens last week will now be focused down so that we can see exactly who and what we are supposed to be. And there is a ton to go through today, so let's jump in. We'll start in verse 9, of the third chapter of Colossians (we'll be jumping around):

### **Put off/Put on**

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*

This is the crux of the conversation today. There is a dual movement that must be happening for us as we grow. The first is that we must be putting OFF the practices of the old self, and the second being that we must be putting ON the new self.

The best image of this is that of a garden. Gardening requires two efforts simultaneously. First, you must tend to your plants. You must plant the seeds (and plant them at the right times), you must water them, in windy areas; you may have to support them. Much like our spiritual life, you have no real control of the growth...a farmer does nothing to turn the seed into the plant. But the farmer does a great deal of work to make sure the conditions for growth are there. This is the putting on.

If all you focus on is plant growth, what you will find is that your garden fails. Why? WEEDS. The same conditions that make for healthy plant growth grow something destructive. The second task of gardening is to pull the weeds. In our spiritual lives, the weeds are our sin; the things that we put in place of Jesus. This is the putting off.

But here's the trick. In order to do this, we need to know how to recognize the difference between plants and weeds. It is great to talk about sin and idolatry as if they are some abstract thing, it is something else entirely to look at our lives and to begin to identify things that are a part of us; that are who we are and have always been, and

then to recognize that those things are what need to be put off. That's why Paul is here to help, and he begins with those things that need to be killed (jumping back to verse 5):

### **PUT TO DEATH**

*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.*

This list is not meant to be limiting, as we want to make it. It is not to define these things so that we can imagine that they no longer have any affect over us. It is to point directly to the things that still wage war against us, so that we may see it for what it is.

The idols that Paul lists are: sex, stuff, and self. Sound familiar? They are the same places that we turn to for false hope. They are the same habits that we live in. And what we are shown here is not a complete list of all the idols that you could possibly have, but the All Star team. These are the big three. We see in the subtitle of the book Counterfeit God's that came out just a few years ago: the empty promises of money, sex, and power. The same three idols.

But what makes them idols? It would be wrong to take a list like this and come away with the idea that sex, money, and power/success/prestige are in themselves bad. Because we see in the Bible God blessing people with success. We see that God created our bodies to enjoy sex. And we see that all of the wonderful things in this world were created by Him to be pleasing us. So how does a good thing become a God thing?

They become idols, not only when we elevate them to a level higher than what they deserve, but when we use them outside of the framework that God created them for.

1. Sex. When two people are joined together in marriage they become one flesh. They are now a single entity. And God created a physical act for this one flesh to enjoy. WITH EACH OTHER ONLY. It is the physical act that accompanies the fact that they are now connected emotionally, and the Bible tells us, spiritually. In Mark **10.9**, when Jesus says:

*What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate,*

it has implications beyond just divorce. It means humans have no right to trample on the one flesh that God has created. We always think of this in just the act of remaining married, but God does not delight in people who stay together but do not maintain one flesh. God is not proud of you for staying in a dead marriage and allowing it to remain dead. We will be talking marriage for the two weeks, so I don't want to get ahead of myself, but as it pertains to sex, we need to check our lives and make sure that we are

not taking something that God has created for the one flesh relationship and separate it out into something else all together.

What this means is, that sex detached from marriage, no matter WHAT it looks like, is destroying what God has created.

Jesus opens up Pandora's box on this in the Sermon on the Mount, when he redefines for the crowd what sexual immorality looks like:

*I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5.28).*

You are no longer okay as long as you keep it in your pants. We are talking about something much deeper here. GUYS. It is not okay to look at porn as long as you don't get caught, to visit the coffee stand with the girl you just like to look at, or to toe the line of what actually is sexual intercourse with your girlfriend. LADIES you are not off the hook either. It is not okay for you to have an emotional relationship with some guy at work who understands you better than your husband, or to connect with your old high school boyfriend on facebook, OR even to sit and wish you had a werewolf and a vampire fighting for your affections. It's a perversion of what God created, and it is SIN.

