

Living with Sinful Saints

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[0:00] Take your Bibles and turn to Colossians chapter 3. So we'll read the first 14 verses of Colossians 3. 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.

[1:05] 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.

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.

Is the resurrection of any practical concern? Well, Paul definitely seems to think so, because he starts Colossians 3 with, since you have been raised with Christ, and then begins a list of very practical things that we need to know, what it means to live the Christian life.

[2:22] And Paul is telling us what it looks like to live the Christian life, and he's showing us how to do that. And what we're seeing, though, is that this Christian life that we are called to live in is not an individual life.

It's something that we're called in together. We live in a very individualistic culture. We're used to thinking of things that way. And the Bible is always pushing us to think of ourselves as something larger, a part of something larger than ourselves.

And the Christian life is like running with a big group of people. And running in a big group of people is hard.

I don't know if you've seen the movie Chariots of Fire, but if you have, you know that in the opening scenes, there is a picture of the Great Britain, the Olympic team for Great Britain, running along the beach.

And it's this beautiful scene, and the water splashing on them. And you can actually see the men's hair blowing in the breeze. It's so cool and refreshing, and they all have smiles on their faces.

[3:28] And they're all nice and spread out as they're running down the beach. And there's no jostling. There's no elbowing. There's no tripping. There's no body odor.

There's no grunting. There's no heavy breathing. It's just that beautiful music that Chariots of Fire is known for. And that's what group running looks like in that movie.

But generally, that's not what group running looks like when you're actually doing it in real life, is it? Running in a big group is generally not done on a breezy day on the beach.

And I've noticed that people don't spread out. They have a tendency to bunch up. And then they're getting too close to you. And if everyone is running as hard as they can, you have heels flying up. And you have arms swinging. And you've all seen those Olympic runners come crashing down after they've tripped on each other because they're so in tight with each other in this big race.

[4:29] And it's hot. And it's sweaty. And you can smell the people around you. That's what group running in real life is like. And that's what running the Christian race is like so often.

It's a race. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, Hebrews tells us. You remember the scene. We're surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses. Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. So here's a way to think of the Christian life. It's one of those races that you go to see and you see all the people running together. That's what the Christian life is. But you notice it's a race that's marked out for us. It's a race that we do together. It's not a race that we do individually. It's a race that we do together.

And yeah, we're all on the same team. But it doesn't mean that we're not hot. And it doesn't mean that we're not sweaty. And it doesn't mean that we're not tired.

[5:35] And that sometimes we don't get elbowed and jostled. And that the runner up there is breathing kind of hard. And they kind of stink from the sweat of all their effort. That's reality.

That's living in the church. That's a picture of the Christian life. And it's good. It's good because we have this built-in group of cheerleaders, don't we?

We are all on the same team. And we're all making progress together. And we have this encouragement from those people running alongside of us. But nevertheless, it is running awfully close to people who are still sinners.

sinners, who are still sinners, who are all working really hard to make it to the end. And so Paul is teaching us how to live the Christian life. And he's very honest about what it's going to mean, what it's going to take.

And that's what we're going to see this evening. So how do you live the Christian life when you are living with a group of sinful saints? That's the question tonight. How do you live the Christian life when you are living it with a group of sinful saints?

[6:45] That's Colossians 3, 13 and 14. And it's so practical. The Holy Spirit is taking us right into our lives. And so we're going to see three points this evening about what it looks like to live with each other when we are in the middle of our sanctification.

And so three points. The first is don't forget who you are. Don't forget who you are. Well, who are you in the plural? Well, you've taken off the old man.

You, you together, have taken off the old man and you have put on the new man. And the old man is running too. The old man runs.

He's in a big pack. He's a big group of sinners running in one direction. And if you look at the, if you look at the old man running, if you look at the people in the world who are outside of Jesus Christ, they're still in Adam.

They're running together and they're fighting and they're arguing and they're elbowing and jostling. Yes, they are going the same direction, but they are on the same team. Not really.

