

A Spiritual Framework

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 January 2015

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Colossians 3, and we'll be reading verses 1 to 11 tonight. To your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

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 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 have 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 is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

We never outgrow the world that we live in. We live in a small town, and we never leave that small town for any other reason, and we never see a bigger world.

[1:34] Well, we never grow any bigger than that little town, and I'm not talking about Bremen, I'm just using this as an illustration, of how things could be or how other people think.

We never outgrow the world we live in. If you live in a victim's world, where you see yourself as a victim, then you'll never be more than a victim. If you live in a money-ruled world, where money is the God and the end be all of everything, then you'll never be more than either greedy or envious or feel poor.

If you live in a sexualized fantasy world, then you'll never be more than a slave to your own desires. We never outgrow the world we live in.

A big part of growing up is really getting out of the house. There is a place for protection, but there is also a place for someone to leave and experience and grow into and grow out to fit your new world.

That works on a social level, an intellectual level, and it works on a spiritual level. So how do you grow spiritually? You must begin to live in a bigger world.

[3:02] So you start living with a God who is big. In the 60s, J.P. Phillips wrote a book called, Your God is Too Small. And he was saying, the fundamental problem here is your God is too small.

So a small God makes for a small Christian. You have to start living with a Christ who is big and near. So the edges of your world now include him, whereas before they never included him.

So Christ is big and near. So a small, faraway Christ makes for a small Christian, an immature Christian. You have to start living for God's big kingdom instead of your little kingdom.

Small kingdom thinking leads to small kingdom living. Now, Paul has just told us what will not work to grow and mature a Christian.

He says, human man-made rules, living on a works principle, according to the basic principles of this world, thinking it's all up to me and my salvation rests in my hands instead of being a gift of God.

[4:12] He said, all of that lacks any value in restraining sensual indulgence. It will do no good. But now he gives us what will work.

He has told us what won't work. Now he tells us what will work. What will get us out of living in the flesh, out of living in the flesh and producing the works of the flesh, to now living in the Spirit, living by the Spirit, and then experiencing the fruit of the Spirit.

A life that's not sensual or fleshly or earthly. Instead, it's spiritual. And his method has two very simple parts. One is, you need to get your framework right.

And the second is, now you need to live out of that framework or in it, or it depends on how you want to say it. You have to act on it. So one, you have to get the framework right.

You have to get the thinking right. You have to get your world the right size and the right shape. And then now you need to act on it accordingly. So first, you have to get the framework right.

[5:20] And that's how he begins with chapter 3 and verse 1. He says, since then, you have been raised with Christ. And this is Paul's revolutionary way of thinking and talking.

Again and again and again and again in Paul. He's saying, in Christ. He's talking about with Christ. And so here he says, you have been raised with Christ.

The old you is dead. Remember? Since you died with Christ. That is true of you. You died with Christ. And now he says, since you have been raised with Christ.

And so the fundamental way that we need to be looking at our lives is stretched over these two poles of death and resurrection. Death with Christ and resurrection with Christ. The old is gone. The new has come.

And now you are living spiritually in the new creation. To be born again is to have your spirit born into the new creation. Living with God.

[6:17] Now you are participating spiritually in the resurrection of Christ. And remember, when Christ rose again, he did not rise again to live in this world, in this creation.

Instead, his home was in heaven. He rose again as the first fruits of the coming resurrection. It wasn't a resurrection like Lazarus. It was his own resurrection.

The very first of its kind. A resurrection out of the old creation into the new creation. And Paul says, when you are joined in Jesus Christ savingly, you participate in that spiritually.

That becomes true of you at a heart level. Paul says, you've done the same thing. Now, Horatius Bonar, you know, we sing a lot of his songs.

And he's a wonderful hymn writer. But he was much more than a hymn writer. He was a wonderful gospel preacher. And he said it so well in one of his sermons.

[7:15] And allow me to quote a little bit of it here. Pointing to the cross of Christ, Paul says, that cross was your cross. You were crucified with Christ.

And on that cross, you endured the wrath which you had incurred. You paid the whole penalty so that there is not a farthing of it remain unpaid. And pointing to the death of Christ, he says, that death was your death.

You died with Christ. It was you who then died. And in dying met the full demand of the inexorable sentence. And what he means is, when your substitute died, you died with him.

Pointing to the grave of Christ, he says, that grave. Grave of Christ was your grave. You were buried with Christ. That's not in our passage.

That's in Romans chapter 6. You were buried with Christ. Or it's in Colossians 2 here. And there you lay, victims to the law's righteous requirements.

[8:18] And the law giver's righteous execution of these in full. There you lay, during the three days in which your substitute was lying there.

