

True Identity

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[0 : 00] Let's turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3, verses 1-14 will be our text this morning.

Let's turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3, verses 1-14.

If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the pews for you to use. And if you don't own a Bible, please take that Bible home with you today, a gift from our congregation to you, in our hopes that you'll continue to be reading God's Word.

Right now, would you stand with me as we honor God's Word together? Again, in Colossians chapter 3, beginning in verse 1. Verse 1-14.

Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

[1 : 39] On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them, but now you must put them all away. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? I know that we have a carnival in town.

We haven't gone, but I do remember going to carnivals growing up in amusement parks, and a lot of them had a fun house with those crazy mirrors, you know, that reflect a distorted image, shape of yourself.

[3 : 10] Some compressed your image and made you look really short and really squat. Others made it look like you had a short torso with really long legs, and then other mirrors did the opposite of that.

And then there was the mirror that made you look tall and thin. And I remember that it was that mirror that most people would linger around just a little bit longer than the others, admiring the image that was being reflected back to them.

And, you know, some clothing companies have been caught using a similar sort of mirror manipulation in their dressing rooms in order to deceive their customers with mirrors that make them look slimmer when they try on their clothes.

They also use soft lighting to hide lumps and humps and bumps, preying on people's desire to look a certain way and to purchase their clothes.

Gyms also are known to use mirror manipulation. They use thicker glass and they angle it in certain ways, using, again, lights to make you look good.

[4 : 23] I know when I go to the gym, I always feel like I look better there than when I do back at home. As I'm sure some of the clothes that you've purchased didn't look as good on you at home as they did when you tried them on in the dressing room.

They project an image of you that did not accurately reflect the truth of who you are. But those mirrors aren't the only things people use to reflect inaccurate perceptions of who we truly are.

People in our lives and culture that we live in have a massive influence on who we perceive ourselves to be, seeking to label us and categorize us and mold us into an image that they say

people will like better, an image and an identity that people will accept, an identity that will make you, they say, a better version of you.

Well, how is that working for us? I don't think it's going very well. And you know, the people who are the most marketed to in our culture concerning their identity and their image are young people. They are a constant target of influencers who tell them how to look, what to like, and who to love. And I believe it's had disastrous effects on them.

[5 : 50] Last October, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospitals Association issued a joint declaration of a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health.

Depression and suicide, they said, are on a huge and rapid increase in our society amongst young people.

It appears to me that there is a correlation between the lack of their happiness and their fulfillment and their hope for the future and the image and the identity that the world is marketing to them. And a society that is so prosperous, excuse me, and enjoys so many comforts that our society does, we should stop and we should reflect upon the fact that we are, and we have so many people who are angry in our culture, frustrated.

We are fractured. And so many appear to be hopeless. And I think we are those ways because we're looking into the wrong mirrors to tell us who we truly are.

[7 : 11] What we need is a better mirror. We need a mirror that will present us with the truth. And that mirror is God's Word.

That's where we should go to find who we truly are, to see what our true identity is. Because the Bible is not like a funhouse mirror or a gym mirror that distorts reality.

The Word of God is unbent. And it presents us with the truth of who we are without Christ and the truth of who we are in Christ.

And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is that in Christ, Christians perceive their true identity.

In Christ, Christians perceive their true identity. Now we're in Colossians chapter 3. It helps for context to understand what Paul is talking about there.

[8 : 13] And so back in chapter 2, Paul talks to the Colossian Christians about walking in Christ, about finding their identity in Him.

The letter of Colossians follows the common being, doing pattern of the New Testament epistles. This model is a synopsis of the Christian life.

It's based on the timeless theological truths and realities of who we are in Christ. And then the corresponding behavior and implications that should match that in our lives.

And so in chapter 3, Paul unpacks who Christians are in Jesus Christ. That their true identity is to be found in Him.

And he explains practical ways for us to perceive that, so that we are not deceived into falling for false images of who we are now that we are in Christ.

[9 : 17] And so there are three ways, Paul says, to identify in Jesus Christ, to find your identity in Jesus Christ, that will set you free from these false perceptions of yourself.

false perceptions that threaten to rob you of joy and the identity that you already possess in Christ if you are in Christ.