[7:51] And so there's a lot of grudges and offenses and tripping and Greek versus Jew and slave versus free and rich versus poor and men versus women and religious versus irreligious and conservative versus liberal and Democrat versus Republican.

And people who live in the city and people who live in the country. And, and you see that the old man in action, everyone thinks they're better than everyone else.

And everyone thinks they're smarter than everyone else. And everyone is fighting and scrambling for the top, scrambling for the top. And so you want to see the old man in action. All you have to do is go online, read some sort of story about something or other, and go down to the comments below.

And you will see the old man running, what it looks like. And it won't take long before someone will say, liberals are so dumb or conservatives are so dumb.

And then back and forth, back and forth. And it's nothing but hatred. It's nothing but meanness and fighting. No understanding.

[9:00] No patience. No thoughtfulness. No gentleness. No humility. The claws are out. And it is the worst kind of catfight.

And if anything, the internet has let us fight all the more. And so that's what they do. So that's the old man running. And his hateful, spiteful ways ruins every group he's in.

It ruins families. It ruins companies. It ruins teams. It ruins Christmas. Christmas. I worked with a guy who hated Christmas dinner. And why he hated Christmas dinner is because it brought all of

that family strife to bear.

And he told me one time his mom said the Christmas dinner prayer. And in the prayer, she berated his uncle over and over and over again.

It must have been fun. That's the old man running. And that is what you used to be. Remember the point here is, remember who you are.

[10:07] That's who you used to be. Used to be no different than that because that's exactly what you were. But you aren't any part of that anymore because God has had mercy on you.

That's the only explanation there could be. That he looked upon you and had mercy. He saw you running there, huddled all together, fighting and arguing.

And he chose you. He chose you out of that group. And he made us holy. And he took us to himself. And he dedicated us to himself.

And he set his love upon us. That's what we saw last week. And that's who we are now. It's like he's taken us from the perennial bottom dwellers of the league.

You know that team that they're always fighting with each other. And they never win because they can't get on the same page. It's like taking us from the Charlotte Bobcats. And he's putting us on the San Antonio Spurs.

[11:05] Where the people actually like each other. And they like to play with each other. But it wasn't us, was it? This great change.

It wasn't us. It was him. It was grace. It was kindness. It was gentleness. It was patience. It was compassion. And that's what it was. Because all of us were there too.

There's not a single exception. We were all there. Sweating. Stinking. Hating God. Hating and being hated. What a perfect description of the old man.

With our minds no bigger than our own little concerns. And our own personal plans. And our own ideas. Is. And so you see us there.

We've got the blinders on. Our hearts are bent in on ourselves. We're hating and being hated. And how does God react? He chose us.

[12:08] He made us holy. He set his love upon us. He set his love upon us. Remember who you are. He set his love upon us.

And that means right now God has plans for you to do you good. If you are alive ten years from now you will have experienced ten years of God's goodness.

And years and years of more of that. For I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you. And not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.

He loves you. And he means to do you well. He means to do you good. And that love also means that he wants closeness with you.

He wants closeness with you. That's what love is. Isn't it? When you fell in love. You fell into this desire to be close to that person forever.

[13:09] Right? I want to know that person. I want to be close to that person. I want to live with that person. I don't want to be apart from that person. That's what love is. And so are you spiritually cold?

Are you distant? Are you struggling to focus? Focus. We all have times like that, don't we? We struggle to focus on what God wants us to do.

We're having a struggle to focus on him. We all have those times. And yet God still loves us. He still wants us to be close.

He's still calling us back. We saw that this morning with Jesus and Peter, didn't we? Peter had gone far away. And Jesus went out in love. And he says, I want you, Peter. I want to be close to you.

And he wants us to get rid of that sin because he wants to be close to us. And he wants us to walk in holiness because those are the paths that he walks on. And he wants us to walk together. And so he wants us to open up our hearts, open up our minds, open up our lives, and live with him.

[14:18] Coram Deo. Before the face of God. He wants us to be that close to him. That's who we are. We are loved by God. He means to do us good.

