

Practical Calvinism

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[0:00] And we'll read the first 17 verses. Since then you have 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.

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.

[1:14] Here, there is no Greek 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 whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

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 word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

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.

[2:35] Paul is teaching us how to live the Christian life, and we've seen that it's more than just a list of do's and don'ts, a list of rules.

You can't take the whole Christian life and put it on a piece of paper and then hang that paper up on your wall, saying, okay, I'll do this, and that will be my life.

And he's told us why we can't do it that way, because at the heart of the center of the Christian life is not me and what I have to do, but it is actually a person.

It is actually Jesus Christ himself. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ and God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

So, it's not a matter of what's at the center of the Christian life, it's a matter of who is at the center of the Christian's life. And Paul says, it's none other than Jesus Christ himself.

[3:39] To understand what we are called to do, we have to understand who we are called to live with. And it's Jesus himself. So, if you wake up and think, today I'm going to really live the Christian life, I'm going to act like a Christian this morning, and now I need to do this or do that, or I need to avoid not doing that, then you've already started in the wrong direction.

You've already started going the wrong way. It's like you've wanted to go to Florida, and you got on US 31, and you headed straight to Michigan. You'll never make it to Florida that way.

And you'll never really live the Christian life as it was meant to live until you're living it with Christ, sharing it with Jesus Christ. And what a wonderful thing, even I look out here, normal people, just like you and me, normal people can live a life shared with Jesus Christ.

That makes all the difference. Isn't it wonderful? But, there's more than thinking about Jesus Christ. There are things to do. There are things to do.

I just heard of a conversation between a pastor and a dissatisfied listener. It wasn't one of us, so don't worry about that.

[5:02] But it was a pastor and a dissatisfied listener. And the listener said, I don't know how to apply what you're saying. There doesn't seem to be any application here. And the pastor said, it's not my job to apply the word.

It's the Spirit's job. But to the pastor, I guess if I were there, I would like to say, but Paul uses the word therefore a lot.

Therefore, now do this. Paul takes a truth, and he doesn't just say, now think about it. He doesn't just say, believe it. He says, now therefore do this.

You remember, we've talked about this a time and again. It's indicative and imperative. It's truth and then duty. The truth does go first, but there are inevitable duties that come from that truth.

There's truth in action. And so, that's what we have here in verse 12, and that's what we're going to look at today. Colossians 3.12, and Paul begins with therefore. Therefore, he's showing us what to do based on what we've already heard.

[6:08] He's applying the truth. He's teaching us what it means to live as a Christian community, a Christian fellowship, a church, a people, the people of God. And not only in this church, but in all of our social relationships.

You're going to find that the places where you are going to apply this word is not just here, but it's in your family. It needs to be applied at your work, wherever you have interactions with people.

And so, he said, now that you've put on this new man, you've put on this new humanity, you've become a new creature in Jesus Christ. You've gone from one body to another. You've gone from one humanity to another.

Now, that means you have to get rid of some things. Some things have to go. Anger, rage, malice. They don't belong in this new man. They don't fit here.

And instead, you have to put on your new clothes. Put on your new clothes. And that's what verse 12 is about. So, first, Paul begins with our new identity again.

[7:16] And I think we need to pause here. He's going to restate in a different way something that he's already been talking about. He's going to give us our new identity again. And then secondly, he's going to tell us about our new clothes.

And again, I want to just pause and say, we must really need to hear who we are. Because what we are called to do flows from who we are. And so he's going to remind us again, now who are we as the people of God?

If you're a Christian, who are you? If you're in the church, what group are you a part of? Well, first, our new identity. he says, therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. Now, why do we believe in election? Why do we believe in election?

It's not popular. People don't think it's fair. And so why do we, why do we teach it here? Well, because the Bible teaches it.

[8:27] And we're not taking an opinion poll or a popularity poll. What does the Bible teach? It does teach this. So who are we? We are a chosen people.

A chosen people. An elect people. And let that, you need to remember that again. You need to pause and let that rest upon you again.

It doesn't say we are a choosing people. It says we are a chosen people. We didn't choose God. He chose us.

We didn't elect God to be our savior. He elected us to be saved. And so the reason you are a part of this new humanity, the reason why you've undergone such a great change in who your identity is, is because of what Jesus Christ has done, because of what God has done in choosing.

There's now no condemnation. You're being remade. You're now entering into a society, into a family where things are being healed and restored. Lord, and it's not because you chose him.

[9:33] It's because he chose you. Now, we believe in election because the Bible teaches it. The Bible teaches it and we believe it because Jesus taught it.