2. Stuff. We all have stuff and we all want stuff. The issue here is not about the stuff, but about how we view the things of this world. It is about the truth that it is very hard for us to have things in front of us, without us becoming entranced and won over but what we can see. **Romans 1.25** tells us about the unrighteous:

*they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*

Our possessions become sinful when they lead to a celebration of the things of this world rather than the things of God. I'll give you an example that became pretty clear at the death of Steve Jobs: gadget idolatry.

Apple is cool, I get it. I understand the appeal of a phone that can give you instant credibility, can link you instantly to loads of information, can have a conversation with you (SIRI), and can look cool doing it. I GET IT. The problem is, you are spending your time have a conversation with a piece of plastic and wires, while a real live God wants a relationship with you. We are intrigued by what man can do, and we allow it to overshadow what God has done and is doing in the world. You don't have time to read your Bible. C'mon. Be honest. You would just rather be doing something else. SIN.

3. Self. The idolatry of self plays itself out in more ways than any of us can really imagine. And it goes back to the beginning, when Adam and Eve ate from a tree

because they desired to rule themselves rather than live under the rule of God. Satan told them:

*for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3.5).*

Satan promises us the same thing. He tells us that control is better than submission, power is better than weakness, success is better than faithfulness, that it is better to be a ruler on earth than a slave in heaven. That the only thing that we can really depend on, in the end is ourselves. So we revert to: *anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk.* We use the methods of this world to control, to win, and to make sure that at the end of the day we have maintained or earned that position that will keep us from having to answer to anyone else. And God just wants us to stop.

The reason is, because sin is not simply us messing up, or not doing what we are supposed to. Sin is us robbing from God.

1. It robs from him the glory that belongs to Him alone, as we try to take it for ourselves.
2. It robs from Him the productivity of our work as ambassadors for Him, as sin prevents us from completing our mission.
3. And ultimately, sin robs from God, by stealing our relationship, love, and trust, and giving it to other things.

And we see this in the final verse of this section on putting off, v.11:

*Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*

The Greek/Jew, Circumcised/Uncircumcised, Slave/Free, these were the delineations of society. These were the ways that they easily categorized people for the sake of picking teams and feeling superior. These were their structures for measuring a person. For us, this verse might say, there is neither:

Baptist/Presbyterian  
Success/Failure  
Type A/Type B personalities  
Democrat/Republican/Other

None of these delineations exist in the new life. These things that we spend a great deal of our time focused on will not earn for us a thing in the Kingdom of God. There is only one, CHRIST, is all/in all, HE MUST BE OUR ONE AND ONLY CONCERN. Anything that takes away His glory IS SIN.

Even more shocking than what God refers to AS sin, is how He says we should deal with it. Paul doesn't simply tell us to stop doing these things because they are naughty. He says do whatever you must to *put them to death*. He says, it is *on account of these the wrath of God is coming*. And in one of Jesus more shocking statements, after redefining adultery for them, he states:

*If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

The idea here relates very closely to the movie 127 hours. If you haven't seen it, you might remember the news story from a few years back about the guy who got himself trapped rock climbing. He is down in this cavern, far from any other person, and his arm is pinned between a boulder that tumbled down and the rock face. This guy does everything he can think of to free himself from this position, but in the end recognizes that he will die if he just stays there. And so he looks down at his hand: which at this point has not had blood flow for over 100 hours, and is dead. So at this point, even if someone miraculously found him and freed him, the doctors could do nothing to make his hand work again. It is dead weight. But it is more than dead weight; it is because of his hand that the rest of him is going to die. So this guy does what he has to, and cuts his arm off with a pocketknife in order to save the rest of himself.

Few of us would be able to do this physically, but this is exactly what Paul and Jesus are calling us to do. The reason why this is difficult is even though this sin in us may be the worst parts of us, even if we can look down and see the deadness of it all, it is still part of us. It still hurts to remove it from our lives. It is a difficult process to remove the false hope from your life.