But it's not just will. It's not just intention. It's not just plan. He wants to be close to us. It's a relationship. And it's effective. And so you have to remember that. Because that's the only way that you're going to be able to live the Christian life with a group of sinners.

It's the only way that you will be able to do that. It's the only way that you'll be able to live with your brothers and sisters. Because the vertical is going to determine the horizontal. Your vertical

relationship with God is going to determine the quality of your relationship with your brothers and sisters.

And it's the only way we are going to be able to do what the Spirit tells us to do here. And these commands that we read in 13 and 14 are not easy. They are some of the hardest things that Christians are called to do.

And it's the only way that we're going to have the strength to do it. And so if you shut yourself off from God. If you shut yourself off from Him. You will soon shut yourself off from each other.

[15 : 29] If you live hiding from God. You will end up hiding from each other. And if you live under this misconception that nothing radical has happened.

That God hasn't done very much for me. And that God really doesn't want you near. Then you're never going to have the spiritual strength to bear with each other. To forgive each other.

To love each other. If you don't abide in Him. Pretty soon you will not abide with each other. We're so good at saying, yeah I need to do that.

But you will never do it if you forget who you are. This is Christian counseling. Do you have problems with grudges?

Do you have problems with anger? Do you have problems with losing patience? Do you have problems with relationships with your brothers and sisters here? This is Christian counseling.

[16 : 27] You can't forget who you are. The dynamics of spiritual life is living with God. And then out of that living with each other. And so God chose you. He took you out of fallen humanity.

And He put you into Christ. And He made you holy. And you are loved. You are loved. Don't forget it.

Don't forget it. That's the first point. And the second point is this. And it's a brief point. But it's important.

Don't miss Paul's assumption. Don't miss Paul's assumption. Look at verse 13. So we've seen, don't forget who you are. And the second point is, don't forget.

Don't miss Paul's assumption. Look at verse 13. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

[17 : 26] So what is the assumption there? That means what is the thing that Paul is assuming is true, but he's not saying that it's true. He's just assuming that it's true. He's assuming that there are going to be things that you need to bear with each other.

From each other. There are things that are going to grieve you. And offend you. So how do you know if you're living in a church?

Well, you're burying. And you're being grieved. And you're being offended. And you need to forgive each other. How do you know if you're living with people? You're doing those things.

And so the Bible is not this pie-in-the-sky book talking about theoretical things. It's talking about reality. And reality is we are living in a fallen condition with fallen people. He's talking about our lives here.

Now there are, from time to time, problems between each other, don't we? So this shouldn't be surprising. This is our life. This is our situation. This is our church.

[18 : 28] There are going to be things that we need to forgive here. And if there are things that we need to forgive, it means that there's going to be things to forgive. There's going to be sins.

A lot of people have come from other churches. And they've found Grace Fellowship. And when someone comes from another church, a lot of times they're so happy to be here.

They think they've found the promised land. And I'm not boasting. And I'm not boasting to ourselves because it's the grace of God. It is the grace of God.

Period. And we have a lot of good things here, but it's all because of what God has done for us.

God has blessed us. And so people show up, and they're happy to find us. And we're happy that they found us.

But it seems like one of the most important things that we need to tell them, and that we need to stress with them, is that we are not a group of perfect people.

[19 : 33] Someone says, Amen. You need the sermon especially, I suppose. This church is a group of sinners. We are not a group of people running on the beach with the cool breeze in our hair and the water splashing on us nice and spread out and everything is going well.

Now, we're running in a muddy field on a 118 degree day. Two or three people are getting sick. And some of us are feeling like we're going to fall out.

And the enemy the whole time is taking shots over our head. This is a group of people in the midst of their sanctification. So that means you can look at the person on your right or to your left, and you can say, these people are holy people.

And at the same time, these people are unholy people. We are in the middle of our sanctification. Your pastors are not at the end of their sanctification.

We are at the middle, in the middle of our sanctification. The deacons are not at the end of their sanctification. They are not what they are going to be someday. They are in the middle of their sanctification.