And that's not two separate things. That's just one thing on top of another. In Matthew 24, Jesus is talking about the last days and he says, in those days, if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.

But for the sake of the elect, it's the same word as in Colossians, but for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. So why does God shorten the terrible last days?

Well, it's for the sake of the elect. He loves them and he doesn't, he's not going to give them more than they can handle. Now, there's a lot of comfort even in that verse, but we're not going to dive into that.

But you notice, he just says, for the sake of the elect. Then he goes on a little bit later and he says, for false Christ and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect if that were possible.

[10:43] Then a little later, he says, and the Son of Man will send his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect from the four winds from the one end of the heavens to the other.

Now, notice something. Jesus doesn't defend election, does he? He doesn't argue it, he doesn't debate it, he just says it and goes on.

Jesus uses election and the elect to comfort God's people, to comfort you, to say, you really, God has chosen you and he's going to orchestrate history in order to save you.

So take comfort in that. Now, Paul is doing the same thing here in Colossians. He's not debating election, he's not debating predestination, he's stating it for your comfort, for you to take it in, take it on board and say, that's who I am.

God chose me. You are the elect and if you are saved, then you're a part of the elect people, a chosen people.

[11:47] God chose you. And if we have any sense about us at all, if we have any sense of ourselves, and I think it would take someone who's incredibly blind to themselves to say anything other than what Isaac Watts says, Lord, why was I a guest?

Why was I made to hear thy voice and enter while there's room when thousands make a wretched choice and rather starve than come?

Why? Why? Why were you chosen? Why were you made holy? Why? That's what he says next about us.

And that's a word that means cut apart. Cut, cut, and put off to the side. So, why did God cut you apart, cut you off of fallen humanity and make you into something and take you for himself?

So, picture this in your mind. we are all on the broad road that leads to destruction. It's a broad road because it fits the entire humanity on it.

[13:07] All of us are walking and the clouds are thick overhead. The sun is not shining. The sky is gray as ash and we are walking and walking along.

And Satan and his hordes are along the sides whipping us as we go forward. And we are an unholy people. An evil people.

A dark people. And up ahead there is light. It's a flaming pit. And we are just trudging along, walking into it.

And the people in the front are falling into the pit and they're falling forever. Now God comes and he cuts a part off. He takes some out and he removes them from that path and then he puts them on a narrow way that leads to life.

And he says these are my holy people. Now at first their lives look very similar. Their lives look the same as before but he says you're a holy people.

[14:12] And as the further they walk along the further they walk to heaven they become more and more holy in actuality. They become more and more holy in action. And so you are a chosen people.

You are a holy people. Because he has done something. He's taken us off of that broad road and put us onto the narrow way.

Now the question is why? If we were all trudging along and we were and we're trudging along and everyone in front of us is falling into hell why was I snatched off that road?

why was I chosen? When others weren't. Can you really mark it down to I was better?

I was different. I was smarter. Or I made some drastic and majestic decision for God.

[15:13] And so because I did that he acted. Were you really any different? Were you really any different? Well what is the answer?

The answer is in love he predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. It was love. God loved you and chose you.

God loved you and set you apart for himself. Now that's what he says. You're dearly loved. his heart was full of love.

His heart is full of love for you. And that heart flamed out and made you his own. Called you to himself. And from eternity past God has loved us.

He loved us. And he thought of you. You were on his heart. You were on his mind. And his heart went out with compassion for you when he saw you on that road to hell.

[16 : 22] But the thing is, and the thing that Paul wants to draw our attention to, is it wasn't just me. It wasn't just you.

It was your sister over there. And it was your brother over there that God loved. God called to be his own.

It's that person that you're angry with at the church. That person you're holding a grudge against that you aren't forgiving. It's that person you're living with at Grace Fellowship Church.

That's Paul's point. That great love didn't fall just on you. It's not your special gift that fell to you alone.

That great love went out to your brothers and sisters in Christ. And so all together we are a new people. All together we are a new community. All together we're a new family.

[17 : 27] Brothers and sisters here. And so God looks and he sees all of his children, all of us predestined to be adopted through Jesus Christ. If we have put our trust in him, then that adoption, that predestination reaches every single one of us all dearly loved.

And he says, therefore, as God's chosen, holy, and dearly loved people, put on your new clothes. Put on your new clothes.

And he gives us five things. Five things. And I really want to call these the five points of practical Calvinism.

You've heard of the five points of Calvinism. These are the five points of practical Calvinist. You are a Calvinist, most of you. If you know what I'm talking about, then you probably are one.