We need to be willing to engage in this difficult process. IF YOU ARE NOT KILLING SIN, IT IS KILLING YOU. It might mean setting very strong boundaries for yourself. It might mean cutting of friendships that do nothing but lead you to sin. It might mean destroying your computer, or cutting the cable, or abstaining from alcohol, or selling your house, or switching careers, or I have no idea. But too many of us are willing to only engage our sin if it means we don't have to give much up. So we fight the sin that is easy for us to overcome, and then we point to the people who still struggle with that because then we can hide the rest of our sin.

But the goal is not to be fully holy, because if you are holy in yourself, then you no longer need Jesus! The goal is to be overcoming. The goal is to be fighting. It means recognizing that you are not as strong and courageous as you would like to believe that you are. That you can't actually handle it. It means putting God's plan ahead of your own. It means continually pushing back on sin as the Holy Spirit reveals it to you, as an act of worship to God. And He has given us the power in His Spirit to actually fight sin

so that we can put on something much better. Verses 12-14 show us what this New Life looks like.

### **PUT ON**

*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. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

Just as we are given a list of things to put away, we have this list of things to put on. A quick survey of this list: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, love, thankful...these are not the things of world powers. These are not the things that most of us aspire to. Even within our churches, these are not the things that are usually appreciated and respected. This should make us think. Not just skip over this list and go, yea, good things. But actually look at this list as a description of who we are to be. We have been called to cut out self-serving idolatry, and now we are called to fill that vacancy, not with another way to show power, but with humility. This is how God describes holiness. This is what Christians need to strive to become.

But we won't just become this. It doesn't just happen. We will not just give up our rights to be meek. Here's the rub, not only does it not naturally happen, but you also cannot just buckle down and make yourself more compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, loving, thankful. The worst thing I could do is give you this list and then say, go accomplish it.

So it doesn't happen naturally, and we can't do it on our own. What we must do is submit to God's plan for sanctification. V.15-16:

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

This is the manner in which we must fight:

1. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts
2. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly
3. Teaching and admonishing one another

The peace of Christ rule in your hearts. We are at peace with Christ when we recognize our place in His kingdom. We are at peace with Christ when we recognize that He has already done the work to make us right with God. All of this killing sin and conform to His likeness is done out of a love for what He has already done. MOTIVATION

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. Receiving Christ changes us so that we can see His Word for what it is: a glimpse into the mind of God. A revelation of His glory. We dwell in the Word when we not only read it, come to it seeing what we can get out of it, but when we seek to let it change us: reveal our sin, show us a new way of life.

#### METHOD

Teaching and admonishing one another. This change does not happen in isolation. God set up community to be a sanctification center, the way we change, and it is also what we change into. As we come together, we teach one another, we encourage one another, we worship God together...all of these things tie us together and unify us. If we look back at the list of characteristics that we are to be in the new life, you will see that none of them can be done by yourself. You cannot show compassion to yourself. Or be patient with yourself. Or be kind to yourself. As we practice these things in community with each other, we are changed by each other, and we become one with one another.

#### MATERIAL

And so we allow the truth of the gospel to rule us, we dwell in the gospel letting it change us, and we practice the effects of the gospel with one another, we will be sanctified slowly, painfully, cutting off those parts of our life that we now see belong to the old us.

Paul ends this section:

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

This is what ALL of this is about. It is not about killing sin for the sake of killing sin. It is not about being raised with Christ because of what you get out of it. It is about recognizing what Jesus has done, and using every ounce of your time and energy to worship Him. That worship plays itself out in everything you do!

In between Food, Family, and Football this week, in a week in which we are supposed to spend extra time giving thanks: remember Jesus Christ. And have a very honest conversation with yourself about what good things you have taken outside of their created order. What things have taken the glory from God in your life? Don't be afraid of God showing you your sin, be afraid if he doesn't. And then...do the hard work of putting them back where they belong.