

I.N.I.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Colossians 3:1-11
September 4, 2011

In Christ Jesus, who has given us **NEW LIFE**, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Paul's letter to the Colossians was addressed primarily to people who were recent converts to Christianity. That is why Paul stressed in cha. 1 and 2 the fullness and completeness of their justification and salvation in Christ. Their redemption was complete, their justification--their standing before God as innocent and righteous--was certain! All because of Christ.

In chapter 3 Paul now addresses the aspect of living the Christian life--sanctification. In contrast to the completeness and perfection of their justification, Paul speaks of the ongoing daily struggle for them (as well as for all of us) to live in Christ and to live for Christ; to let their lives reflect the change that God has brought about in them. In so doing Paul shows all Christians the vital importance of the connection between what Christians believe and how Christians live. Today the saying is: if you're going to talk the talk, then also walk the walk. Paul clearly and powerfully shows that, just as Christ is all-sufficient for the Christian's faith, He is also all-sufficient for the Christian's life.

In the last chapter Paul introduced the thought that in baptism we are buried with Christ and raised with Christ. He repeats that thought in this section of his letter and uses it as the basic, motivating truth for all of the following encouragements to Christian living in the rest of this letter. We have chosen as our theme this morning the thought that:

NEW LIFE IS OURS IN CHRIST!

I: Christ is the SOURCE of our NEW LIFE.

II: Christ is the FOCUS of our NEW LIFE.

III: Christ provides the POWER for our NEW LIFE.

We read vs. 1-4...**IF THEN YOU WERE RAISED WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST IS, SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD. SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE, NOT ON THINGS ON THE EARTH. FOR YOU DIED, AND YOUR LIFE IS HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD. WHEN CHRIST WHO IS OUR LIFE APPEARS, THEN YOU ALSO WILL APPEAR WITH HIM IN GLORY.**

Christ's death and resurrection not only assures us of complete and full forgiveness of sins but the Holy Spirit, by working faith in our hearts, joins us to Christ and makes us sharers in Christ's death and resurrection. We have died to Satan, self and sin and are spiritually reborn to live in Christ for God. Through the conversion process our sinful natures are put to death, and the spirit and power of Christ lives in us. With Christ living in us, our lives are changed, and we are enabled to show our faith by words and deeds of love and kindness. That **NEW LIFE** we have in Christ is perfect and complete, however, the **EXPRESSION, the PUTTING INTO ACTION** of that **NEW LIFE** in our thoughts, words and deeds is incomplete. It is a daily growing process, which is often hindered in its growth by our sinful flesh. Paul knew this---that is why he encourages the Colossian Christians and us to **SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE.**

What are **THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE?** They are heavenly things, spiritual treasures such as forgiveness of all sins, spiritual knowledge of God and of His will for our lives, faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, peace with God, eternal security, assurance of our redemption, the fruits that faith produces in our lives. These are the treasures that we should strive to keep in mind and seek after, not the changeable, empty, temporary treasures and short-lived pleasures of the world. The Christian's goals, values and decisions should reflect a conscious heavenly-mindedness.

This does not mean that we walk around with our heads in the clouds, unconcerned about our duties

and callings in this life, or that we withdraw from the earthly society that God has placed us in and become hermits and recluses. Rather, it means that as we live our day-to-day lives in the world, we will always be conscious of the fact that our real citizenship, our real home is in heaven. We will not lose sight of the fact that nothing on earth, nothing this earth can offer is a lasting treasure, of any lasting value to us.

The temptation for these Colossian Christians was to turn back to the kind of living that satisfied their base, sinful desires. But Paul reminds them and us, that all who truly understand what Christ has done for them and really knows the meaning of His life, His death, His resurrection and ascension, will not be able to center their lives again on the changeable, material things of life or the sinful ways of pleasing the flesh.

