

99-02-19a Colossians

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of God's Word this evening with a moment of prayer. Father, we thank you as always for your sustaining grace, for the many ways that you have expressed your love and your care for us in these preceding days. We thank you for the mercies that are renewed every morning.

We thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you for the standing that we enjoy in our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that not only have you remedied our past problems, but you have created for us a wonderful opportunity in the present and in the future.

We pray tonight that as we study your Word, God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us. We will have perception and understanding to be able to bring the truth of your Word into our souls and be transformed by it so that we live in a way that is pleasing in your sight and that reflects the character and the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name.

Amen. We resume our study tonight in Colossians chapter 3. If all goes according to plan, we will finish chapter 3 tonight. But then you know how that is.

Sometimes things go according to plan and sometimes they don't. We have come to a place in the argument of this letter. Paul did his introduction.

You know the background. You know the visit of Epaphras. You know the challenges that were facing that church.

And we saw that in chapter 3, Paul has turned the corner after laying the foundation, the doctrinal foundation, the spiritual foundation, reminding Colossian believers of what they know, what they know about the Lord Jesus Christ, where they are in God's plan, the positional truth that creates the potential for the fulfillment of God's calling in the experience realm. If you had ever studied back, say, in the mid-70s up through the early 80s or so with Colonel Thieme down in Houston, he had a memory aid or a teaching device or whatever you want to call it, where he had an equation. I don't know.

Equations usually complicate things more than they simplify them for me. But he had an $x + y + z$ equation that this was equal to the plan of God. If you were able to follow through the things that each of the things in the equation represented, he did a great job of talking about the fact that there are things that God has done for us that create potential.

There is a potential in the plan of God. And he had three different equations. And when God imputes righteousness, when He imputes eternal life, this creates the potential for something.

And then when you fulfill that potential in time by taking in the word of God and so forth, there is a new potential that is created. And the plan of God, things are accomplished that make a potential

possible for us. And then as we fulfill that potential, new things become possible for us.

This is what Paul essentially is communicating in Colossians. He says in answer to the competing philosophies and the other ideas that are being presented, that there are realities in the universe. There are things about God and about His plan.

There are truths related to the Lord Jesus Christ and His work that create potential for us. And this is positional truth, our standing in Christ, our secure eternal life, the absolute fact that our sins have been forgiven, that we have been entered into a relationship with God forever. There are unchangeable truths.

And these things create a potential. The challenge for us is to be conscious enough of those truths that they become a part of our motivation to pursue the fulfilling of that potential. We explored that in some detail over the last two weeks in chapter three, where Paul says, if then these things are true, this is what you ought to be doing.

If this is so, then here's what the result should be in your life. So at the beginning of the chapter, if then you were raised with Christ, you ought to be looking at things above, not things on the earth. You ought to be setting your mind on things above and not on the earth.

And then through the rest of the chapter, and we've spent several lessons actually looking at the content of what this is, you can summarize this. If you look at verse five, and again at verse eight, there are two lists of vices or two lists of problems that ought to be remedied. These are things that we were trapped in before Christ.

These are things that we had no power to escape before Christ. These are things that enslave us, that control us, that are characteristic of us and determine our behavior before Christ. Now, because of positional truth, we have the potential to overcome these things, to put them away, to put them to death.

It's interesting because there are five things listed in chapter five, in verse five, there are five things listed in verse eight. And in each of those lists, there are two pairs of items, two pairs of vices, if you will. I wouldn't exactly call these vices, but they are problem areas.

There's a pair, and then a pair, and then a fifth thing that has a little bit of expansion. So, like in verse five, it says, put to death these things on the earth, fornication and uncleanness. We saw that this is a word from pornography, the first word for fornication, and the second one is akatharsia, which is uncleanness.

Catharsis comes over into English. People say, well, I had a cathartic experience, I had a catharsis. This is what they were going for in Greek tragedy or Greek drama when they would try to, and they still do this, I guess, in movies and things, where they want to tell you a story, and in the telling of it, cleanse or purge your soul.