Just as those who have refused the substitute shall lie eternally, bearing the penalty which no time can cancel or exhaust. Pointing to the resurrection of Christ, he says, that resurrection was your resurrection.

You rose with Christ, having exhausted every claim against you and paid to the full each farthing of the righteous penalty, so that the law has nothing now to insist upon against you.

So now the law is done with you. It has nothing more to require of you. Yes, it was you that rose 1,800 years ago when your substitute arose. And rising, you left behind you.

You left behind you in the grave all the guilt that laid you there. It was the law that chained you there. And it is the same law that now unchange you.

[9:20] Because it has nothing now to say against you. It was righteousness that cast you into that prison and barred its gates against you, your return from it.

And it is the same righteousness that has brought you forth in triumph. You have come forth, not with the felon's brand upon you, not with the shame and the stigma of your former life to darken and disgrace you, but as one risen to a new life altogether, a new life in the eye of righteousness, in the eye of the law, and in the eye of God, as one entirely severed from his former self, between whose present and former self there is such a great gall fixed, that he is entitled to say, I am no longer the same individual.

I have acquired a new personality, a new legal identity. That's the framework that we have to understand. And this is so important.

The cross and the resurrection is not only the end of my guilt, but it speaks decisively to the end of the power of sin over me.

That old life is gone. It's dead, buried. And so the old you, under law, under sin, under the power of sin, is dead.

[10:49] And now the very law that condemned you to the grave now has set you free. And the very righteousness of God has set you free and given you a totally new identity.

Now you remember Augustine's words. He was walking on the street after he had been converted. He had been a womanizer, a very sexually immoral man before.

And one of his old flings, so to speak, saw him on the road and said, Augustine, it's me, it's me, it's me. And he just walked on by. And you know the story.

She said, Augustine, don't you recognize me? It is I. And he said, yes, but it's not I anymore. A new me.

New life. New freedom. Justified. Resurrected. And so now your citizenship is no longer on this earth. It is in heaven.

[11:46] And so your passport doesn't say the United States of America. It says the city of God. And that's where you belong. And that is where you are going. And so now you are living here. But in another way, Paul says your life isn't here at all, is it?

Your life is there. That is that's your your life is tethered to that place because your life is tethered to Jesus Christ. And he's anchored there. And so because he is there, that's where my life is.

And that's where I'm going. And when he appears, then I will also appear with him in glory. So that's what he says. Christ, who is your life, is there. And he's coming back. So that's the framework.

That you need to understand if you're going to grow in spiritual maturity, grow in holiness, grow in grace. See, the people in Colossians 2.20 through the end of the chapter there, they wanted to be holy.

And they thought, this is what I have to do. I have to do these rules. I have to keep these things. I have to be very strict. I have to be aesthetic and all that. It's really up to me. And Paul's totally different version of it is, no, your life is in Jesus Christ.

[12:55] And now you have to see yourself that way. So this is the framework. You need to grow in spiritual, into a spiritual life.

Not only putting sin to death, but living in positive righteousness, producing the fruit. This is what it takes. See, there is that world.

There is that world. That world where Christ is. Where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. And that's a reference to Psalm 110, where the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.

It's there where the kingdom of God is now completely realized, fully known, fully expressed. And Paul is saying, that's where your life is. You're a citizen of that kingdom where he is.

And he's already mentioned that in Colossians 1, hasn't he? He's taken us out of the kingdom of darkness, and he's brought us into the kingdom of the sun he loves. Well, now in heaven, his kingdom is fully there. And so you need to see there's that world, and then there's this world.

[14:05] There's this world. But how should you think of this world? Well, you're dead to it. You died out of it when Jesus Christ died. So you don't belong to it anymore.

That's the framework that we have to get right. And there's no maturity, growth, and grace without understanding this. You need the right framework.

You need the right thinking. You need the right way of looking at things if you're going to grow and if you're going to make progress. And let me just give you an illustration of that. Let's go back. Time machine.

You go back to the old days, back to the 1600s or the Middle Ages. And so what was the framework? Maybe you don't know this, but what was the framework for medicine?

What did they think was the fundamental way that we were healthy or the way that we were sick? Well, people thought all the way back from the Greeks and the Romans all the way to modern medicine, they thought basically what was the problem was we have these four things called humors.

[15:08] There are four different kinds of fluids. And you got sick. You got depressed. You had cancer. You had all sorts of problems when your humors were out of balance. Okay? So you go to the doctor.

You're going, or you are a doctor. Someone comes to you and they have pneumonia. What are the chances that you're going to be able to help a person with pneumonia? If you're thinking, well, they got four humors and their humors are out of balance.