You are a Calvinist. Good. But are you a practical Calvinist? Are you practically a believer in sovereign grace that saves from first to last?

[18 : 34] So do you have a good grasp of grace up here where you know the doctrines? Has that grace reached into your heart and got a hold of you here?

Sinclair Ferguson, which probably many of you know who he is. He's a wonderful Scottish pastor and theologian. He has a wonderful series of lectures on the Morrow Controversy.

The Morrow Controversy, it's not my point to talk about it here, but it was this controversy in the Church of Scotland 300 years ago, and it was about the gospel because what had happened was all these confessing Calvinists died in the wool Calvinists, and yet a good deal of them, actually a majority of them, had somehow lost the gospel.

gospel. They knew it up here, but it had translated into something completely different in their hearts. And so they had quit preaching good news to sinners.

They had quit preaching the gospel to sinners. They didn't feel the gospel as the stunning good news, I can't believe it, good kind of news in their hearts.

[19 : 56] And they had twisted that gospel into a law, and when it happened something died in their hearts. And the way Ferguson puts it is this, they had got a hold of grace, but grace had never got a hold of them.

So my question is, has grace got a hold of you? So what is the use, this is my question, what is the use, what is the use of being a five-point Calvinist, believing in total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints, what is the use of being a five-point Calvinist in your head, in your mouth, but not in your heart?

So what does Calvinism, what does grace look like when it puts its clothes on, when it goes to work, when it lives with its family, what does it look like when it puts its clothes on?

Now Paul tells us, therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

That's what it looks like when it has its clothes on. Compassion. Bowels of mercy. We don't translate it that way anymore.

[21 : 24] Bowels of mercy. mercy. It's not talking about just compassionate deeds. It's talking about compassionate feelings. Compassion that reaches down to your guts and you feel for that person.

You say, oh, I feel for them. The sadness and the grief of people hurting, it doesn't just bounce off your head, it reaches to your heart. So what does grace look like when it puts its clothes on? It looks like feelings of compassion. Heart level feelings of mercy. An uncompassionate, uncaring Christian is an ugly and deformed Christian.

So how can anyone go from, I have been chosen by God because he loved me. When I was a wretched, nasty, ungodly sinner, he chose me, he loved me, he sent his son to die for me, he had mercy on me.

How can anyone go from that to, I don't really care what happens to you? It's amazing. It's a tragedy.

[22:41] So brothers and sisters, how is it going with you? Do you have that piece of clothing on? The second piece is kindness. Kindness.

In this cynical world that we live in, not very many people are kind. But you do see kindness every now and then. And it should be something that we wear, that we put on, we put into practice.

Kindness. Bernard Michaels. No one you know, no one famous, no one special. He's just a man, but a real man.

And he had Parkinson's. And his health was deteriorating, but before the end, his family wanted to take him to Venice, Italy.

And so they did. Well, the first morning, you know, they're in Venice now, the first morning in the hotel, Bernard fell when he was getting out of bed. and he fell badly.

[23:47] He was in real pain, and so they knew they had to get him to the hospital. Now, the problem is, in Venice, the roads are so narrow, there's no room for ambulances.

And so what they do have are little boats that are ambulances. And so they called an ambulance, and a little boat came up. And so Bernard and his wife were able to get on this ambulance.

Their daughter was not able to fit, because this is just a little boat, and so off they went. And his daughter stayed at the hotel, because there's just no room for her. A few hours later, the hospital gave Bernard some medicine, they treated him, and they released him.

But there was no way of getting back to the hotel. So Sonia, the daughter of Bernard, looks at the map, and it's only a kilometer away.

And so she gets the collapsible wheelchair out, and it's 20, 30 pounds, and she starts, she's going to walk to the hospital. But it was much more difficult than she realized, because all the little roads in Venice go over all these canals, and for every canal there's a bunch of steps up, and a little bridge, and a bunch of steps down.

[25:10] And it's not just here or there, it's all you're doing over these little bridges again and again. And you can imagine she's got this wheelchair, and she's dragging it along, and it's getting heavier and heavier, and it's hot out, and it's banging her legs.

And she's just getting tired, frustrated, and if you've ever been to another country, you're just disoriented. Now she was going up another set of these stairs, and all of a sudden her wheelchair, the wheelchair felt very light, and she looked back, and there was a man finally dressed, and he had the other end of the wheelchair, and he helped her over the bridge, and when they got to the other side, he smiled and walked away.

The next bridge, a couple of backpackers saw her, and picked up the chair, and carried it over for her. And so it went all the way to the hospital.