These are the things about which the unbelievers are so concerned. Believers will center their lives on their risen and ascended Lord, for He is the **SOURCE** of our **NEW LIFE**. Since Christ has ascended and sits at God's right hand as the ruler of the universe, we can have the absolute confidence that the Lord will shower upon us the gifts and blessings that He determines we need both for this life and for the one to come.

When the Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Christ, they die to their sinful selves and their old, earthly way of living and a **NEW LIFE** begins. That **NEW LIFE** is hidden with Christ in God. Hidden in the sense that the world cannot see or identify this inner relationship between God and His children. It is a spiritual, unseen thing; peace with God, forgiveness of sins, the assurance of everlasting life. But when the Lord Jesus returns as Judge of all of mankind, what is now hidden from the world will be revealed to all. Then we will be in full radiant glory, just like our Savior for all of the world to see.

Paul now urges his readers to give some practical evidence of their heavenly-mindedness by putting to death whatever belongs to their earthly nature and focusing on Christ.

We read vs. 5-9a...**THEREFORE PUT TO DEATH YOUR MEMBERS WHICH ARE ON THE EARTH; FORNICATION, UNCLEANNESS, PASSION, EVIL DESIRE, AND COVETOUSNESS, WHICH IS IDOLATRY. BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS THE WRATH OF GOD IS COMING UPON THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE, IN WHICH YOU ALSO ONCE WALKED WHEN YOU LIVED IN THEM. BUT NOW YOU MUST ALSO PUT OFF ALL THESE: ANGER, WRATH, MALICE, BLASPHEMY, FILTHY LANGUAGE OUT OF YOUR MOUTH. DO NOT LIE TO ONE ANOTHER...**

Paul lists some of these **MEMBERS WHICH ARE ON THE EARTH:**

FORNICATION-sexual immorality: most often referred to as sexual activity by those unmarried, but in the broad sense it can mean any sexual union outside of the marriage bond--pre-marital sex, living together outside of marriage or a sexual affair by a married person.

UNCLEANNESS-impurity: this includes the thoughts and desires and intentions of the heart which lead to outward sins. These are just as serious as the outward act and must be done away with, put to death or they will take over and lead to immoral actions.

PASSION-lust/EVIL DESIRE: both of these words refer to the desire to have something that God has forbidden. The context here involves primarily sexual desires that are forbidden.

COVETOUSNESS-greed: this word can be a summary of all sins. That's why Paul calls it idolatry. Every sin against God is the highest form of selfishness, doing and living according to one's own desires and idea of what is right and wrong, not what God has commanded. Every sin is at its basic root a worship of self rather than a worship of God. It involves what I want and not what God wants.

What fearful words Paul continues with: **BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS THE WRATH OF GOD IS COMING UPON THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE...**In our day and age sin is made light

of, almost as if it is non-existent and if it does exist, it's not really that bad. But God does not take sin lightly. In His holiness and justice He demands that sin be punished. All who continue in sin and refuse to seek God's forgiveness in Christ will one day feel the terrible wrath and condemnation because of those sins and unbelief.

That is how these Colossians once lived when they were dead in their sins and unbelief. But that time has ended. That was in the past. They now have a **NEW LIFE**, one **FOCUSED** on Christ. Therefore Paul says, **YOU MUST ALSO PUT OFF ALL THESE:**

ANGER: anger is not sinful in itself. But in this case the term refers to the kind of anger that burns within with an attitude of hatred toward another, an anger that a person will not let go of.

WRATH: can also be rage, in this case an uncontrolled anger that is directed toward someone else with the thought of revenge.

MALICE: the desire to harm another person.

BLASPHEMY: also slander, harming someone by speaking lies about him.

FILTHY LANGUAGE: includes cursing, swearing or sexually explicit talk, but also includes any words that would abuse or hurt someone else.

All of these sinful emotions and actions the Christian is to **"put off."**

But how can we do that, when our heart, even as Christians, is still sinful and unclean and our feelings and emotions so often take over and lead our actions? The answer is our third point:

III: CHRIST PROVIDES THE POWER FOR OUR NEW LIFE.