The ancient Greek tragedies of Oedipus and Prometheus and some of these other stories that they would tell were supposed to, in following the course of the hero, it was supposed to purge your soul, and they called this catharsis. Well, if you put a in front of that, which is the negative, that's not purged, not cleansed. So that's the second word in verse 5. So the pornia and uncleanness or uncleanness of soul go together.

They're two aspects of the same thing. The second pair go together, passion and desire. You have pathos, which is, we have kind of a different meaning for that in English.

We think of something really sad, oh, that's full of pathos or pathetic, and, of course, it becomes kind of an adjective for something that we really think is poor when we say, well, that's just pathetic. That was a pathetic effort. The pathos meant a passion, and then evil desire, epithumia.

The word for evil is not actually there, but passion and desire. These are two things. This is part of a pair.

And then the fifth thing there, you have covetousness, which is idolatry. The fifth item in the list is expanded a little bit. Covetousness is described.

It is idolatry, and we know that that's described that way in other passages, such as Ephesians 5.5. Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming, period. We know from Ephesians that the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience, but that phrase is not in this passage. It's true, and we know, and we spent some time looking at the sons of disobedience last week.

They are sons. They are disobedient, and we looked at that word in great detail. Apatho, not convinced, not motivated, not compelled.

What a terrible thing to come to an understanding of the positional truth that we've talked about, our standing in Christ, the results of our salvation, the potential that Christ has created for us in this life, and not to be compelled by it, not to be constrained, to be motivated, to be interested enough to break out of the routines of life and fulfill that potential and move on to even greater things in the calling and in the plan of God. But that's what happens. And when it happens, and unfortunately it happens to the bulk of believers, and that's why Jesus, talking to the believers in the age of Israel, said that it's a wide road and a broad gate that leads to destruction.

He was talking to believers. He said there's few that find that narrow road that goes through the straight gate to life. And this is life in full.

It's everything that God has for us. There's such a tremendous spiritual attainment that is set before us, but we miss it. Instead, we wind up going back to where we were before.

It's like the Israelites who were delivered from bondage in Egypt and spent the next 40 years trying to get back into it. You yourselves once walked when you lived in them, but now you

yourselves are to put these away. Put them off.

And now in verse 8, there's another set of five. Two pairs and then a fifth thing that is described. Wrath and malice.

These two words are linked. Blasphemy and filthy language. These two things are linked.

I'm sorry. Anger and wrath are linked. Malice and blasphemy are linked.

And then filthy language or this bad speech, this inappropriate speech out of your mouth. It's got a descriptive phrase after it. So the pattern is the same in these two.

The reason I review this a little bit is that tonight when we look at the positive side of things, we're going to find that there's another list of five virtues rather than vices. And it only takes one packet of five virtues to offset two packets of vices. And that just goes to the power of God.

The power of God to heal is greater than our ability to fail. So when you get down to verse 12 and Paul tells us what to put on. Tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering.

We find again that we have two pairs and then a fifth thing that is described. And the whole next verse describes that long-suffering. What does it mean to be long-suffering? It means to bear with one another, forgive one another.

If anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave, so you also must do. That's all wrapped up specifically in long-suffering and more broadly in all five virtues. But I don't want to gloss over the beginning of verse 12 before we leave this section.

Because it's one more reminder that the compelling motivation to pursue this life is our standing. He says, therefore, as the elect of God, remember you're chosen. This is the Greek word *eklektos*, chosen.

Chosen of God, holy and beloved. We are chosen to be holy. You go back to Romans 8.28 and 29.

And that God pre-designated us to be conformed to the image of His Son. So that He could be the firstborn among many brethren. And He sanctifies and justifies and does all of these other things to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose.

Who recognize that His purpose is more important than anything else. So we also discuss the fact that to actually attain to this life takes more than just an evening around the campfire where someone sings songs and gives an emotional invitation and we rededicate our life. It takes more than an occasional realization that this is a possibility and a firm but shallow commitment to do so.

And then daily life takes up again and we fade. We forget. We get caught up in the routines and

in the normal patterns of life.

And we fade out. We don't have that inner motivation. We don't have the inner transformation that is a prerequisite for these things to be true of us.

