

Colossians Chapter 3 v 1 - 17

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[0 : 00] Colossians chapter 3, Colossians chapter 3, it's on page 1184 in the Red Church Bible.

And I'm going to read the first 17 verses. So Colossians chapter 3, the first 17 verses.

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

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

[1 : 08] Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now, you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these.

Anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you've taken off your old self with its practices.

And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there's no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free. But Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Bear with each other, and forgive one another, if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive us, the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

[2 : 20] Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body, you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and admonish one another, with all wisdom, through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

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. Amen.

And may the Lord bless his word to us. Amen. Amen. Well, perhaps you could turn again to that passage that we read in Colossians chapter 3.

This is a passage that we're going to be looking at. And it's appropriate that as we meet together tonight, because it's a cold winter's night, that there are fewer of us than normal.

And this might give us a picture of this church that Paul is writing to. I suspect there were far more people than tonight at Colossae at this particular time, because Epaphras had been there, and there had been people converted, and a church had been formed.

[3 : 45] We don't know the numbers, but in those days, people were being converted in large numbers. So we assume there were quite a number of people there. And this was one of a trio of churches.

There was Laodicea over here, on the area which is just at the bottom of Turkey there. Laodicea was there, and Hierapolis was there, and just down below both of them was the church of Colossae.

And this is the church that Paul is writing to. Most commentators feel that Paul hadn't ever been there before, that it was Epaphras who actually preached to them, and yet he was writing to them, because it was really part of his area of ministry.

And obviously he knew Epaphras, and he was writing to these people. And he's writing out of a concern for them. And this is what I want to look at this evening.

And to introduce it, I'd like you to think about some films that you've seen. I'm told there are only five or six stories in films that you can tell.

[4 : 56] It's Boy Meets Girl, or Boy Meets Girl, Boy Loses Girl, Boy Gets Back Together With Girl, something like that. And then there are war films, and then there are about, they say, five or six scripts that all that the writers do, you just change them all the time.

And in a way, this passage that we're looking at, I think fits into one of those types of scripts where everything's done in flashback.

You see the events of the present day, and from time to time, well, most of the time in most of the films I've seen, you don't understand what's going on. And then they flash back to some earlier point and reveal a little bit at a time what happened to cause the events of the present day to happen.

And one of the most famous of those in recent times has been the Bourne trilogy, Jason Bourne. He remembers he was found in the sea, drowning, and he lost his memory.

He'd forgotten all about his previous life. And in all of the three films, he's gradually finding bits and pieces of his past life, memories coming back to him. And ultimately, those memories, and the things that he was involved in, and the things that he learns from them, change him completely.

[6 : 19] And if you watch the last episode, which I think was last night, because it's on the TV every few weeks, isn't it? You'll have found the time when it comes to the end, and he's changed purses completely different.

And here we have Paul writing to this church, and he's writing out of a concern, which we'll think about, and you'll see perhaps some of the parallels as we go through.

And I'm going to try and help you to remember it by thinking, you know I'm a maths teacher, so we think about the three R's, reading, writing, and arithmetic in schools.

But I want to think about the three C's tonight. So I've got three headings to help us remember. I say three C's, there are actually six. Right? Because the first C is concern for the cold.

The second C is conflict and combat. And the last C is conquerors through Christ. So those are the three.

[7 : 26] And we see that these are all present in this passage that we're looking at. So let's begin with this concern for the cold. This is why Paul is writing this letter to these Colossians.

It was a new church, perhaps with a few believers, and he's writing to them because of the things he's heard about them from Epaphras and maybe others, and he's concerned about a number of issues.

And the main ones, according to those who have studied these books in detail, come from two particular areas. One is that, as in many of the churches of the day, there were people in the church who were teaching other things than what the true gospel was all about.

And that was one of the concerns that Paul was going to address. The second thing, which, if you like, might even come under the same heading, but which often came under a different heading, is the fact that many of these people were saying that Christ wasn't actually God.