Well, there's no chance at all. There's no chance at all that you're going to be able to help them.

Because what you're going to do is not end up helping them. You're going to end up hurting them.

You're going to bleed them because that's one way to fix the humors. They have too much blood in them. Or you'd make them vomit, which was another way of sorting out the humors. You'd give them chamomile because everyone knew that chamomile lowered the bile humor.

Whatever that meant. But the point is it lacked any real value for restraining pneumonia. It was all very, they thought it was working.

[16 : 15] They thought it was a good idea. They thought it was effective. But in reality, it lacked any real value for restraining pneumonia. And so something might appear to work for a while. But in the end, it would be a mirage.

And that's the way it is with these. If we have the wrong framework about spiritual holiness and the way forward, something might appear to work for a while. But in the end, it's going to prove ineffective.

You have to get the framework right. You are free from sin because you died and rose again. So count it so. Your life is in Christ.

You are joined to him. You don't do a day without Jesus Christ with you. And when he appears in glory, you will appear with him. So your life is not tethered to the 60 or the 70 years that you live here.

Your life is there forever. We need that eternal perspective. Death, resurrection, glorification.

[17 : 21] Paul says you're going to do it all with Christ. And so now in this in-between time when you are in this world but you are not of this world, you do that with Jesus Christ too.

Sanctification comes when you get the framework right. Because if you don't have it and if you're not trusting in Jesus Christ, well, you're going to be trusting in yourself. And it's impossible for me to fix me because I am the problem.

But Jesus Christ is someone from the outside. And he has divine power, divine grace to help us. So when our world isn't confined to what I see here and I experience here and now, but more and more it's being taken up with that world, with a heavenly perspective, with Jesus Christ seated on the throne, when my mind is set more and more on that, then I will be growing in grace.

Now, you have to get the framework right. But secondly, and just as importantly, you have to live in that framework. You have to act on it. You have to do something about it. So if you go to the doctor and you have pneumonia and they say, the doctor says to you, well, we know this is not a humorous problem.

This is a germ problem. You need to recognize that if you're going to get better, that this is not a problem with your bile. It's a problem with some sort of virus or bacteria or germ or whatever. And so, you know, bleeding won't help you.

[18 : 52] Well, it's good. They have the right framework, don't they? They're not working on the wrong premises. But now they have to act on it. They have to do something about it. The doctor actually has to give you medicine and you actually have to take it.

Or the right framework is not going to do anything for you. So just getting to know the framework is not an automatic response. It's not going to automatically make anything better.

The doctor telling you that you have to understand this isn't a humor problem. This is a germ problem. That's not enough. And that's why Paul gives specific directions.

He gives commands. He gives, now go and do this. Now go and do that because we need to have the framework, but then we need to act it out. You have to do something about it.

If you have pneumonia, the doctor has to realize that you have a germ problem and he has to give you an antibiotic and you actually have to take it. If you don't take the antibiotic, the doctor knowing all about it doesn't fix the problem.

[19 : 52] And you knowing all about your problem doesn't fix the problem. You have to take the medicine. Now, you'll get better when you have the right framework and you're acting on it.

And so the framework in this passage is sort of behind the scenes. He's just assuming it. Since you've been raised with Christ, since you died with Christ, your life is there. He's counting on it.

It's kind of behind the scenes. But what is in the forefront? Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above or better seek the things that are above.

So that's the word seek. Seek them or keep seeking them. So after you have sought them, you keep seeking them. It's very much echoing Jesus words when he said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Now, you remember Jesus saying that the Gentiles run after all of these things. So what are the things that the Gentiles are seeking? Well, what shall we eat?

[20 : 55] What shall we drink? What shall we wear? The pagans run after all those things. They run after them. They don't walk after them. It's their pursuit. It's what they want.

It's what makes sense of their life. It's the direction of their life. It's what they long for. It's what organizes their life. So if you want to understand a Gentile, you have to understand what are they doing?

They're living for what I eat and what I drink and what I wear. But Jesus says, seek first his kingdom. And so Paul, very much echoing his Lord, he says, seek the things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

So you seek his kingdom and his righteousness. So how do you restrain the flesh? You have to stop seeking limited, mortal, temporary things and living for them and start seeking bigger things that belong to that greater kingdom.

You don't seek your kingdom. You seek his big heavenly kingdom. And that's what you want more than anything. To see Christ lifted up.

[22 : 05] To see his kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And so what does that look like? It very much looks like praying your kingdom come, your will be done.

On earth as it is in heaven. It means you go into a situation and you say, Lord, I want your kingdom to come here. Whatever that situation is, parenting, husband, wife, any situation, work situation, school situation.

