

Dan Jansen was an Olympic speed skater, and you may remember him as the man whose sister, “Jane”, died of leukemia just before the 1988 Winter Games in Calgary. He desperately wanted to win the gold medal in honor of his sister, but he failed in Calgary. In the 1992 games in Albertville, France, he again came away empty. Four years later, in Lillehammer, Norway, he won the gold in the 1000 meters and set a world record. It was an emotional moment when he skated his victory lap holding his nine-month-old daughter named “Jane” in his arms.

After the Olympics, Jansen was asked how he had overcome so much adversity and yet kept on going. He reflected back to a time when he was 12 years old and had lost a skating meet. His father drove him home, and Dan pouted all the way. His father was silent until they arrived home. Then, as Dan was going to bed, his dad came into his room and said, “Son, life is more than skating in circles,” and he walked out. Jansen said that one comment changed his whole perspective on life.

As you know, Dan Jansen didn't quit skating in circles. He just had a bigger picture – a different perspective – his skating took on a new significance, and in many ways, that's exactly what the Apostle Paul is wanting to see for those who follow Christ. Yes, at times we may seem to be going in circles, life may appear routine and just ordinary, it may feel like drudgery – even misery, but Paul wants the believer to see things from a different perspective – from a higher perspective – from God's perspective or we might say, “*from God's point of view.*”

Now, thus far in this letter to the Colossians – as a response to the false teachers who were claiming that Jesus was not God and He was not enough, Paul explained in great detail who Jesus is. Jesus is God, and in Him the fullness of the Deity dwells. He is the Creator of all things and the Sustainer of all things, and at just the right time, Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us, and in doing so, the invisible God became visible – possessing all the nature and the characteristics of God to their fullest extent.

Paul explained who Jesus is, but not only that, he then explained something about us. At the moment of our salvation, we were spiritually united to Jesus, and in this spiritual union we were made complete. In Christ, our sin debt has been wiped away because it was nailed to His cross. In Christ, the power of sin can no longer dominate a believer. We can now say “*no*” to those things we once said “*yes*” to. In Christ, we share in the victory accomplished by Jesus – we are alive because He is alive, and as a result, we can step out of the shadows of religion with its man-made rules and rituals and walk in a gracious and loving relationship with God. We are complete in Christ, and therefore we have everything we need.

So, with that foundation laid for us, we come to **Colossians 3** where Paul explains how all of this is to work out in the life of a believer. Beginning with **verse 1**, he says,

¹Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

These four verses serve as a hinge point in this letter to the Colossians. In the first two chapters, Paul had focused on doctrinal truth explaining who Jesus is and who we are in Him, but after these four verses, Paul shifts from doctrinal truth to the practical application of this truth. So, what we have here is a hinge point.

Paul says, **“Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ”** – which could just as well read, *“since you have been raised up with Christ”* – it’s a confirmed fact – it’s a reality of being spiritually united and connected with Him – so, *since* Jesus is alive and we are alive in Him – that’s the truth, Paul commands that we **keep seeking the things above.**

Paul wants believers to view life from a different perspective – a heavenly perspective because that’s where Jesus is – **who is our life**. Believers are to habitually and deliberately turn their hearts and their minds towards Jesus who is seated on the throne at the **right hand** of the Father which means all authority and all power are given to Him. Jesus is **seated** – *and you know why* – because His work – on our behalf – is done. That’s when you sit, when the work is done.

So, we are to keep seeking and setting our hearts and minds on the things above – where Jesus is – where kindness and mercy and grace dwell, where patience and forgiveness is had, where wisdom, and hope, and strength, and love is found.

*O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There’s a light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!
Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

That's what Paul's talking about. With our hearts and our minds, Paul says look up because that's where Jesus is. Seek the things above. Think about things from a heavenly perspective – from God's point of view. Pursue them, and if it helps, consider your destination because your destination should influence your journey.

Now, just for clarification, this does not mean, as D.L. Moody used to say, that we become “*so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good,*” but rather it means that in our daily lives, in our everyday activities, and in our thoughts – just like a compass which points north, our attention and our affection should habitually point upward – and speaking of looking upward and also looking forward, one day Jesus will come again from heaven, revealed in all His **glory**, and we will be with Him.

So, we can't become obsessed and preoccupied with the things of this world. Our hearts and our minds are to be turned upward while the things of this earth grow strangely dim. We have a heavenly destination – a new home and Jesus has given us a new perspective on life, something this world cannot understand.

Our life is **hidden** as far as the world is concerned, because the world does not know Christ. In Christ, we died – sin's dominating power over us has been broken, and now we have a new life hidden with Jesus – in fact, Jesus is our life, and as a result, people should look at us and wonder why we are so different from those who live according to the views and the values of this world.