Every bridge, someone saw her coming, and they would grab it. One time it was a couple of nuns, one time it's one person, one time it was another person. So she finally makes it to the hospital, and she grabs her dad and her mom, and so now they're going to walk back.

Now this time they have a wheelchair and a man with Parkinson's. But the whole way back to the hotel, it was the same unplanned acts of kindness.

[26:38] One time a young homeless man sitting in a doorway saw them coming, and he sprang up, and he put his arm around Bernard and whispered in Italian soft words as he helped him get up the steps and go down the steps.

In the next year or two, Bernard developed dementia, but there were moments of lucidness, and in those moments of lucidness, he always said, I want to go back to Venice.

Kindness. It's picking up the wheelchair for someone and helping them over the bridge. Kindness, put it on. Paul says those are the clothes that fit the new man.

Humility is the third. Humility. Pride fits the old man. Pride makes sense if you have something to be proud of.

But which of us have anything to be proud of? Which of us saved ourselves? Pride is too small of a shirt for the new man to wear.

[27 : 45] Only humility will fit. So how can you show humility? How can we show humility? There's lots and lots of ways. But try this.

Try to listen instead of waiting your turn to talk. Try to listen instead of waiting your turn to talk. I don't know if I've mentioned this.

I ran it by a couple of people and they have no recollection of this. So if I've said something like this already, I guess God wants you to hear it again. I'm sorry. But do you ever hear a conversation?

Have you ever participated in a conversation that goes like this? Something like this. I was sick last week. Oh, I was sick last week too.

I've been having a pretty healthy summer. Oh, I had a summer cold. Well, I don't get summer colds. Well, at least I didn't lose any days of work. Well, I haven't lost any days of work this summer either.

[28 : 46] And on and on they go. well, what's going on there? These two people are taking turns talking about themselves, aren't they?

There's something heartfelt in common there. I mean, it's not altogether a bad thing when we talk like that. But there's not listening. See, pride only waits to talk.

Humility listens. Try it. And you will not believe how hard it is, how unnatural it is to actually listen and then to ask a question instead of saying, oh, but this is what I did.

And this is how I feel about it. But that's what humility does. It considers others better than yourself. It looks out for the interest of others before it looks out its own interest.

next is gentleness. Gentleness realizes that we are all a mess. Realizes that we are all a mess, and we all make mistakes, and we treat ourselves with gentleness, don't we?

[30 : 03] We give ourselves plenty of slack, and we treat each other with soft hands, and we put the best consideration, the best spin on everything that we say, and everything that we've done, and we say, if they would only know what I was going through, if they only knew what I was up against, if they only knew what it was like for me, then they would understand, because we love ourselves, don't we?

We know how to put the best spin on things, and we know how to give ourselves gentleness and consideration, and so Paul simply says, love others like you love yourself. Be gentle.

Gentleness carries the idea of meekness, where you're not fighting for your rights. You're not fighting to win, saying, I'm right, and they're wrong, and I'm going to press home until I win the day, until my cause is established, until everyone sees that, or she sees, or he sees that I was right.

Gentleness isn't about winning the fight. It's not conquering and getting your way. That's how you act in the world. You don't let go of anything. You get what's coming to you.

But we can't act that way. As Christians, we cannot act that way, because it doesn't fit with what God has done for us, because it doesn't belong with people who are chosen, holy, and dearly loved.

[31 : 35] God didn't win, or didn't fight, and win the day against us. He sent his son to the cross to reconcile us, to let us win, to be friends.

friends. But you're frustrated. You're frustrated with that person. You're disappointed. And you say, but they messed up.

They didn't measure up. They didn't do what they were supposed to do. So what? So what?

did you measure up to God's standard? Did you measure up? Did you earn God's love? Were you just so great, God couldn't help choosing you?

So the answer is so what? I thought we believed in total depravity. And total depravity shouldn't have high expectations of people, should it?

[32 : 40] And so they messed up. They didn't measure up. And you didn't either. You didn't either. But God loved you.

He loved you the same. And he didn't treat you like your sins deserved. Instead, he treated his son like your sins deserved. And he pitied you, and he gave you what Jesus deserved.

And so let him who is without sin throw the first stone. That's what Calvinism with its clothes on looks like.

That's what it is. That's what grace looks like when it's got a hold of you. It's not looking to win the day. It's not looking to establish the right. It's not looking to conquer the other person and not

saying, aha, now it's all going to come out.

The truth is going to be established. It's gentle. It's gentle. It's meek. So are you being gentle.