Now maybe today you do have that joy. You know that you are in Christ. Well, I hope that you will pay attention because because you can easily be deceived and blinded as to who you really are. Maybe you don't know Christ this morning. And I'll tell you that you are here by God's design so that you will know what His design is for you and the hope that He has for you if you will repent of your sins and turn to His Son.

And so the first thing, the first way, the first truth that Paul unpacks here about our identity and how to find it is to find your identity in Christ, you must think much of heaven.

[10 : 35] To find your identity in Christ, you must think much of heaven. Look again at verses 1 through 4. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

So Paul begins to help the Colossians see their true identity in Christ by reminding them of the transformation they underwent when they were saved through the preaching of the gospel. They have, he says, been raised with Christ. The Greek verb actually means to be co-resurrected. It's an accomplished fact. Believers, spiritually, are entered into Christ's death and His resurrection the moment they are saved.

They have been transformed, as Galatians 2.20 tells us. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. In the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

[11 : 50] In that verse, the apostle shows the union of the believer with the Lord so that they have a shared life. They have a shared identity with Jesus Christ.

Romans 6.3-4 teaches the same truth. Do you not know that all of us have been baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death?

We were buried, therefore, with Him by baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

The baptism there is not speaking about water, but an immersion in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through their union with Christ, believers have died.

They have been buried, and they have been risen with Him. They now possess divine and eternal life, which is not merely endless existence, but a heavenly quality of life, which they have now as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in them.

[12 : 59] They are alive in Christ. They have been awakened to the realities of what that means. Consequently, consequently, they have an obligation to live consistently with who Christ has enabled them to be, as the Bible specifies in Romans 6, verses 11-14.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions.

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

For sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law, but under grace. The new life in Christ is real.

It's powerful. But so is remaining sin in the life of a believer. Though it is no longer our master, it can still overpower us if we are not presenting ourselves to God as servants of righteousness.

[14 : 12] And that's what Paul is encouraging the Colossian Christians to understand here in chapter 3. He begins to emphasize their true identity in Christ with phrases like with Christ and where Christ in verse 1, with Christ in verse 3, when Christ and with Christ again in verse 4.

He stresses to them Christ's sufficiency for them and is reminding them of their new identity in Christ so that they are no longer forgetful of who they truly are and how they should live in this new reality.

So he directs their thoughts upward. He directs their thoughts heavenward towards the things that are above. He says where Christ is. He said seek these things that are above in verse 1.

He says set your mind on what is above in verse 2. Because finding your identity in Christ means thinking about your identity in heaven. In other words, locating your identity in Christ involves a kind of spiritual geography.

It means looking to where Christ is presently, right now, at the right hand of God the Father and how he got where he is. that he was there, that he descended, that he added a human nature to his divine nature, that he lived sinlessly, that he died sacrificially and was raised victoriously, that by grace, through faith in him, you have been saved and have eternal life.

[15 : 49] And nothing and no one can take away or undo what he did when he saved you. A Christian's destiny is determined.

It's settled. It's been resolved. In salvation, they were grafted permanently into Christ. The gospel isn't a list of rules that you must keep to be saved.

It's not about what you must do, but what Christ has already done for you. His work is complete.

And that's why scripture pictures him as seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

And where he is, is where you in Christ one day will be too. That's a fact. One day, you are going home to the place in heaven that he has prepared for you.

And that truth should drive us forward in this life. as you look to your heavenly reward, understanding that you possess it because of God's grace.

[17 : 00] And you are in Christ now. And you will never be outside of Christ again. So your mind is set on Christ above. He's seated.

He's victorious. He's reigning there. And just as a compass points north, so your thoughts should be consistently dwelling over the heavenly realities of who God has made you to be in Jesus Christ. And those thoughts will affect your entire disposition in this life. Knowing your identity is in him and where that reality, that identity, that truth is taking you.

You know, I like going on trips, but one thing I hate, especially about long trips, especially about long road trips, is the travel back home.

Man, I hate that. I had surgery on my right knee many years ago, and whenever I'm cooped up in the car for long periods of times, it hurts.

[18 : 09] It aches. I just want to get out. You know, sometimes on those long road trips back home, you hit traffic jams, or there's detours that you have to take, or if you're like me, you grew up in Kansas, and there's not a whole lot of things to look at outside the window when you're driving through Kansas.