He was just a man. And if you talk to people from other religious backgrounds today, that's often what they do say. That's what the Jehovah's Witnesses would say.

[8 : 52] And so, these are concerns, and I think the whole point about Paul's letters, as we have looked at them over the years, or perhaps as you've studied them, is that they're just as relevant today as they were on the day that Paul wrote these letters.

Exactly the same problems can come into a church because of the fact that all of the same people, in other words, sinful people, make up the church.

And some of those people, who aren't really believers at all, come up with all sorts of ideas that might lead people into blind alleys.

Well, that's what we find here then. But at the start of this particular section that we're looking at, I'm not going to worry too much about the heading that's given there, living as those made alive in Christ.

But that's actually where it starts. Because previously, we find that these people, if we just look at verse 4 and 8 of chapter 2, we just see the description of these people trying to lead people astray.

[10 : 09] In verse 4 it says, I tell you this, so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. So there were those who were trying to deceive them because here, Paul was talking in chapter 2 about the mystery of God, talking about Christ, and he doesn't want people to be deceived.

And again, when it gets to verse 8, it comes up with the same point. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than that on Christ.

So in that one particular verse, he's tackling both of the issues that we talked about. And so clearly, this is something that we need to take note of.

And right at the start of this particular chapter that we're looking at, chapter 3, he says, since then, you've been raised with Christ.

He wants to remind them of where they've come from. And that comes again from the previous chapter, from chapter 2 of Colossians in verses 13 and 14, which say, when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

[11 : 41] He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness which stood against us and condemned us. He's taken it away, nailing it to the cross and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

And that's what he's talking about prior to the beginning of this particular section. Since then, in other words, since they already know that, that Christ died on the cross and paid the penalty for their sins, since that's true, then what he's going to say next is going to make sense to them.

Think about that character, Jason Bourne, being completely unaware of his past, which of course the Colossians shouldn't have been, but now being faced with the fact, this is what it was.

Remember, this was the thing that changed you. This was the thing that made you Christians. This is the thing which made you what you are today. This actually happened.

It wasn't a figment of your imagination. This actually did take place and reminded them of that. And of course, along with that comes the understanding that there are things which must follow.

[13 : 07] And the first thing about this concern, it was a concern for the cold because he reminds them also that this is something that was supernatural.

It wasn't something that just happened to them because it was a fad that was going around the area at the time, but this was a divine intervention.

We find this in verse 15 of Colossians 3, but also in verse 12. We look at 12 first. It says, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, etc.

In other words, this church at Colossae, they were God's chosen people. And then in verse 15, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace or you were chosen.

You were called to peace and be thankful. So these men and women in this church were called by God himself.

[14 : 22] And he's saying to the church and he's true of every church, so let's take note of it, that we're to be very careful because what he says to them in some of the previous passages in chapter 2 is that they shouldn't be swayed by the principles of this world.

In verses 20 and 23 of chapter 2, this is what it says. Since you die with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belong to the world, do you submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. These rules, which have to do with the things that we are all destined to perish with use, are based merely on human commands and teachings.

And he says something similar later. So don't be, as it were, led astray by the basic principles of this world.

I'm not going to ask you the question, I'll give you some answers, but if I was to ask you the question, what are the basic principles of this world? If you look out on the world today and say, by what principles is the world operating, being run, as it were, what would you say those principles were?

[15 : 55] Well, it wouldn't take you long to realize that the main principle of this world is that I, as an individual, can do whatever I like because all of this is for me.

It's a selfish world. In other words, we can just control our own destiny, we can do whatever pleases us because if it's right for us, then it's right.

We, in other words, can do whatever we like and it doesn't matter. So we can pursue money, we can pursue power, we can pursue authority over people, whatever that might be, whatever we like because that's the principle that this world runs on.

It's about greed, it's about getting the most that you can for you and your family and all of us, though we might say, well, we're not like that. In some ways we are, aren't we?

Because what we want for our family and our children and so on is probably where even though we might not be millionaires and going out trying to grab more, we certainly want the best for all our families and that we would say, don't we?

