

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

FREE FROM THE SHACKLES OF SIN
MAY 3-9, 2015



MAIN POINT

As believers, we are joined with Christ in His death and resurrection. We are no longer slaves to sin, and in Christ we are free to set our hearts on things above.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. **Have you ever had a bad habit that you wanted to break for a long time? If you feel comfortable sharing, what was the habit? Were you able to break it? Why or why not?**
2. **Do you actually feel like you are free from sin? How do the bad habits we can't shake make us feel about the hold sin has on us?**

Leader: Our longest standing and most entrenched habits often feel impossible to break—you've been biting your fingernails or hitting the snooze button for so long it feels like you will be doing that the rest of your life. As broken people living in a broken world, it is all too easy to fall into the trap of thinking of the sin in our lives in a similar way. We look at our sinful pasts and attitudes and wonder if we will ever change. While our own brains and past experiences keep telling us that we can't change, the gospel proclaims a different message. The gospel tells us not only that we can change but that have already been changed. If you have trusted Christ, you are no longer a slave but a child of God and an heir with Christ. Through His death, Christ has completely changed your position before God. He has freed you from slavery to sin through His resurrection, and He has raised you up with Himself so that you can set your heart on things above. When we worry that we will never change, we need to "play the tape" of Christ's redemption to remind ourselves that we have died to sin and our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ returns we will be with Him in glory.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-4.**

3. **What tempts us to continue to live like we still belong to this world? What does Paul say in these verses that would contradict such thinking? How does he describe followers of Christ?**

Leader: If you are a Christian, then Paul says four things are now true for your life: we died with Christ, we have been risen with Christ, He is our new life, and He is our life not just now but forever. From the day we become Christians, we are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). We have renewed minds (Rom. 12:2). Our new lives and new minds guide us to seek the things that are above where Christ is (3:1). If Christ is who He says He is, then our lives cannot be the same. If Christ is our life, then we now live through Him and not to and for ourselves.

4. What reasons does Paul give in verses 3-4 to focus on what is above? How should a greater awareness of what Christ has accomplished for us through His death and resurrection change our relationship with the world?

5. Read John 17:15-19. How do we balance Jesus' words here with Paul's commands in Colossians 3 to set our "hearts" and "minds on things above, not on earthly things"? Keeping Jesus' words in John 17 in mind, what do you think it means to "set your minds on things above"?

Leader: The Greek verb translated "set your minds" means "to think, ponder, consider" and is a command in Colossians 3:2. Paul is not commanding us to cut ourselves off from the world but rather to maintain a heavenly focus on Christ as we live in the world. The things of this earth will fade away, but we have eternal treasures hidden in Christ. Paul instructs that because our lives are on a higher plane, our responsibility is to represent Jesus in all aspects of life. The new people we are in Christ gives us a new purpose in the world: to live in ways that reflect Him.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ COLOSSIANS 3:5-10.

Leader: Because of our position in Christ, Paul told us to rid ourselves of our old, sinful patterns. Practically, we are to exercise discipline through the process of sanctification—shedding old habits, behaviors, and attitudes. Paul instructed us to daily "put to death" the habits of our sinful nature. Using the metaphor of changing one's clothes, we are to put off our former self and put on our new character in Christ.

6. What do the sins listed in verse 5 and in verses 8-9 have in common? What does the presence of these sins in our lives reveal about our hearts?

7. What does Paul's command (v. 5) to "put to death . . . whatever belongs to your earthly nature," tell us about the attitude we should have toward the sinful attitudes and actions still present in us?

8. Do you always feel capable of putting to death your sinful attitudes and actions? Why or why not? How should remembering our position in Christ and what He has accomplished for us through His death and resurrection give us confidence in our fight against sin?

Leader: The sins Paul lists in Colossians 3:5-9 are all rooted in selfishness. When we give into lust, greed, slander, or rage, we demonstrate that we have an inflated view of ourselves. Such selfishness cannot be dealt with lightly. Paul did not mince words about what our relationship, as believers, should be with regard to sin. We must not put up with, or even be patient with, our sin. We must slay it. If this seems difficult or impossible to you, it is because you have lost sight of who you are in Christ. You have been raised with Him. You have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the image of its Creator. If you look at the sin in your life and you think it is impossible to overcome, you are "playing the wrong tape" in your mind. You must "play the tape" of redemption in Christ. You must remind yourself daily of your new position in Christ so that you can begin living in the freedom that Christ has won for you.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ COLOSSIANS 3:11-17.

9. How does Paul describe our standing as believers before God in verse 12? How should our standing before God in Christ change the way we live on a daily basis?