[20 : 45] And your fellow members are works in progress. They are not at the end of what God is going to do with them.

They are in the middle of their sanctification. And there will be things to bear. There will be things to put up with. And if you are not willing to put up with it, then you are not willing to live with reality. And you are not willing to live up, live with God's real people. There will be a real need to put on love. And a real need to forgive.

And so not just wait on love to happen, not wait for forgiveness to happen, but to really put it on with fierce determination and fight. Paul is assuming that.

And I like that. That is helpful. That relieves us of a lot of disillusionment. It relieves us from ever feeling like I'm surprised.

[21 : 48] Here is a group of real sinners. Sinners. And there is real grace for real sinners. Jesus came to save real sinners from their sins because he is a real savior.

He's a real savior. Now to our third point. How do you live with a group of sinful saints? Well, don't forget who you are. Don't miss Paul's assumption. And third, you have to imitate God.

And that's a high calling, but we have the Holy Spirit to live in us. Christ is in us. He's already said that. So, we should actually start to expect this. We imitate God.

That's verses 13 and 14 in a nutshell. So, what does Paul call each one of us to do? What does he call us as a body to do? He calls us to three things. Bearing, forgiving, and loving.

Bearing, forgiving, and loving. And that's what we are to do. If we are actually going to live together, we have to do that. Because that's how God lives with us, isn't it?

[22 : 50] That's how he lives with us. How does God live with a group of sinful saints? He bears, he forgives, and he loves. So, think of yesterday.

Think of this morning. Did God have to do any bearing with you? Did God have to do any forgiving? Did he have to show you his love?

Did he show you his love? That's how God lives with us when we are in the middle of our sanctification. And that's how we should live with each other.

So, bear with each other. It means put up. Endure. Persevere. Undure. Jesus uses the same word when somebody came to him with his demon-possessed son and the disciples couldn't heal him. And you remember Jesus said, how long shall I put up with you? It's the same word. So, their unbelief was a provocation. It was offensive to Jesus.

[23 : 54] And Jesus felt it. But what did he do with it? He put up with it. And then, you know what he did for that boy? He healed him.

For evil he rendered good. So, he does that, doesn't he? We don't believe. We have these doubts. We disobey. And yet, he puts up with our small thoughts and he puts up with our doubting thoughts and he doesn't strike out.

He doesn't ignore us. He doesn't... He puts up with us. He carries our offense and he does us good. Now, how in the world are we ever going to live with each other if we don't do the exact same thing? It's going to take bearing with each other. Carrying each other's burdens. Carrying each other's loads. Carrying each other's griefs. Being grieved and not losing heart.

Well, maybe you can think about the opposite. In 2 Timothy 4.3, Paul says, in the last days, men will not put up with sound teaching. So, Jesus put up with these people, with this man, but in the last days, men will not put up with sound teaching.

[25 : 05] So, what does not putting up with sound teaching look like? Well, it means you stop listening to it. It means you write it off. It means you condemn it, you belittle it, you talk it down, and then after you've made it small enough, you shove it in a corner and you walk away from it and you don't think anything more about it.

That's what these men do. They don't put up with sound teaching. It's like a noisy fly on a summer day until finally you just kill it because it's so annoying.

That's what not putting up with something looks like. So, what does putting up with your brothers and sisters look like? Well, you go on listening to them. You don't write them off.

You don't belittle them. You don't scrunch them down and then stick them in a corner and you forget them and say they've disappointed me too many times. They're not where they should be and I don't like what they're doing.

Remember in love, God wants you close to Him. He wants to live with you. He wants you close to Him. He wants your heart and His heart beating in synchronized beats.

[26 : 20] Bearing is part of living close with sinners. Bearing is what it's going to take to live close with sinners. And so, how are we going to have a closer relationships with one another?

I know this is something that people really want. They want genuine, authentic, close relationships. That's what we want here.