[17 : 19] That's only natural. But he's saying the natural things, the basic principles of this world, they're the things which lead us astray.

They're the things which are going to take us away from the things of God. These are the things that he's going to warn these Christians at Colossae about as they set off at the beginnings of the Christian life.

Because the one major principle of the basic principles of this world is that the world and people in this world are unconcerned about anything other than the things that affect them personally.

They're not touched by anything else. And more important, they're unconcerned about God and they're standing before him. Because the principle of this world is God doesn't exist, God didn't make us, God didn't send Jesus Christ to the cross to be our saviour, therefore we're not concerned.

We can go through life and just ignore everything that's going on because it's of no concern to us. that's why we see in churches, we've said it for years and we've seen it in other churches and seen it in our own churches, some people come week after week, month after month, year after year, but they're unconcerned about the judgment to come.

[18 : 58] As Peter was mentioning this morning, there will be one day when we'll be judged. And the basic principle of this world is we don't care, we're unconcerned because it's not going to touch us.

So Paul's acutely aware that when he's warning them against these things to these people who are reading his letter or listening to those who are reading out his letter, that he wants them not to be led away from God and into sin.

Because he's seen it so many times himself already. And it's as if the people, having been rescued from their previous life, which we read about, by Christ because he saved them, now it seems as if some of them want to return to the way things were before.

because they want to go back. And Paul is explaining to them where the truth lies. And that's why he starts his argument the way he does.

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

[20 : 26] God. Just want to read at this point, Psalm 121, because in Psalm 121, we get a feel for the sort of thing that he's talking about when he says, you know, lift your eyes, because this Psalm, of course, you remember it, begins with those words.

I lift up my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from? You can almost forget that when Paul is saying these words to these people, it's not like me saying words to you, and you thinking, now, what does he mean by that?

What did Paul say? Lift up your eyes. They would know immediately that Psalm, wouldn't they? lift up your eyes to the mountains.

Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber.

Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

[21 : 51] The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forever more.

And that's why in his introduction to this letter, in chapter one, he puts the supremacy of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, right at the center of what he's saying.

These people have already read that bit. The wonder of the supremacy of Christ and the fact that Christ was God. So when he read those words about looking to the mountains, where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord. He knows that people will understand exactly that he's talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. It's hard to appreciate what effect that must have had on them.

We're to set our minds on things above because all of the things, however attractive they seem, in this world, they are going to tend to take us away from the things of God, the really important things.

[23 : 17] And how many times do you see it, that people get caught up in the things of this world? And he also, in talking to them about this, gives them another revelation as he's talking about his concern for the people who are called.

He reminds them that this particular gospel, that's being preached, about the Lord Jesus Christ, this is one that applies to everybody because he gives a list of these people in this particular passage who are included.

And it includes the Gentiles, it includes those who aren't Jews. So the chosen people aren't simply the Jews, Jews.

These are people who can be from any nation. And he gives a list there. And when we look at that list, he says, here there's no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free.

He ends it like this, but Christ is all and is in all. In other words, if they're in Christ, then they are brothers, sisters, they're related to all of these others from whatever background they come who are also in Christ.

[24 : 57] What an amazing thing it is that we can find Christians, Christian brothers and sisters in every kingdom, tribe and nation in the world because Christ is all and is in all.

You know, sometimes we look at other people, perhaps from other groups and we imagine, as I did growing up, I won't say which groups, but there was a school down the road that didn't belong to the particular branch of the church that the school I went to went to and we thought they had two heads.

But I'm sure there must have been Christians in that school as well, even though we fought battles with them on the playground. And you'll see the importance of that when we come to the summary at the end.

Let me just leave it there for the moment. So that's the first point. The second pair of C's is conflict and combat.

Well, here, it's quite easy to see where that comes because we have two lists, actually, of things that these people were being warned against.

[26 : 15] The first one we find, beginning at verse 5, put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Notice, it's the earthly nature, the basic principles of the things of this world.