10. What attitudes and actions are now a benefit to us because we are God's people (vv. 12-15)? What do these attitudes have in common?

11. Why is Paul's command to do everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 17) such a crucial attitude in our efforts to put sin to death?

Leader: If we hope to overcome sin, we must recognise our position in Christ. Paul described believers as being chosen, holy, and loved. We must first understand what God has done for us in order to know how to live. The attributes and callings Paul gave stem from what God has done—we love because we are loved, we forgive because we have been forgiven. Putting on our new selves, in Christ, frees us from slavery to our old, selfish ways to the eternal joy that is found in living for the name and renown of our Lord and Savior.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

12. Pastor George talked about "playing a new tape" in our minds—the tape of all that Christ has done for us. How might doing so help us in the fight against sin? How can we make this a more consistent part of our daily lives?

13. What does it look like practically to "put to death" earthly things? What role does the church play in the process? How can we, as members of this Growth Group, support each other in our individual fights against sin?

14. Which of the attitudes in verses 12-14 do you find most difficult to live out? How might remembering your position in Christ help you grow in this area?

PRAYER

Pray and express your gratitude to God for choosing you. Confess your need for Him to daily renew your mind. Ask for the Spirit to help you daily choose the things above where Christ is. Ask God for the grace needed to daily "play the tape" of redemption in your mind so that you would live more mindfully of who you are in Christ and what He has done for you.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **What promises or realities in these verses do you need to take hold of this week? Consider reading these verses each day or taking intentional time to memorize a few of them. How could doing this help you put on the new self and seek the things that are above?**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize Colossians 3:2-4.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

3:1-2. The phrase “if you have been raised” connects what follows with “if you died with the Messiah” in Colossians 2:20. The word if has the force of “because.” Believers had died to sin’s rule and had been raised with Christ to new life. Thus they were to seek (go on striving for) what is above—the lofty qualities of character that Christ revealed. He is seated at God’s right hand, the position of honor, majesty, and power. Believers consistently were to make the victorious, reigning Christ their priority—to center their lives in Him. Believers were to set their minds on what is above. The Greek word translated set your minds on has the idea of continually focusing total attention on something. Such focus involves affections, will, and intellect. The phrase “what is above” essentially refers to Christ’s character traits. The words what is on the earth refer to worldly goals and values.

3:3. Believers had died spiritually to their old, sinful way of life. Because of that complete break, their lives were hidden with Christ in God. Three interpretations of Paul’s statement are possible. (1) He may have had in mind their spiritual safety and security. (2) The words could have pointed to Christ as the Source (whom the world could not see) of believers’ new quality of life. (3) Paul may have meant that in the present they could not grasp the fullness of their life in Christ. In light of verse 4, a combination of (2) and (3) seems likely.

3:4. Believers’ lives were to demonstrate love for and faithfulness to Christ. His being revealed referred to His return, when all people will acknowledge His lordship (see Phil. 2:9-11). Also, Christians will realize the fullness of their new life in Christ. The phrase “in” glory refers to more than Christ’s (and believers’) radiant splendor. The term glory indicates God’s character revealed as redemptive. All people will see Christ for who He is and will recognize believers as reflecting His character. We live in accordance with new life in Christ when we consider Him and base our actions on what He has done and will do for us. For us, “living is Christ” (Phil. 1:21).

3:5. Because believers’ lives centered on Christ, they were to put to death (completely break with) worldly elements in their lives. They had to remove every facet—every expression—of the old, sin-dominated life. Worldly values, goals, attitudes, and actions were incompatible with their new life in Christ. Paul addressed sexual immorality and listed five vices believers were to eliminate from their lives. In his day, sexual promiscuity among pagans was rampant. Believers were to make a complete break with an immoral lifestyle. The Greek word translated sexual immorality was an umbrella term for all sinful sexual activity, whether by married or unmarried people. The word impurity expanded the range to include unclean thoughts and words as well as actions. Here, the term rendered lust has the sense of uncontrolled sexual urges. The phrase evil desire includes sinful sexual desire and broadens the scope to all evil passions. The word translated “greed” has the idea of a feverish desire for something someone else has or for something not yet obtained. Here, the term probably refers to unrestrained pursuit of sexual pleasure. Such greed is idolatry. Self becomes the center of life, and life’s energies are focused on self-gratification.