And now we've got cars with the GPS, right, and they give you the ETA on when you're going to arrive. And sometimes you're driving in the car, and it feels like, you know, we've probably, we've probably taken a huge chunk out of this trip, and then you look at that ETA, and it's like, no, it's only been like 10 or 15 minutes, and you've got hours still left to go.

And so something that has helped me in those situations with those long, long hours still ahead is to daydream a little bit.

Now, I keep my eyes open. I'm focused on the road and everything, but I daydream a little bit, and this is what I do. I think of myself already back home. I think of myself reclining in my chair.

I think of myself, soon I'll be stretched out on the couch or curled up comfortably in my own bed.

And I remind myself that those things await me, and that they're going to be there for me soon.

[19 : 33] I do that with other things. I do that with my doctorate as well. When projects are due, and now towards the end with getting ready to work on dissertation, I think about the end goal.

I think about the destination. I think about crossing the stage and being done with it and celebrating that with all of those people who have encouraged me and helped me along the way. To find your identity in Christ means, as Paul encourages the Colossians here to do, to stop and just think about where you're going.

To think about heaven, where Christ is. To think about what heaven will be like. And if you do so, even if you do so for just a short amount of time, what I've found is it changes your perspective.

When you focus on the goal, when you focus on the prize, when you focus on the realities that await you and what you have received in Christ and who you are in Christ, the brighter heaven's glories will blaze in your heart and the clearer your identity will be in your mind that you are in Christ.

You know, when you're lonely, dwell upon the vast assembly of heaven that will gather around you, with you, as you worship the Lord in heaven and be reminded that I have a family.

[20 : 55] That is my family. When you're overcome with grief or sickness, think of who you are in Christ and the healing that awaits you in heaven and say, that is my comfort.

That is going to be my place of peace. When you're bored or you feel unmotivated and tired, think of who you are in Christ and the inheritance and the reward and the joy that is yours that awaits you in heaven.

When you are afraid, soak your mind and your heart with the strength and stability of heaven knowing that in Christ that is your home.

You are going there. Your name is written in his book of life. He knows you. He has a place for you and glory awaits. Is that not what scripture says?

Is that not what Paul is telling these Colossians in verse 4? When Christ was your life, he appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. Think about these things. Look forward to these things. Your identity is in Christ.

[21 : 58] And it's necessary to find your identity in Christ by first looking upwards because then you will be able to avoid and reject the false identities that this world seeks to entrap you in when your eyes then are cast back downwards.

They force labels and they try to put you in categories but they don't fit who you are and they do not accurately describe who you are in Jesus Christ.

And so secondly, to find your identity in Christ, now that we've looked upwards, you must reject how the world seeks to define you when your eyes fall back downwards. To find your identity in Christ, you must reject how the world seeks to identify you.

Look at verses 5 and 6 again. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry.

On account of these things, the wrath of God is coming. This verse begins with a transitional therefore which establishes that the instruction that follows is dependent upon the theological truths that just preceded it.

[23 : 14] The sins that Christ died for, the sins that we've committed are the things that no longer and should no longer define our identity and who we are now that we are in Jesus Christ.

The call to put them to death or to crucify them is what distinguishes our identity in Christ. If you've tasted and you've seen and experienced that the Lord is good, even though the residue of sin's desires remains, there is now a greater desire within you to reject what is evil and to reject calling good evil and evil good that rejects being associated or defined by the sins that Jesus died to save you from.

Paul's initial list of sins in this passage deals primarily with those of a carnal nature. The first four sins are explicitly illicit and the final one addresses the root of these other sinful behaviors.

The term sexual immorality refers to any promiscuous activity outside of the bond of marriage between one man and one woman. It includes not only actions but looks and thoughts.

Impurity refers to moral corruption and is commonly used in Scripture to describe the attitudes and actions that promiscuous thoughts produce. Passion and evil desire describes lust.

[24 : 50] It's a lusting for what is immoral, a lusting for what is impure and they result in a covetous disposition which is greedy for more. Those thoughts, those actions, those desires leave you greedy and hungry for more.

Having an insatiable appetite and in that way I think the saying that you are what you eat applies.

The more these appetites are fed the harder and harder they become to satisfy until they consume you and you end up worshiping them which is idolatry and become identified with them.

But the Bible says that these appetites must be put to death. They must be starved out. But have you noticed that in our culture that a person's identity is most often defined by who or what they are attracted to?