Christians should be different, we are supposed to be different, we go to church and claim we are different, but unfortunately, that's not always what this world sees and hears and talks about, and that's where Paul takes us next beginning with **verse 5**. Paul says,

⁵Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

So, Paul has finished the *doctrinal* part of his letter and now he moves into the *practical* part, and just so you know, this is a pattern of Paul seen in his other letters as well. In this letter, Paul began by telling us who Christ is, then he explained who we are in Christ – it's all doctrine, and now he moves to practice.

This passage begins with **therefore** – therefore since Christ is our life, therefore since the power of sin can no longer dominate us, therefore since we are no longer entangled by the wicked things of this world, therefore since our hearts and our minds are turned upward where Jesus is – then therefore, there is a certain way we are to live and there are things from our old sinful nature we need to throw out, and Paul starts with the subject of sexual sin – and rightly so.

In the culture of that day – the Greek culture in which the Colossians were steeped in, prostitution and fornication were considered permissible activities for men. Even a married man – not a married woman, but a man could engage in extramarital affairs as much as he wished. Sexual permissiveness was rampant in their culture – and it’s surely rampant in ours, so much so that we’ve become indifferent to it, and Paul said to throw it out, and once again I want to remind you that he is writing to Christians.

Now, if you notice, the first word Paul brings up is **immorality**.

A man wrote: “Dear Abby, I am in love and I am having an affair with two different women other than my wife. I love my wife but I love these other women too. Please tell me what to do, but don’t give me any that morality stuff.” Signed: “Too much love for only one.” In this case Abby’s answer was classic. She wrote: “Dear Too much love for only one. The only difference between humans and animals is morality. Please write to a veterinarian.”

Immorality – in the Greek, the word is *porneia*, from which we get our English word *porno*. Now, this word *porneia* refers to more than just dirty movies and magazines – in general, it refers to all forms of sinful sexual conduct – and just to keep it real, the only acceptable sexual conduct for the Christian is that which occurs between a man and a woman who are married to each other. That’s it. That means premarital sex is a sin even though your boyfriend says “*I love you.*” Extramarital sex referring to adultery is a sin, prostitution is a sin for all involved, and homosexual sex – yes, it too is a sin – that’s what the Bible calls it, and I don’t care what the culture says about it. It’s all considered immoral conduct.

Then Paul, mentions **impurity** – a word that literally describes a substance that is unclean like an oozing infected wound. With this word, Paul speaks to any activity of a suggestive sexual nature that is deemed inappropriate, and from there, Paul digresses from immoral *acts* to immoral *thoughts* – bringing up our **passions** and our **evil desires** – similar words – and it’s here he goes a little deeper – it’s here where it all starts – in the mind where we tinker with these sinful things.

Paul mentions the word **greed**, and at first glance we might think he is talking about the love of money and material things – and that is certainly a problem, but in the Greek, it simply means *the desire to have – the desire to have more – the desire to have what isn't yours*, and staying with the flow, I think Paul is referring the lustful craving to lay your hands on another's body – as if to have their body as your possession, to which Paul says **amounts to idolatry** – meaning, from God's point of view, you are worshipping and bowing your knee to another – to yourself. It's a worship of self and ultimately that's where this whole thing starts.

Listen, this was a problem back then and it's still a problem today, and many Christians have been dragged back into the muck and the mire of sexual sin. Paul says to the Christian, your body is dead to this stuff and you need to get it out of your life. Kill it! Kill it where it starts. **Will it be a struggle?** Yes! Sexual sin seems to be a different kind of animal – its claws go deep, and you will need the Lord's help. You need to look up, and as you do, confession might be a good place to start.

Agree with God that what you are thinking about and what you are doing is absolutely wrong – it's a sin against God – ultimately its idolatry – the worship of yourself, and also be reminded that God brought His **wrath** down upon people who walked in this same manner – in other words, people are sent to hell for this stuff – so, **why would you do it?** Look up, ask God to forgive you – and graciously He will, and then ask Him to give you His perspective, and the resolve, and the support, and the strength to say “*no – no more.*”

Now, I want to turn your attention to **verse 8** – where Paul brings up another serious problem for Christians – and it's the problem of **anger**, and the anger that Paul describes here is this deep-seated, stewing, bitter kind of anger that quietly devours a person from within. We might describe this kind of person as being “*hot tempered.*”

Under the surface, this Christian has a temper that always seems to be smoldering, and then – often over the littlest of things, like a match thrown into a pile of dry grass, their anger suddenly explodes into **wrath**. The idea here is that a person's anger builds up so much that it bursts into a fit of rage and lashes out at others. They yell and scream, they say hurtful things they shouldn't – ironically taking their rage out on those who love them most – as if they have some moral high ground to pass judgment on others. Paul says – “**What do you think you are doing?** *That has no place in the life of a Christian. Those things have to stop right now. Put it off. Kill it.*”

If you notice, Paul continues with the sins of **malice**, and **slander**, and **abusive speech** – all of which describe a sharp cutting tongue that seems to fit right between anger and wrath.