3:6-7. The vices listed bring God’s wrath on people who habitually practice them. God’s wrath is His settled opposition to sin, not the emotion of anger. If people choose to disobey God and insist on their sinful course, He will give them over to their choice. Evil, however, has within it the seeds of its own destruction and will work its way out to its inevitable result: death. Disobedient people make themselves God’s enemies. Before the Colossian believers became Christians, they practiced the vices Paul listed. The word “walked” means “lived.” The five sins were characteristic of believers’ former lifestyles. The phrase “when you were living in them” may refer to the inner principle of evil that generated their sinful practices.

3:8. The words but now contrasted believers’ old lifestyles to their new life in Christ. Paul listed five elements believers were to put away (lay aside, as soiled clothing). Three sins pertain to attitudes and two concern speech. Thus Paul emphasized that sinful attitudes and words are as serious as sinful acts. The Greek term translated “anger” is the same word Paul used in 3:6 for God’s wrath. When it refers to a human attitude, it has the sense of a continuing, seething resentment toward others. The word rendered “here” as wrath also can be understood as “rage”—a sudden, heated outburst of temper that dies down quickly. The term rendered malice conveys the idea of ill will that awaits an opportunity to inflict intentional harm. These attitudes have

no place in believers' lives. Paul urged believers to get rid of two kinds of speech. The Greek term translated "slander" means "speaking critically of another person with the intent to hurt." The Greek term rendered "filthy language" has the sense of obscene and abusive speech.

3:9-10. Paul stressed that truthfulness was to be a mark of believers' lifestyle. The phrase "do not lie" can have the force of "stop lying." The Colossian believers' relationships with one another and their witness to unbelievers required truth and honesty. Lying, dishonesty, and deceit had characterized their pagan lifestyles; but because they had put off the old self (nature), they were to shed these practices (habitual actions) as they would discard old, ragged, filthy clothing. At conversion, believers had put on (as new, clean clothing) the new self (nature). In Greek, the tense of the verbs translated "put off" (3:9) and "put on" (3:10) convey once-for-all action. When believers placed their faith in Christ, He gave them a new nature governed by His grace. The new self is (continually) being renewed (transformed in quality) in knowledge. Christ works in believers to facilitate a process of renewal—of their continuing to gain new insights into and understanding of God's will. False teachers in Colossae offered secret knowledge they claimed was necessary for people to be fully Christian. Paul countered that Christ in believers was progressively supplying them with the knowledge they needed. He was nurturing them in the process of spiritual growth.

3:13-15. Paul added two character qualities to his list. The Greek term rendered "accepting" means "putting up with." Believers were to endure offenses patiently. Forgiving has the sense of pardoning others as a gift of grace. If a believer had a complaint (grievance) against another Christian, the offended person was to take the initiative to forgive the offender as (in the same manner) the Lord graciously had forgiven the one offended. Christians were to take the initiative to forgive others because of their personal experience of Christ's forgiveness. Above all literally is "over all." As an outer garment covering the items Paul had listed, believers were to put on love—agape, determined good will that seeks others' best interests. Such persistent good will is the perfect bond of unity. Christ had called believers to His peace—spiritual wholeness under His lordship. The phrase in one body implies believers' oneness under Christ's rule as the Head of His body, the church. They were to allow Christ's gift of spiritual health to exercise control (literally, "act as an umpire") at the center of their lives (in their hearts). Gratitude was to be a continuing characteristic of their life together. The exhortation to be thankful applied especially to corporate worship.

3:16. Christ's word—the genuine message as opposed to the false teachers' empty substitute—was to continue to have priority in the church. The word "richly" has the idea of flourishing or being abundant. Paul pointed to three ongoing activities that should issue from Christ's indwelling word or message. Teaching referred to instruction in Christian living. Admonishing involved warning against false teachings and encouraging one another. Mutual instruction and encouragement were to be offered in all wisdom—carefully, tactfully, and with the right motive. Singing joyfully expresses worship and praise. Psalms were Old Testament songs of faith that originally were sung to musical accompaniment. Hymns were songs of praise and probably were Christian compositions. Spiritual songs may have been spontaneous melodies or compositions similar to today's gospel songs. Believers' joyful singing was to express to God the constant gratitude that flowed from their hearts.

3:17. Paul urged believers to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. "Name" is a synonym for person. Thus the phrase is the same as "in Christ"—in close relationship with Him. The words "in the name" of can mean "in the authority or power of." Jesus supplies power for Christian living. The title "the Lord Jesus" stressed that they were to represent their Savior and Master well in their daily lives. Paul again emphasized believers' expressing gratitude to God the Father. God was believers' Father in the sense that they were members of His family through faith in Christ. Their joyful gratitude was channeled through Christ, who made possible their relationship with the Father. We live in accordance with new life in Christ when our behavior reflects our relationship with God. He provides us with daily power to live for Him.