The LGBTQ community for example. People have changed or seek to change their gender and their pronouns based upon what they desire.

Transforming themselves into the objects of what they desire. When people sin it is at its basis they're doing what they desire rather than what God desires for them.

[26 : 22] That is in essence to worship themselves instead of God and in that case that is idolatry. in the first chapter of the Bible God creates heaven and earth and he fills it with living creatures but the crown of that creation is mankind is humanity and among all of the various human characteristics that we possess God highlights one in particular their gender male and female Genesis 1 27 says so God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him male and female he created them later when Jesus was tested by a Pharisee about divorce he upheld God's design regarding gender and the appropriate relationship within which physical desires and attractions are intended for in

Matthew 19 4 through 6 Jesus answered that question have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh so they no longer are two but one flesh what therefore God has joined together let no man separate you know Jesus was never ever afraid to correct people when they erred from the truth he never shied away from speaking about controversial topics if God intended it to be any other way or if something was misunderstood Jesus would have said so but he didn't he upheld God's design for gender and marriage while culture says you are what you feel God says you are who

I created you to be the truth of our identity isn't based on something we feel it is not based on our self perception scripture says that the fallen heart is deceitful above all other things and desperately sick we cannot trust our own thoughts and our feelings so we need to submit them to God as the author and the source of truth as we talked about last Sunday and it should not surprise us that the

deceiver whispers to some regarding their identity and their gender and who they're attracted to with the same question that he brought to Eve did God really say word has spread about this drag queen show that is going to be taking place in our community down at unity square and I don't like it I don't like that it would be labeled as a family entertainment

I'm upset with those who have chosen to sponsor it but there's something else about this that has been upsetting to me you know I've seen a lot of posts describing this event and these people from Christians who use terms like sick and disgusting when I read the gospels I don't see Jesus using such adjectives to describe the women or the woman who was caught in adultery or the woman at the well who had been married and divorced multiple times no he doesn't begin the conversation with the woman at the well for example saying you're so sick and disgusting he had compassion he showed mercy he wanted them to discover a better identity he wanted them to know their true identity he didn't approve of what they did not at all he denounced it but he did so in order to show them a better way he sought to help them to see the truth to see the pain that those choices had caused them and the hope that in following him they would understand and see whose image they truly bore and direct their worship to the one in whose image they were made you know there are people in our churches who struggle with these things and they are afraid to confess! and seek prayer because they feel like they will be ashamed and ridiculed and we like Paul does here must come around them and encourage them not to be conformed to this world to reject the ways the world seeks to identify them and I love what he says in verse 7 Paul knows these people he knows these things that he's just described once defined who they were but not anymore in verse 7 he says in these two you once walked when you were living in them but now you must put them all away and they must be put away he says because in verse 6 on account of these things the wrath of God is coming in Christ we are spared of the wrath that results from God's judgment of our sin God's judgment for rejecting him his ways and making idols of what we desire instead of desiring him the one who made us and created us in his image and not only that not only must we reject that and help those who have accepted it to see a better way we must!

[32 : 36] that they must look a certain way weigh a certain amount of pounds and dress a certain way so that they will be attractive and we must teach our young men not to consume images that distort the view of God's design for the marriage relationship we have too many men in our society who are just big boys they're just boys with beards they don't know!

how to talk to girls they don't know how to treat girls right they don't respect them as God's image bearers but objects for them to possess and then to discard the more our world teaches people to find their identity in this list of sins the more fractured we have seen it has become so we must teach and encourage one another to submit to God submit to his design that God makes no mistakes that he created us in his image which is marred by sin but that image is recovered by faith in Christ and finding our true identity in him putting off the old self and putting on our new identity and its practices which are found in verses 8 through 10 but now you must put them all away anger wrath malice slander obscene talk from your mouth not lie to one another seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator the world establishes false identities which erect barriers fracturing societies with labels which divide and put us into different camps and then war with one another that happens out there but that should never happen here in the church the gospel shatters breaks down all of these barriers all of these divisions and it does so when we prioritize our identity in Christ as Paul says in verse 11 here there is no Greek and Jew circumcised and uncircumcised barbarian Scythian slave free all of these different categories all of these different labels all of these different groups no more in Christ because Christ is all and in all the list of people Paul mentions here wanted nothing to do with one another in their pride in their refusal to reject false identities they developed elevated views of themselves which promoted condescending views of everybody else who was not in their group devaluing then the image of God they were all created in and worse devaluing the work of Christ whose death destroys every barrier and reconciles us to the father and unites us together as his children the beauty of the body of Christ is found in its cohesive unity and its blended diversity divisive people create division among