Malice refers to an ill will or a mean spirit towards another person which often rears its ugly head during outbursts of anger. *Slander* is basically an attack against the character or the reputation of a person, which too can be associated with a hot temper, and *abusive speech* or obscene language – well, that seems to speak for itself when anger is involved. The truth is, Christians can say the worst and meanest things, and Paul would respond, “*That’s not who we are in Christ.*” And Jesus would take this matter a little deeper and point out this really is not a mouth problem. He said to the self-righteous religious leaders,

“You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.” (Matthew 12:34)

So clearly, when it comes to your mouth, the heart of the matter is the heart – your heart. Now Paul’s not done.

Lastly, he says to stop **lying** to one another – and continuing with the flow of this passage, it seems that Paul is saying this: “*Stop saying whatever you think you need to say to justify your sinful behavior.*” It’s all lying, and how about instead of lying, maybe try something new and start with the words “*I am so sorry. I was wrong. Can you forgive me?*”

You know, when studying these passages, I was reminded of the story in **John 11** where Jesus goes to where Lazarus was buried in a cave. It was a very sad and somber time as people were there mourning their loss. Now Jesus loved Lazarus, but by design, He shows up late for a purpose. Jesus speaks with Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus – who both said that if He had been there on time, their brother would not have died.

Then Jesus said something surprising, “*remove the stone*”, to which they replied, “*Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he as been dead four days.*” Anyway, at His command, the stone was removed from the cave entrance, and Jesus looked up and cried out with a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come forth.*” Sure enough, on command, Lazarus came forth – and I’m guessing he was doing the “bunny hop” because he was wrapped with burial clothing from head to toe.

Then Jesus said this, “*Unbind him, and let him go.*”

Do, you see what I see? Lazarus was given new life by Jesus. He was a new man, and yet he was still wearing the clothes of a dead man. Jesus said, get them off of him – he’s not dead, he’s alive, and Paul is saying the same thing. Like those grave clothes we once wore, throw that old stuff off, discard those old sinful ways that bind you – for you are alive in Christ.

Now, that’s only half of it. Part of the Christian experience is to *put off* the old stuff, but it also involves *putting on* the new. So, let’s continue beginning with **verse 10** where Paul says,

¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— ¹¹ a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

This is huge. In Christ, you are new – not new, as in the old you is given a clean slate, but new as in you are a new creation – as if you have never existed before. At the moment of salvation – spiritually, you became a new creation in Christ, and this new creation is constantly being cleaned and renewed as you grow in the **knowledge** of Him.

The more you *know* the Lord, the more you *love* Him. The more you *love* Him, the more you *trust* Him. The more you *trust* Him, the more you *obey* Him, and the more you *obey* Him the more you let go of your old sinful life, and the more you become like Jesus in character. So, Paul says, “*get to know Him.*”

Now, we come to **verse 11** and I wrestled with this one. It is true that in Christ, there is no room for division among us. In Christ, no matter our human distinctions and differences, we are one big family called the “*church.*” I totally get that, but when considering this verse in light of all we just covered – and I could be making things harder than it has to be – I could be wrong – but I wonder if Paul is saying that we can’t use our past background as an excuse and justification for our current behavior. Let me give you an example.

“I got a terrible problem with lust, but that’s because of the sexual culture I live in, and on top of that – I’m a hot-blooded Italian.” “I know I have a temper, but I can’t help it. I’m red-headed and I’m Irish.” “Yes, I know I have a filthy mouth, but I have a good excuse, I was brought up that way.”

Maybe what Paul is saying here is that despite our backgrounds – however different and diverse they may be, there is one thing we all have in common and it's our struggle with that person we used to be, but now in Christ, without excuse or justification, we all have what it takes to say “no” to sin, to say “no” to self, and to look up and say “yes” to Jesus.

A man was passing along the street, and saw a blind boy seated on his father's knee, holding in his hand a kite-string while the kite was flying in the air. The man said, “Do you get any happiness of flying that kite when you cannot see it?” “O yes, sir,” the boy replied, “I cannot see it, but I can feel it pull.”

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