And so we talk, and you'll remember over the last few weeks, we've talked about the fact that it's more than just a conscious decision in the same way that fitness or weight loss or any other skill, playing the piano. I had, I think, a year and some months of piano lessons. I heard my cousin play.

My cousin, although he was younger than me, had started lessons earlier and had been playing for four or five years. And he would sit down and play these classical pieces and just roll my socks down. I would listen to that and think, boy, to be able to sit down and play the piano.

I would listen to my father since I was in the cradle and probably earlier than that. I would hear my father play. And to be able to sit down and express yourself in music is a wonderful thing.

And so you think, oh, I've got to play the piano. Please let me take some piano lessons. Okay, fine.

Here's the piano teacher. You go, well, now you're doing scales. And you can't even do them with both hands at once.

You start with one hand and you do the scales up and down and up and down and up and down. And then eventually after you've done those and all the different keys, then you put your other hand with it. And you do the scales.

And then you practice and you play these tiresome, mundane, boring songs. And they have no musical value. They don't sound good to the ear.

Nobody else wants to hear you play them. People, when it's time for you to practice the piano, they go, oh, you know, I think I've got some chores to do outside. Other people are out playing.

You can hear the joyous noises of children in the streets and all of these things. And you're in there, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun. Well, you have to have a goal.

You have to have a motivation. You have to have a reason to throw yourself into that and remember your basics and remember your fundamentals and persevere and keep your eyes on the goal. If you don't have a goal, if you're aiming at nothing, you're going to hit it every time.

We have to keep our spiritual goal in mind. And that's why Paul constantly reminds us of positional truth. Look what Christ has done.

Look what God has done. We have to cycle that through our mind and through our souls. And

nobody can do it for us.

I can't do it for you. People on Christian radio can't do it for you. We each individually have to decide that the upward climb, remember Paul calls it an upward call.

He says it's the upward call of God. Forgetting those things which are behind, I look forward. It's an upward climb.

God didn't say, well, I'm at work and you're willing to do, you just hold still and you're going to become a wonderful, mature believer reflecting, in the grandest and greatest sense, all the glory of Christ. We are necessarily involved, our volition, our perseverance. That's why one of the fruits of the Spirit is perseverance, patience, self-control.

All of these things are required. The reason we are dwelling on this here is because that's what Paul is dwelling on. We're going to see it tonight because he turns yet another corner here.

He's eventually going to come full circle back to where he started. This wonderful letter, which is so cohesive and so well written under the ministry of the Spirit, is going to bring us right back to chapter 1 with the worthy walk and the life that is well-pleasing to God. He started by reminding us and reinforcing and describing and enhancing understanding of truth.

Truth about God, truth about Christ. It's important for us to dwell on those things, to take some time, set some time and meditate on them. I was talking to someone earlier this week and they had found that setting aside time first thing in the morning.

If you're single or if you're married, so much the better. Maybe you have someone that you can spend that time with. It's like working out.

It's always easier if you're running with someone else instead of getting up in the dark and going off by yourself. Whatever it takes, whatever time of day, whatever works for you, in some way, shape or form, to take the best part of the day, the best part of our energy, the best part of our mind and soul and devote it to God. To stop and think because just rehearsing these truths in our mind invokes the power of God.

The Word of God is living and powerful. I've mentioned this many times before but it is always true. It's frustrating to be given a description of how life ought to be and how we ought to be hitting these marks and making this progress and becoming these wonderful things and not find it in ourselves to be and do those things.

It's very frustrating. It's depressing. It can actually move us in the opposite direction.

It can repel us instead of compel us. I have had this experience, I had it particularly when I was a teenager, where literature and Sunday school and everything else was talking about how great things could be. Read your Bible, pray every day, sing these songs, yield not to temptation,

yielding is sin, each victory will help you another to win.

If you're not having any victories, you're not going to have another one to win. Each victory doesn't help you another to win because you're not winning any victories. It's just depressing when people seem to be making progress and you feel like you're back in the rear with the gear and you're not getting anywhere.

This is the wonderful thing that God's Word reveals. God has put the power there. It's in His Word, but we have to go get it.