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

He used to walk in these ways, etc. But then he goes on, verse 8, but now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language, from your lips.

Do not lie to each other, since you've taken off your old self with its practices. And Peter was specifically mentioning that this morning. We didn't plan it, but he did talk about lying.

And the truth is, it's easier to tell the truth, because once you start to tell lies, you forget what you said, and then you've got to make up other lies to cover the things that you said that didn't make any sense to people, to cover your tracks.

[27 : 30] Whereas if you speak the truth, you don't have to hide anything, because it's the truth. Hard, though it may be. So we're given this great list of things there, which these people have to, as he says, put to death.

These are things which are going to inevitably spoil the lives of these people. They're going to be in a battle against these things all through their lives.

And aren't we? We battle against these things all through our lives. We might tick off one or two of these that we don't think applies to us. We're probably wrong, but many of them we'd have to say are our faults as well, things that we have to be aware of.

And these are things which Paul is saying they really have to go into combat against. In that story of Jason Bourne, once he understands the truth, the whole of the rest of the three films is about his battle to put the truth to the forefront and put all the things of the past in the background and put them all to bed, as they say in the films.

And that's what it's about. It's a battle after that time. And he's got very real enemies. And we've got a real enemy called the devil who is wanting us exactly to go back to these things.

[29 : 05] And it was the same with these people at Colossae. They were just converted, you would think. They were at that stage in their Christian lives where everything seemed to be perfect.

They understood the gospel. They were in love with Christ. They longed to do what he wanted them to do. And yet relatively quickly they were being dragged back into the world.

And just because we're older, most of us, doesn't mean to say we're any wiser. And it can happen to anybody at any time. And that's why Paul is reminding them of this and he's warning them of it. in verse 7, here's a flashback. Because of these, this is in other words these sins, because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived, but now he wants them to walk in a new life. He's reminding them that this is exactly what they were like before.

[30 : 14] This is what I said, they were going backwards now, potentially, to what they've done before because of this false teaching that they were receiving. And it was a real danger.

Going back to the world is never the answer. And yet, to many, it seems that they've forgotten that they're a new person.

another place we're told in the Bible that for this battle that we're in, we need spiritual armor.

You know, the breastplate and the helmet and so on. But, this particular battle, in this particular way that Paul has written it, it's unarmed combat.

And the only weapon we have, I did think about asking you this and finding out if any of you would give me answers, but I thought it was a bit dangerous, so I won't do it.

[31 : 21] But the answer is, our principal weapon here is love. That's the principal weapon for every Christian in this particular battle against these particular sins that are given.

look at Colossians 3 verses 12 to 14. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive us, the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love.

love. You remember when he talked in that passage on the armor of God, he says, putting on the breast plate and putting on the armor. But here, it's not armor, it's love.

If we put on love, he said, it binds all these people together in perfect unity. what is a perfect church?

[32 : 32] Are we one? No. Will we ever be one? Unlikely. But if we ever get to that stage, the one thing that will stand out above everything else is the love that we have for one another.

It's the overriding thing. And that will defeat all of the wiles of the devil. This is the battle that we need and this is one which we need to be united in because that love, it says, binds us together in perfect unity.

To win this battle, all of the church needs to be united. One or two people can't win this battle. you can't win this battle on your own.

We need all to be involved. We need to help one another. But the great news is that we'll receive all the help that we need in this conflict and in the combat.

But finally, conquerors through Christ. We know that the Bible calls Christ in another part the Prince of Peace.

[33 : 59] And this peace rules over all. We've already read it a few times but let me just read it because really this is the one verse I wanted to focus on.

There are some really great verses in here but this is the one I wanted to focus on. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace and be thankful because it brings all of these elements together.

Can you see what Paul's saying as he gets to this particular tipping point if you like in his letter to them. He's talked about where they came from what they were once as sinful people saved by Christ's death on the cross.

he's talked about the potential now for them falling back into sin where they came from. He sees the danger and he's trying to warn them about it and he says this needs love above all things and all these things come together because these are God's chosen people and all the elements come together in this one verse.

because of all things he's saying let the peace of Christ the peace of Christ just imagine that. What was the peace of Christ like?