What does it mean to seek the things that are above? It means to want them to come here. It's to want to obtain them. Seek it and keep seeking it.

You've been raised. And that's the world that you belong to. And that's the world that you are going to. And that's the kingdom that you belong to.

And so to seek after the earthly things when you belong to the heavenly kingdom is sort of like treason, isn't it? It's to be living and serving and operating for a kingdom that you don't belong to.

[23 : 15] When your citizenship is in America and you're saying, I want to live for China. Well, that's a problem. And when we say our kingdom, our citizenship is in the kingdom of God, and instead we're living for the good and the grandeur of something here.

It's treachery. Since you've been raised, seek the things that are above. You have the framework. Now live in it. Seek the kingdom of God.

Seek to honor Jesus Christ. And then he says, set your minds on things above. So this is just another way of saying it. It very much is the very same thing. But this time he's saying it's more than some sort of physical seeking.

He's talking about, we're talking about our minds, our affections, our hearts. It's not a super specific word. It means your hearts, your desires, your thinking. So you're setting your desires on the things above, not on earthly things.

You can't want the things of the earth and want the things of heaven at the same time. You can't want Christ and this world. This world killed Christ. They're two diametrically opposed things.

[24 : 28] You can't live for the stuff of this world and live for Christ because they're in totally different creations. One belongs to this creation and one belongs to the next creation. This one perishes and that one is forever.

And so the world has its own followers. Doesn't it? And the things of this world belong to them. But we have a company and we have joys and we have hopes that the world knows nothing about. And they're for us. God has given them to us by Jesus Christ. And so Paul says, if that is what God has done for you, then live for them. Don't live for these earthly things that are temporary and passing.

So if we love this world, we cannot love the world to come. And if we love the world, we cannot love the Father. And if we love the world, we cannot seek the things above.

Because the friendship with the world is enmity with God. Two different directions totally. And so there can be no compromise.

[25:34] No lingering. No half-heartedness. Because if we have been raised with Christ. If that is true of us.

Then there can't be any vain. And there's no room for any sort of vain, lame excuses about why it's okay for me to keep living for this world. Because I don't even belong to this world.

Either you are risen or you are not. And if you are not risen, then go on in your worldliness. Live for these things. But know at the end, it's death. And it's ruin.

It's all coming to an end. But if you are risen, the point is settled in Paul's mind. And you wonder, what was so powerful that motivated Paul to suffer and do all the things that he did?

This is one of them. He is reaching forward to Jesus Christ. He is going in the future. He's forgetting the things that are past. He has no time for these things because he's living for those things.

[26:38] And so that motivated him to suffer. And that motivated him to get up and say things that were uncomfortable. And that motivated him to put things to death. So if you are risen, the point is settled.

Now this is very much in the positive. Seek these things. Set your minds on them. Do them. Live for heaven. Put it on. Put righteousness on.

See, so often we want to just settle with, I know the right things. But Paul won't let us settle for, I just know the right things. I know what kingdom I should be living for. He says, no, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ.

And make no provision. Don't think about how to gratify the flesh. So put on righteousness. That should be a part of your thinking.

Monday morning, today is a day to put on righteousness. That is not legalistic. That is not living by faith.

[27:40] That is living out of who you are by faith. Christ died and rose again. Why? So that we would no longer serve ourselves but him who died for us.

And that service actually looks like something. It looks like service. It looks like sacrifice. He saved us for good works that he prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And so seek them. Do them. Get them. But in verse 5 he says, It's not really a negative, but it is sort of a negative.

Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you. Or what belongs to your earthly nature. The idea is the things that are earthly in you, put those things to death.

He's talking about the things that still fit in this world. The things that belong in this world. The things that don't have any part in the world to come. So think about the parts of your life that will not be there when you get to heaven.

[28:43] Think about your sin. Will that be there when you get to heaven? No. It's part of this earthly nature. Will your greed, he's going to talk about. Sexual immorality.

Those things. Will those things be in you when you are in heaven? No. They belong to this earth and this creation. And so he says, Now, you don't wait for them to disappear at the end.

You put them to death because they don't belong in you anymore. They're a foreign invader at this point. Yes, they were born in your natural self, but you are no longer who you once were.

So now they don't belong. You put them to death. So sin belongs here. It belongs to this earth, not to heaven. And so it doesn't have anything to do with your new heavenly identity.

It's earthly. It's worldly. And so what do you do with it? What do you do with anything that you find that says, You know what? I would be ashamed to do this in heaven. It doesn't belong there.