We have to point our minds at it. We have to be convinced by it. We have to be patho and not apatho.

We have to be pistuo, which is to exercise faith, not apistuo. Both of those words are used frequently in the Scriptures. This is what Paul has done.

He's put the truth out there and reminded us of it in the doxologies, in the content of his prayers, in his description of Jesus Christ, and in the description of our position in God's plan. In Colossians, especially since we've gone through it in some detail, to just read back over it and remind ourselves of these truths. Then we come to chapter 3 and now Paul has moved into the application phase.

If these things are so, how should we then live? We need to be setting our minds on things above. Well, how do you do that? Well, think about daily life. What is our goal? Is our goal to get as much done as possible in the shortest amount of time? Are we checking things off on a list? Or have we set our minds on things above? Are we trying to do things heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men? How are we measuring ourselves? How are we evaluating the success of a day or the success of a week or the success of a month or a year, the success of our lives up to this point? How do we evaluate it? What are we looking for in the future? We're going to come right down to specifics tonight because Paul is moving ever closer to the actual point of contact between the rubber and the road.

That's where he's going to be tonight. So he has talked about, in verse 12, putting on these five things, tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering. Now here's the thing.

You think about the situation. Epaphra is coming. Paul, I've got to tell you, people in the church are dazed and confused.

There's lots of preachers compelling, dazzling in their presentations. They hook people's interest. They're like the Tony Robbins mouthful of teeth guy on TV.

They've got all the right things to say. People have all these success stories. All these things are swirling around.

And our common grounding in the faith seems to be slipping away. What do I do? How do I point out the difference between these false and deceptive views of life and views of success and what we heard at your feet, Paul, when you came and taught us? Epaphra comes there, and so he's talking about that. Well, how do people typically measure success? How do we measure success today? What do we look at? What's the income? What's the output? What's the visible fruit? What model of car are you driving? How big is the house you're living in? What neighborhood are you in? Where's your income bracket? How much do you spend on your suits? How much do you spend on your dresses? How big of a dog can you put on when you entertain? There's all of these social conventions, social measures, and within the church there's another set of measures that have just become the de facto standard.

How big is your church? How active is your church? How many ministries do you have? Do you have a thing for children? Do you have a youth group? Do you have a young singles? Do you have a young divorce? Do you have an old divorce? Do you have an old singles? What do you have for me? What do you have so that no matter who I am and where I come from and what my characteristics are, you've got a ministry tailor-made for me? And, of course, the biggest thing is, well, what's your body count? How many people came this Sunday? How many people came last Sunday? What's the offering? Who brought their Bibles? You fill it out on the Sunday school envelope. Put it on the little wooden thing at the front of the auditorium. Who can stand up and say how many people were impacted this past week in some way? They were impacted with the gospel, or they were impacted with ministry, or they attended, they came, they showed up, their door was knocked on, their hand was stuffed with a fly, whatever it may be.

We like quantifiables because that's the human world. That's the earthly things. To quantify, to justify, to defend, to bring oneself forward as a success.

Well, a lot of these things take place in contact with others. We measure our success in front of and in association with others. Do you notice anything? Keeping all that in mind, when we read chapter 3, where is the measure? Where is Paul's emphasis on impacting the community? Where is Paul's emphasis on outreach? Where is Paul's emphasis on having an effect on others? Ministering to others.

It's mentioned in here, isn't it? He says you need to have love, you need to forgive and be kind and have long suffering. You can't do that in a vacuum. All of those things involve people.

But you notice, and this is why Epaphros was having such a hard time, because this is not an easy thing to point out when everybody is all singing the same praise song and they're all waving their hands in rhythm to the same chant in the stadium, to point out, don't you see that you've minimized your personal responsibility and maximized the measure of what effect you have on others. When you read Paul, Paul is maximizing what's happening in your soul. Where are you before God? Because if you are where you're supposed to be, if you're becoming what you're supposed to become, if you have put on the new man that is renewed in the epinosis, the full

knowledge of God, to the extent that you interact and touch other people, you're going to be manifesting all of these things.

But Paul is focusing on the source. He's focusing on the power, on the transformation that takes place on the inside. We, as a church, focus on the outside.

