

“Thank God for Changing Me” Colossians 3:1-11

This month we are focusing on those things in our lives that we should give thanks to God for.

We gave thanks to God for our Church.

We gave thanks to God for the cross.

Today, as we look at the first verses of Colossians 3, we thank God for changing me.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read:

Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

In Colossians 3 we discover how that happens and the difference that makes in our lives.

Before we can become a new creation in Christ, something radical must happen: we have to die. That is what verse 3 says. Our new identity in Jesus starts the moment we die.

Does that mean we do not become a new creation in Christ until we die and go to heaven?

No, Paul believes that the Christian dies to self, to sin, to pride, now, in this life. In fact, the very act of baptism symbolizes this – we go under the water as if we are being buried, for we have died. But notice that in baptism and in life we do not stay dead, or buried. We are raised up to new life.

So the starting place for Paul is the joyous fact that we have been raised to new life. Verse 1 says, **“Since you have been raised with Christ....”**

He does not say, “If you are raised with Christ...” or even “you should be raised with Christ...”

Paul says you are raised with Christ if you are a Christian. But to be raised to new life, it means you had to die.

This is not a physical death, but a death of our old life lived just for ourselves, replaced with a new life lived only for Jesus. It is made possible because Jesus lives within us.

The Apostle John recounted the words of Jesus as he spoke to Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to Jesus at night. Jesus told this religious, good man that he had to be born again. He needed to start life all over again, but this time focusing on a relationship with God through faith in Jesus instead of focusing on religion, or wealth, or fame, or happiness, or anything else. This would only be possible as the Holy Spirit gave new life to the believer.

But to need new life, means that the old life ceased. We have to die.

I have been reading about the spiritual life in Ireland during the 600's-800's. This is the time when men like St. Patrick lived and served God. Many of these godly men thought the way to die to self was to live austere lives of hardship – eating very little, staying up night after night to pray, standing in cold water, going on long pilgrimages which were neither safe nor funded by anyone. They thought that by denying themselves this way they would put to death the desires of the flesh.

It did not work.

The dying referred to here comes through confession of sin, repentance and calling out to Jesus for forgiveness and new life. It is when we realize we cannot get to God on our own, and we stop trying, and instead turn our lives over to Jesus.

A poor analogy might be what happens when someone is running from abuse, or from crime, or from debt. The things that chase them will never give up as long as they live. So the only way to stop the pursuit of the enemy is to fake a death. Once a report of death is read, the pursuit comes to an end. The person who was fleeing hopes they can now start a new life in a new place with a new identity.

In many ways that is what happens to us, except it is not a faked death – we do die to self. And then Jesus raises us up and a new life begins, one where our focus is on heaven, on the things of God, and the promise of his return. We walk with Jesus and communicate with him through prayer and reading the scriptures. The Holy Spirit lives within us to guide us, teach us, comfort us and empower us. It is a new life.

And we are so thankful for the new life we found in Jesus.

Are you grateful for that new life? Can you remember the day you said “Yes” to Jesus, repenting of your sin and asking him to come into your life?

This morning I have asked Jeffrey Randle to share his testimony. I can talk about the change Jesus makes in our lives, or you can hear a testimony of how it happened. I believe the testimony is far more powerful.

Jeffrey, please come and share with us how Jesus changed your life.

If we have started a new life in Christ, then we must live differently. We cannot simply know about the new life in our head – it must be lived in our lives. That is what the Apostle Paul is getting at in the next part of chapter three.

First, he says we must get rid of some things.

In Acts 19:19 we read the following:

A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.

These new believers in Ephesus got rid of many things that tied them to their old pattern of life. They used to practice sorcery, so they burned their books.

Though Paul does say we must get rid of some things, he does not zero in on possessions, but more on practices and attitudes in our life. It is interesting that his list in verse 5 starts with the most visible sins and works towards the most hidden sins.

Here is his list: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed.

The ancient world had few rules about sexual behaviour. Basically, anything was permissible. That, of course, leads to all kinds of terrible practices, and completely undermines families and

marriages. It came as quite a shock to Paul's first audience to hear that there is a right way and a wrong way to think about sex. For the Christian sex finds its purpose and meaning within the sanctity of marriage. Anything outside of that was sexual immorality.

Impurity is connected to immorality. Impurity spoke of breaking vows with one's spouse, or giving yourself away in sex before you had a spouse. It was once again going against God's design for sex within the institution of marriage.

Lust was desiring to have sexual relations with someone who was not your spouse. It was looking at someone else as a sex object, rather than a person. In the Old Testament we see the results of lust – for in 2 Samuel 13 we read of Amnon, David's oldest son, falling in love with his half sister, Tamar. But that was not love – it was lust. He rapes her, and then despises her. Lust is always destructive...

Evil desires is a very broad category – but summed up with wanting what is not good for you!

He ends this short list with greed – wanting more: always more. And that, Paul says, is idolatry. It is making an idol of whatever it is you want more of.

These things, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed all come from our worldly mindset. That is what must die. God's wrath will come against these practices. So many in our world today are in for a rude awakening when the day of judgement comes.

But look at verse 7: "You used to walk in these ways..." But Jesus has given you a new life.

Paul is not done yet. He adds a few more things that need to be taken from our lives:

Anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language

And, Paul says, don't lie to one another. Don't say you are better than you are – be honest in all you do because you have taken off the old practices like a dirty garment and you have put on a new life in Christ. Better yet, we are being renewed so that we reflect the image of our Creator. And this happens in all believers – with no divisions or walls of separation.

We are all united in Christ, and Christ is in all of us. This is true of believers in India, and China, and the Russia. This is true of believers in Brazil, Venezuela and Peru. It is true of believers in Europe and Africa. It is true of believers in Canada and the USA. Christ is our all, and Christ is in us all.

We stop there this morning, looking at what we must get rid of. And do not put these things on the curb so others can pick them up, or some place you can go back to later. They need to go to the incinerator – to the dump. Get rid of it...

Read on and you will find some wonderful things to put on, now that you got rid of the things of the world. Let me give you a sample: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience...

And as you read on you will find this verse:

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." Sound familiar? I sure hope so!

We are thankful today that we have been given a new life in Christ! I pray you know what this means, not by words spoken by a pastor today, or written in scripture, but by experience.