[29:41] You put it to death. Everything earthly in you. It doesn't belong to you anymore. And this is important to realize.

This is absolutely fundamental to realize. You don't have to do it. And your son is no longer native to you.

It no longer grows naturally in what you are. Because what you are has been fundamentally changed. And when Christ raised you to new life with Christ, he put Christ in, and he put sin on the outside.

So Christ belongs. Sin doesn't belong. And so we can't be moping around saying, I'm a big sinner and all I do is sin and I'll never not sin.

That's not true. That's not true for any Christian. Because one day we will not sin. One day we will not sin. And that means that we don't have to sin now.

[30 : 47] And so one day in glory you won't sin. And you will experience then what is true of you now. And when you get to heaven, you won't be something fundamentally different than what you are now.

Because that fundamentally different change happened when you were born again and put into Jesus Christ. Coming to heaven is going into your own. It's perfecting what has begun. It's not something totally new. So sin is on the outside. It doesn't have some sort of native claim on you anymore. It's like mice in your house.

Maybe you have mice in your house. I hope not. But maybe you do. But if you find some mice in your house, you say, yes, they are here. But they don't belong here. And they don't have to stay here.

And I'm going to do everything to make sure that they get out of here. That's how it is. They might show up, but I'm not going to be satisfied. And I'm not going to say, well, mice are just going to live in the house.

[31 : 48] No, they're not going to just live in my house. So what Paul says is, put them to death. Execution. There's a lot of ways of putting something to death. Use your imagination.

How many different ways can we kill something? Well, whatever way that you think, I can kill this sin, you kill it. Choke it. Strangle it.

Execute it. Poison it. There's all sorts of metaphors of ways that you can think about killing sin. But the idea is, wherever it pops up, you thwart it. You confront it.

You face it. You tear it out. You cut out its roots. You make it so there's so many flowers that there's no room for weeds. There is such a thing as putting sin to death.

John Owen talked about that a Christian can have such success at putting some sins to death that they are as good as dead.

[32 : 46] And he talks about, you can walk on the throats of your lust if you again and again and again and again put them to death.

So put them to death. You kill them. And when you see one, you thwart it. And you drive it away. And you root it out. And you keep at it. And you keep at it. And you keep at it. Until it is as good as dead.

It takes more than just getting your theology right. You have to act on it. You have to do something and put it to death. Now verse 6 is where we'll end.

Why? Because the wrath, because of these, the wrath of God is coming. Now what Paul is doing here is he's recruiting us to God's side and saying, does God hate that sin?

Then you should hate it. Is God's wrath coming upon those sins? Yes. He's going to destroy them. And so put it to death because God hates it.

[33 : 59] Can the wrath of God motivate a Christian? Paul thought so. So we don't do it maybe so much out of terror.

There is a part for that. But we realize, you know what? God is not, does not take any of these sins lightly. And he has done something amazing so that they don't naturally belong to me anymore.

And so what do I do? I put them to death. And so the question is, is how, and this is where we'll end, how will you escape the wrath of God? How will you escape the wrath of God?

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. The anger and the justice of God is real. It's not the words of an angry pastor who delights in the idea of torment.

It's there on the page. And because of these, the wrath of God is coming. And so there is only one way of escape. It's Jesus Christ.

[35 : 05] It's not you. It's him. It's not your life. It's his life. The only escape is to get into Jesus Christ so that his life becomes your life. And his death becomes your death.

And his burial becomes your burial. And so his hell is your hell, his resurrection, your resurrection. And his justification is your justification.

And God justified him as he rose from the dead. And he said, there's no reason for this man to stay dead. He was perfectly righteous. So your eternal destiny, it's all depending on him.

Will you get in him? Will he save you? And his promise is, if you put your faith in him, he will save you. He will save you. That's his promise. And so take him at his word and be saved.

Let's pray. Oh, Father, you are holy and we want to be holy.

[36 : 08] Will you help us to do that? Thank you that you have not left us to our own devices and our own thinking, but you have taught us how we should think. But you've also given us the Holy Spirit to move us to obey, to press these things in our hearts in such a way that we are called into action.

And so I pray for my brothers and sisters here that they would not be discouraged, but they would be encouraged by the gospel and so encouraged by what is theirs in Jesus Christ that this night, tomorrow morning, the rest of this week, they will fight their sin and they'll seek to put it to death and they'll seek to grow in righteousness and holiness because of what Jesus Christ has done for them and what you have done for them in uniting them to the Savior.

And I pray for those who are lost. They truly are spiritually dead and there's no amount of words and no amount of persuasion or argument that can save them.

You must act. So I pray that you would act for your own great name's sake. It's in Jesus' name I do pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.