What were the results? How did it turn out? What did anybody see or hear? You'll notice even in the list of vices, where these are all things that happen on the outside. This porna typically reflects itself in sexual immorality. The uncleanness and passion and evil desire, it always leaks out in behavior.

It's reflected in the interaction we have with others. We're greedy or we're promiscuous or we're this or we're that or the other. It's always on the outside where people can see it.

You look at the second list. Anger and wrath and malice and blasphemy, this all shows up. You don't just sit in a vacuum and get angry.

You don't sit on a rock next to the Pacific Ocean watching the waves crash in and just build up this tremendous pent-up anger. When does it happen? It happens in association with other people, drivers and so forth. I knew that I was getting examples for this lesson as I was driving home tonight.

I got cut off four different times. People pulled in front of me and slammed on their brakes twice. They just did unkind things in traffic all the way home.

This was on my new, better, faster, safer route that I was so proud of until today. Coming up Skillman instead of coming up Gassen and Garland Road. But there's signs saying it narrows down to one lane.

Get over on the left lane. Everybody does so and somebody in a sports car in the back revs all the way around on the right-hand side and you get right up to the pylons and the loop guardrail. There is no room and they just shove in front of you forcing you to slam on your brakes and go into the opposite lane of traffic so that they can get through without having to wait like the rest of us.

Anger can come up in association with other people. It's always in other people. It's easy to measure sins.

This is why the Law of Moses was so great at measuring sin because it's all about your relations with other people. You dug a hole that the ox fell in and broke his leg. You wronged this other person.

You got his wife or coveted his ox or his manservant or his maidservant. You did this, that, and the other. It's all measured in the people realm.

We're built that way. It communicates to us when we're fallen and when we're unsaved and when we're out of fellowship. It's easy for us to see sin because it's all right out there in the earthly realm.

That's where sin is. That's where the earthly stuff has to be put to death. What does it take to fix our minds and our eyes on heavenly things, on spiritual things? It takes something we haven't got because we're living in the two-dimensional world that's all about breadth and length but has no height.

We're not able to look up in our own power. That's what God gives us when he saves us. When he infuses us with his grace, when he gives us the gift of his Spirit, now we have those muscles that enable us to lift our head and look upward and set our minds and our hearts and our eyes on things above.

But when we do that, we're going to find that now we have a different measure. We've got to break these old habits and get away from these old instinctive ways of feeling and measuring and evaluating things. It's not going to be in the external realm.

You may win a tremendous victory over anger and nobody's going to see it. Nobody's going to notice. There's no fanfare.

There's no pat on the back. There's no one standing back going, Oh, it's invisible. Because this is a vertical thing.

God is looking into the soul. God the Holy Spirit is in the soul. The Word of God is circulating and doing its transforming work in the soul.

Eventually, these things will work themselves out and be observed, but the first and great victory is invisible. And we're not content with that. We're typically not content with invisible victories and with invisible measure until we learn, until we have our norms and standards transformed.

But this is what Paul is talking about. When you look at the virtues in verse 12, tender mercies, kindness, humility, he doesn't say put on a knock on the doors campaign. He doesn't say get a clothing thing going, get shoes for the orphans or get coats for the homeless or get a soup kitchen ministry going.

It's hard for us to catch this because we're just so used to it. We don't even apply one to the other. We don't even apply the Word of God to our practice.

But Paul says nothing in here about impact on others. He says you need transformation. You need the new man yourself.

It's all about personal responsibility for our own soul. And you can see the overflow. People are going to see.

They are going to be affected. They will be ministered to. All of the things that are wonderful about the grace of God expressed from person to person are going to take place.

But Paul starts at the source. He says you have got to be changed on the inside. You have to take responsibility and you have to start paying attention.

When you set your sights on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father, you're going to find that it is personal responsibility for one's own soul. So he says you've got to bear with others. You've got to forgive others.

If anyone has a complaint, Christ forgave you. You should forgive others. Forgiveness.

Where does that forgiveness take place? Forgiveness is not a soup kitchen. It's not handing out clothes and shoes. It's not ministering to the sick and afflicted.