How are we going to do that? Well, it's going to take bearing with each other. Saying, you know what? They are in the middle of their sanctification and I love them and I'm going to get closer and closer to them anyway.

And you know what? You'll do that when you realize that that's what He does with us. That's what Jesus does for us.

John Newton wrote those beautiful words and they're very haunting and I can't. Could we bear from one another what He daily bears from us? Yet this glorious friend and brother loves us though we treat Him thus.

[27 : 26] Though for good we render ill. He accounts us brethren still. So go on counting each other brothers and sisters.

Say, yeah, they've let me down but they are my brother. They are my sister. I am with them. We are part of this family. And so, when you're getting tired and when you're having a hard time putting up with things, run back to Jesus and think about how much He is putting up with you.

how patient and compassionate and kind He is to you. Then Paul says, forgive. Forgive whatever grievances you have against each other. Whatever.

Whatever is a big word, isn't it? It's only eight letters but it fits an entire life. And to forgive whatever. It fits all sorts of things into it. But there it is.

We like to limit our forgiveness, don't we? We like to limit the things that we forgive. And so we like to protect ourselves. We like to forgive only when it actually doesn't cost us anything to forgive it.

[28 : 34] So have you ever had this happen? Someone comes to you and they apologize and you weren't really, that wasn't a big deal to you but there it was and so you didn't care all that much.

Will you forgive me? Sure. Think nothing of it. We say. Well, that's the kind of forgiveness that I like. That doesn't cost me anything that I didn't have a problem to begin with.

But that isn't the forgiveness that actually does anything. That isn't the forgiveness that does anyone any good. Forgiveness can only come after real sin. Forgiveness can only happen when there's been a real failure.

Real disappointment. Real not measuring up. Real failure on their part. And that's precisely when it's so hard to forgive, isn't it? Paul isn't talking about those easy to forgive.

He's talking about those really hurtful things that your wife does. That way that she failed you again or he failed you again and the way that your children are not getting it or that person at work is not doing it the right thing and your boss is really saying hurtful things.

[29 : 40] And forgiveness isn't explaining away someone's actions either. That's how the world forgives. They say something cruel to you and you say, well, they didn't really mean it.

They didn't really mean it. So they, then they forgive it. After they've made it down to nothing, then they forget it. Forgive it.

Well, forgiveness is saying they did mean it. They didn't mean it. They meant that cruel thing and then it's taking it on board and then it's treating that person like just as Christ through the cross treats you.

Let me repeat that. It's taking the offense on board and saying, you know what, they really didn't mean it. and then treating that person just as Christ through his cross treats you.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Christ didn't say about our sins they didn't really mean it. It was no big deal.

[30:49] He didn't say anything like that. He took it on board. He took it upon himself and he bore the sin. He put it on his back and he suffered so we wouldn't have to.

And that's the gospel. The gospel is real mercy for real sin. It's real forgiveness in the face of real sin. And so, that's how any sin is forgiven.

That's how any debt is forgiven. So, let's say you owe me \$500 and you can't pay. And you come to me and you say, I can't pay it and I forgive your debt.

Well, what do I have to do in order to forgive your debt? I have to lose the \$500, don't I? I have to absorb the loss.

And then I treat you like nothing ever happened by treating you as if you had not done what you did. forgiveness is always a painful thing. And I'm not talking necessarily emotionally painful.

[31:57] It always costs in order to forgive someone. So, how do you know if you're doing forgiveness right? If it's hurting a bit.

If you're absorbing the loss yourself and then treating them like they didn't do what they did. Not counting it against them. And that's why Paul draws our attention to how Jesus forgave us.

And again, this is Christian counseling. How are you ever going to forgive anyone? Well, the vertical is going to decide the horizontal.

He forgave us fully. He forgave us fully. There is not a bit, a drop of sin that is outside of his blood. There is now no condemnation. It's not a partial sentence. It's not a reduced sentence. It's full forgiveness. You don't owe God a single penny for your sin because Jesus paid it in full.

[33:03] And he brought it in. He brought the debt to himself and he absorbed it, the loss himself. And then he forgave you. And then he treated you like you never did anything wrong.