[35 : 25] It was a peace that allowed the Lord Jesus you remember to be asleep in a boat that was being tossed about in a storm where everybody else was really scared for their lives.

but Christ was so much at peace and aware that it was in God's hand that it didn't worry him. What was Christ's peace like?

When they arrested him in the garden and all the others wanted to fight and Peter chopped off one of the soldiers' ears Jesus was so much at peace he just said no just let them take me.

and when he went to the cross it was the same he was at peace because he was at peace with God.

This verse is encouraging us to have the peace of Christ the relationship that Christ had with his father letting that rule in our hearts since as members of one body we're one body this evening not just one body of evangelical church but the body of Christ church universal every other single Christian in the world is a member with us of that one body and when we were called unlike the situations in past history some people say this is so marked in the New Testament that the God of the Old Testament couldn't be the same God as the one in the New Testament because in the Old Testament it's all about war and killing people and the New Testament is all about love but they've missed the point that is the whole point about the New

[37 : 24] Testament that's how it should have been in the beginning that's how the church should be in perfect unity the love that binds all these people together because we were called by God to peace we weren't called to war we were called to peace and be thankful of course we're thankful everybody wants to live in a world of peace that was a great verse but I'm going to carry on because although we have this peace if we trust in Christ we know that the Bible else well tells us that this is a peace that passes all understanding we can't comprehend it we're simply to be thankful but this reminds us that it's not a physical battle that we're in it's a battle for the heart look at verse 16 let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms hymns and songs from the spirit singing to

God with gratitude in your hearts we have to let the message of Christ dwell in our hearts we can't do that if we never read it we can't do that if we don't accept certain parts of it we can only do it if we allow that word to dwell within us so this is the mechanism by which this peace can be ensured within our hearts to let the word dwell within us now actually in this passage it doesn't mention prayer I just wish it had then it would have put it brilliantly all together but we know that one other aspect of being with Christ and having his peace rule over us and having his word dwell in us is that communication that we have with the

Lord through prayer so when we are thankful we should pray to God and thank him and also allow him to speak with us and of course the final thing that this passage tells us when it's spoken about what we need to do and how we need to guard our lives and how we need to turn to the word verse 17 is wonderful as well isn't it 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 I'll leave you with this just to think in terms of you know when you read a passage like that certainly as I was reading it and thinking about bringing it this evening doesn't it make you think imagine what our lives would be like if we had that perfect peace with

God which we do we might not use it the way that we should but we have peace with God through Christ imagine we lived our life doing everything that we do in the name of that same Christ what a difference that would make it's not just a case of doing things to the best of our abilities is it we're doing everything in his name and when that happens everything that we do will be supported by him because he says in another place if you asked in my name I will do it how could we transform this church how can we transform ourselves into if you like the model

Christian church which may be the people at Colossae might have become on the one hand it's impossible because we'll always be sinful people but on the other hand if we take this injunction that Paul gives to them if we do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we may get close to it I don't know about you but I wonder how I would have reacted to that if I had been hearing that for the first time in that small church in Colossae because it certainly caused me to think back to what I was before I became a Christian and then if there had been any tendency for me to think well I've had enough of this

[43 : 04] Christianity I'll just go back to what I was like before surely this is the antidote and of all the things that we know when we assess ourselves if we're honest with ourselves however good we thought it was before we were Christians isn't it a fantastic thing to know the peace of God to know that love for Christ and for one another that you don't get in anything else in this world I'm sure that's why Christ wanted us to be with other Christians like minded men and women full of the spirit

concentrating on the word of God in gratitude to him bringing their prayers to him and wanted to do everything for his sake and his name to bring all the glory and all the honour to him impossible may be simple easy to understand absolutely it's as if

Paul said look I know you don't know everything yet but these things you do know and keep to these things and these will keep you on the right path let's all seek to keep on that same path thousand to end