[33 : 42] The fifth is patience. Clothe yourself in patience. Long suffering. Long suffering.

Put it on. That means you cut people some slack. And things don't have to be perfect because I wasn't perfect when God loved me.

no, he loved me to make me perfect. And he didn't love me when I had it all together. And so what Paul is after is not theoretical patience.

Not theoretical patience. Patience in the face of real sins. So here we are, a group of sinners.

Patience is in the face of real sin. Have they messed up? Then we need real patience with them.

Patience puts up with real sinners.

[34 : 51] It puts up with less than ideal situations. It's long suffering because God was long suffering with us. And he still is long suffering with us.

I remember one time I was stuck with my family, my sisters and my dad, coming back from Florida.

And it was I-75 and there was a huge traffic jam in Florida, no air conditioning in the car.

And we're sitting there on the highway for three hours. It was less than ideal. It was less than ideal.

Now I don't know how we acted. You can ask my dad. I'm sure it was just charming how we acted.

But what did we need in that situation? What did my dad need? What did I need? What did we need? We needed patience. Patience with the situation.

Patience with the people who we were in the car with. And so this is a fallen world. We're in a traffic jam in Florida and it's hot and there's no air conditioning.

[35 : 57] It's less than ideal. ideal. And here we are. We're a group of sinners too. And it's not ideal. And I love you.

I do. But it's not ideal. I'm not ideal. You're not ideal. Not yet. So in the meantime, clothe yourself with patience.

Put it on. Wear it. And so when people look at you, they should see your patience. Patience.

Because isn't that what God is doing for you?

Isn't that how he's treating you? He committed himself to you all the way to the end. And you don't have a day that goes by where God doesn't have to exercise patience with you.

So, the only time you are impatient, the only time you are harsh, the only time that you are proud and mean and heartless, is when you forget how God has loved you.

[37 : 05] How God feels about you, dearly loved. So do you need more of these things? I think we all do, don't we? I do. We need more of these.

How do we get it? Well, I've given you practical examples of ways that you could do it, but where does the motivation come from? Where does the true heart change where these things come from your inside instead of simply acts you're putting on?

Well, it comes from that one little word, as. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. Now, we wear these things as we settle into our identity.

To the degree that we are waking up and we're thinking, God loves me, God has chosen me, I know that because of what Jesus Christ has done, I was a sinner, I am a sinner, but because of what he has done, how he loves me, I am saved, and things are different all because of him.

Now, we wear these things as we settle into our identity, and to the degree that we live in God's love, and we are drinking in his patience, and his mercy, that's to the degree that we'll put these clothes on.

[38 : 21] Christ had mercy on sinners, on real sinners. God chose real sinners, and that means there's hope here for the lost, because we're not talking about theoretical salvation, we're talking about real salvation.

God saves sinners, not pretend sinners, but everyday real sinners like you and me, and so that's the gospel, and in believing that, coming to Jesus Christ, that is how we become a part of his people.

So here's what I want you to do. Here's what I want you to do every day this week. Wake up and tell yourself, if you're a Christian, tell yourself this, that I am part of a chosen, holy, and dearly loved people.

I am chosen, holy, and dearly loved. Preach that to yourself. and then go out and put clothes on it. Put it into practice. So I've applied it to your minds, I've put it there in front of you, but it's between you and the Holy Spirit to now apply it to your hearts and to your lives, and to go out then and be

compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient with each other.

[39 : 46] remembering all along that you are a holy, that you are chosen, holy, and dearly loved. Well, in our closing hymn, we're going to remind ourselves of his grace to us.

It's hymn 271. Let's stand as we sing. Hymn 271. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for choosing sinners like us.

Thank you for loving us so much that you would even give your own son for us, that whosoever would believe in him would not perish, but have everlasting life.

Lord Jesus, thank you for being so willing to come for embracing us and our cause, embracing even our sin, and owning it and taking it upon yourself and paying the penalty for it.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for then sending your spirit. Holy Spirit, thank you for coming and opening our eyes to what God has done for sinners like us.

[41 : 07] It's hard, to put these things into practice. It is easy to talk about compassion and kindness and humility.

It's easy to talk about these things and it's easy even to understand how we should be these ways. I pray, Holy Spirit, make us to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives in these ways.

Affect real change as we live in the gospel. Real change that our children will see. Real change that our spouses will see.

Real change that those working with us will see. That you would not leave us where we are, but that you would take us by the hand and sanctify us even more.

we love you. We thank you for being patient with us. And we long for the day when you won't have to be patient with us anymore, but we will be like your son in every way.

[42 : 16] So we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.