We read vs. 9-11...**DO NOT LIE TO ONE ANOTHER, SINCE YOU HAVE PUT OFF THE OLD MAN WITH HIS DEEDS, AND HAVE PUT ON THE NEW MAN WHO IS RENEWED IN KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO THE IMAGE OF HIM WHO CREATED HIM, WHERE THERE IS NEITHER GREEK NOR JEW, CIRCUMCISED NOR UNCIRCUMCISED, BARBARIAN, SCYTHIAN, SLAVE NOR FREE, BUT CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL.**

The image of God is righteousness and perfect knowledge of God. Adam and Eve were created in God's image. They knew God perfectly and rejoiced to perfectly live according to His will. When Adam and Eve sinned, mankind lost that image of God.

When the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of lost sinners and brings them to believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, He recreates that image of God in their hearts. The Christian now knows who God is and what He has done for him and in God's eyes the believer in Christ is blameless and holy because of Christ. He also is set apart for Christ.

However, as long as we believers live here on earth, our sinful nature clings to us, constantly opposing and battling against our new man. That is why the life of sanctification for the believer is an incomplete, ongoing process. Daily through repentance and the assurance of forgiveness in the Gospel we put on the new man and put off the old self. This happens as we use the same means by which God created our **NEW LIFE** in us, **the Means of Grace; the Gospel in the WORD and in the SACRAMENTS.** Through diligent use of the Gospel in our daily reading, in our weekly hearing of the Word, in our participating in the Lord's Supper, we grow in faith and in spiritual knowledge and understanding.

Sanctification is a process, and the progress of believers will be uneven and unequal. We will all not grow at the same rate. We will stumble and fall, some over this temptation others over that. But, as Christ restores and empowers us by the Gospel of forgiveness, the **NEW LIFE** will be more and more evident in our daily lives.

This empowering by Christ is not only worked in the hearts and lives of those from a certain nationality or race. Paul says, **THERE IS NEITHER GREEK NOR JEW, CIRCUMCISED NOR UNCIRCUMCISED, BARBARIAN, SCYTHIAN, SLAVE NOR FREE, BUT CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL.**

The Gospel power works in all kinds of people with no regard for race, religious rites and

ceremonies, culture, or social status. The Greeks prided themselves in their wisdom and learning. The Jews took pride in the fact of their descent from Abraham as God's chosen people. The Judaizers regarded those who were circumcised as somehow spiritually superior to those who were not. Even the barbarians, who were not schooled in the Greek language or culture could still look down upon the Scythians, a savage war-like people, who were considered culturally the lowest of the low. Those who were free could of course look down upon those who were slaves.

All of those distinctions and more are still maintained in human society in many areas of the world today. Even after the Gospel enters the hearts of these individuals these distinctions still remain--differences of race and sex, nationality and color, societal standing and affluence. Some people are cultured and learned others not, some are free others not. But before God all are sinners, no matter what their earthly differences are, and all are in need of forgiveness. Thank God that He did send His Son to die for **ALL** and **ALL** who are led to repent and believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior have a **NEW LIFE** begun in them.

CHRIST IS ALL.

He is the **SOURCE---**

He is the **FOUNDATION----**and

He is the **FOCUS** for everything a believer is and does.

CHRIST IS IN ALL. He is the One who alone provides the desire and the power to live the **NEW LIFE** of faith.

Our lives as Christians, then, involve a living and a dying. We live to Christ, with our hearts set on things above, and we die to sin and our sinful flesh. We "**put off**" our old, inherited, sinful nature and we "**put on**" the new nature which is daily renewed in knowledge and the image of God.

May each of our lives be constantly nourished and strengthened by the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection and show forth a continual growth in our **NEW LIFE** in and for Christ.

To the glory of His name we pray this.

Amen.