It means he doesn't bring it up anymore against you. You know how when someone says they forgive you and then there's that sly word.

Or that sudden withholding of love. But when Jesus forgives us, it's like it never happened.

He does deal with it. Don't hear me wrong. He does deal with it. There are consequences. And you know what? He does discipline the children he loves. But all of those things are good and they are measured out for our good.

But he doesn't come after us in wrath. He comes after us in disciplining love. And so, can we really hold grudges and withhold forgiveness from each other?

[34:07] Jesus said, not if you want to enter into the kingdom of God. One of the most startling parables is that of the unforgiving servant.

Remember, the servant owes the king so much money and the king forgives him and then he goes right down and he starts choking another servant who owed him so little.

Is that one of you? Happy to receive forgiveness from God and then going down and choking one of your brothers or sisters?

I hope not. Then Paul, last of all, says, above all these virtues, put on love. So what does the new man's new clothes look like?

Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving as the Lord forgave you. Those are the new man's clothes but around it all is his belt.

[35:11] Tying it all together, putting it all together is his belt. It's love and it's love at the bottom of it all. Love, determination to do them good. A desire to be close to them.

Yeah, they've hurt me but I'm going to still move closer to them. Yeah, they hurt me but I'm going to forgive them and I'm going to do them good regardless of that. Paul says, put that on. Put it on.

Now, what did it take to get dressed this morning? Did any of you fall into your clothes, slip into your shoes like, oops, and it accidentally happened and you said, well, I guess I'll wear this.

No, it took decision, didn't it? It took a choice. It took forethought. It took action. It took actually doing something. You had to do it on purpose to get dressed this morning.

Those are what Paul is saying. Put on love. Actually do it. Mean to do it. Plan to do it. And then do it.

[36:12] And so this is where we're going to end. Put on love. Grace Fellowship Church. What's left of us here. Put on love.

Don't wait to fall into it. Don't hope it happens. Put it on. Wear it so everyone can see it. Over all these virtues, put on love.

So one of the most obvious things about you should be your love. And love is actually what's going to help you to bear and to forgive and to be compassionate and kind and patient and all the rest.

And so wrap it around yourself. Wear it like a neon green coat so everyone can see that person loves. He wants to be close. He's so forgiving.

He puts up with so much. Put it on. Love. Love these people. Not, let's not, we're so good about talking in theoreticals or thinking in theoreticals.

[37:11] At least I am. But let's think about these people. These sinners. Your brothers and sisters. Do them good. Pursue closeness with them. So we're all running the race and sometimes it's not pretty, is it?

It's not. But this is your team. These are your people. This is your family. We all have that new shirt on that says the family of God.

We're all running this race and we need each other and we're in this together. We need to be encouraging each other and cheering each other on. But it's going to take perseverance to run this race that is marked out for us.

And you know how Hebrews goes on. He says, let us then fix our eyes on Jesus. Two eyes. Fix our eyes on Jesus.

Fix our eyes on Jesus. Put both eyes on Jesus. Think about how he forgave you. Think about how he pursues closeness with you. And you're no different than Peter. When you've fallen away, he's coming after you.

[38:16] Think about that. Think about how much he just puts up with. Then bear, forgive, love, and that's how you run the race with a group of sinners.

And as we do, we'll win the prize together. Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, we do want to win the prize together.

we don't want a single person missing. Will you please help us then to encourage one another that no one here might have a heart that's been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

But as we encourage each other on, as we live with each other, and as we bear with each other, and forgive each other, and as we love each other, that we would run that race that is marked out for us with perseverance.

Holy Spirit, come and open the eyes of our hearts that we might see Jesus. And that the thought of him, the sight of him who ran before us would so penetrate our hearts that it would change the way that we live with each other.

[39:29] Help none of us here to have the audacity to receive forgiveness from you and then withhold it from someone else. Oh, but it's so hard, it's so painful. Will you give us grace to forgive even as you forgave us?

So we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.