It's not going out and having a class or having a coffee or having an event. It's not going over and trying to help somebody with some problem area in their life. Is it? Forgiveness takes place inside our soul.

When it comes to others, Paul says, God says through Paul, it's all inside our soul. You've got to be humble. You've got to be meek.

You've got to have self-control. You've got to forgive. Forgiveness takes place inside our heart.

You don't have to move a muscle to forgive someone. You don't have to go outside your door to forgive someone. But so many of us as believers, we are so caught up in the momentum of the false idea, the false measure, that we don't stop and take the time to make sure that we have done these things, that we have put on these things in the soul.

It's much easier. It doesn't take as much responsibility. It doesn't take as much self-evaluation or concentration on the Word of God or prayer or meditation to just go out and, well, let's put together a flannel board or let's get a luncheon going or let's put together a lesson and give it to someone or let's go pray with somebody and counsel them on how they can live their life better.

We're so busy trying to tell each other how to live and a lot of us have never stopped and gotten God's power active in the middle of our own soul. Lest anybody think that I've somehow got some kind of an issue within our group, I don't. And I don't have any specific thing in mind.

So, this is what this passage is about and it does strike close to my heart because I have seen this up close. I have been pastor of a church where some of these things were true, where people were actively poking their nose in someone else's business. And with the best of intentions and believing that this was the Christian life, wholeheartedly on their knees praying and doing the wrong thing day after day after day after day.

We have to look at the Word of God and be sure that we're doing the right thing. And that's where Paul is going at great lengths. He's writing this letter in prison to make sure that we understand these things.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you. He doesn't say get out there and dwell among the unbelievers. He doesn't say get out there and minister.

I can't say this. I probably have said it too many times. But the Word of God, every place you look, tells us you've got to be responsible for your own soul.

That's where the battles are won and lost. That's where the measure is made. That's what we will be accountable for.

There's going to be so many disappointed people at the judgment seat of Christ because God isn't going to ask for the attendance rolls. He's not going to ask for the impact sheets. He's not going to ask for the after action on the neighborhood ministry or the church ministry or any of these other things.

He's not going to have any testimonials. He's not going to say, well, do you have anybody that can come up and tell me what an impact you made in their life? Do you have any witnesses? Do you have any people who can testify to what a wonderful believer you were and what a difference you made in their life? Can we get any kind of literature? Is there any biographies or books or specials or anything that you can bring forward before I make my judgment on your life? God is going to be looking, just as He is right now, directly at our souls. And we're not going to be able to turn and look and grab the pastor or the deacon or anybody else to come in.

It's all what did we do with what God gave us in our soul. Everything else is a result of that. That's why all of the verbs, all of the injunctions, all of the exhortations in chapter 3 point in that direction.

That brings us to verse 18. And I've laid this foundation on purpose and carefully following Paul's example here because when you get to verse 18 and tell wives to submit to their husbands, you have to really be sure you know what you're saying and what the Word of God is saying here. There's a lot of people that have misconstrued this and have caused themselves no end of grief.

Well, having laid this great foundation, I think we'll pause and take our break. And when we come back, we want to look at the specifics in verse 18, verse 19, and verse 20. Let's just read them before we break.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged. The thought I will leave you with as we pause here is after two and a half chapters of exhortation when Paul finally comes down to the actual commands for obedience, where do these things take place? It reminds me of what Jesus said to the disciples about spreading the news of His work on the cross. He said, go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the outermost parts of the earth.

It's like a concentric circle. So where do these things begin? Is there anything closer to you than your spouse? Is there anyone closer to you than your children? Is there anyone closer to you than the people that you work with or have contact with day by day by day? Paul doesn't say, now that I've given you this great doctrine, let's all get on the bus and go to Guatemala. He says, these things ought to be working themselves out in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, right in your house.

In fact, these have been called house rules. There are parallels even in secular literature of how the household ought to run. And this has been compared because these are household injunctions.

So that gives us a framework. It gives us a context because if God does His transforming work within our soul, where is the first place it is going to bear fruit? It's the people that are right next to us. How is it going to do that? Well, that's what we'll look at when we come back.