God's people which ultimately hinders our individual and collective spiritual growth and impedes our universal mission which is to collectively go and make disciples therefore as we strip our sinful passions and sinful practices we must also strip ourselves of sinful pride that divides the body and makes us forget who we are now that we know Jesus yes we are to divide and separate ourselves

from sin and those who support sinful identities and practices which distort the image of God who we have been created in and the best way to do that is to reject these false identities and promote the true identity that is to be had in Christ so thirdly to find your identity in Christ value the person that he's called and made you to be value the person that he's called and made you to be verses 10 through 14

Paul says put on then this new identity as God's chosen ones holy and beloved compassionate hearts kindness humility meekness and patience bearing with one another and if one has complaint against another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must!

[37 : 07] above all these together in perfect harmony if you know Christ you value him and you value the person he's called you and made you to be how did he do that well he was God's son holy and beloved he came to rescue us from sin and its consequences he was kind in associating himself with us adding a human nature to his divine nature he humbled himself in that way he also humbled himself by going to the cross he patiently endured the beatings and the mockery and the torture and the pain and ultimately the wrath of God for the sins that we've committed he did it without complaining he did it he endured it so that you and I would be forgiven and his great motivation in all of this was love as John 3 16 says for

God so that gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life Jesus died Jesus rose again Jesus ascended and is seated at the right hand of the father that by faith in him we are new people with a new identity with a new disposition we have a peace we have a harmony with our creator we know who we are we've been rescued we've been restored we've been renewed and we will be resurrected we all tend to model ourselves after those who we want to be like you know when I was a kid my favorite baseball player was Kyle Ripken Jr.

I wore number eight because Kyle Ripken Jr. wore number eight I tried to play shortstop because that's where he played and I batted like him too which is his funky stance where he laid his bat on his back because I wanted to be like Kyle Ripken Jr.

but who I most want to be like Jesus the main point of application for this sermon is this put off sin and put on Christ if you put on Christ you will be like Christ and in our world it's desperate for Christians to be like Christ when I got to college one of the things that I most couldn't wait for was to put on the uniform and the hat and represent my university and I remember our coach would always tell us kind of the same speech before every season as we were given our uniforms and our hats and all those things he told us that he chose us to be on this team said you can't be on this team unless

I chose you to be on this team and I've chosen you to be able to have the privilege to wear this uniform and he told us when you wear this uniform you represent the name on the front and the name on the front is more important than the name on the back!

[41 : 46] ! to have a purpose that you have a home no other identity can satisfy the longing of your hearts than to be known by Jesus and to be in Jesus and no other purpose is greater than making him known through your identity in him three questions of application question number one what sins described in this passage do you need to put off what sins described in this passage do you need to put off question number two how does Jesus embody the characteristics we are to put on think about his life think about what he said think about what he did how does knowing this help us put on these characteristics and then question three how should our identity in

Christ affect how we treat one another in the church and with the people who have rejected him again in this world I believe what it needs most is for Christians to be like Christ Satan is going to always come and he is going to tempt you and he is always going to say well you know you're not as good as the Bible says that you are do you really have this identity in Christ if people knew the things that you've done and the things that you've thought things that you've said that's not who you really are and!

he tries to convince you that there are better identities for you to live in that he's the father of lies and you don't believe it if you're in Christ you're hidden in Christ all that is past has been forgiven all that is present all that is future has been forgiven if you know that grace and have received that you know that there is no!

better way to live your life than in gratitude for the one who saved you and who's given you this identity and who's given you this purpose and this hope and an eternal life which begins now you might be here this morning and you realize that you are defined by some of these other identities that you have bought into the world's perceptions of who you are and I tell you with compassion and

with love they're lying to you and that will not satisfy you it will only hurt you and I urge you to turn to Christ the world's ways will only leave you wanting more it will never satisfy but Christ will if you turn to him he will forgive you and if that's you today and you want to talk to me I would love to speak with you I would love to share more of the gospel with you for us who are in

Christ the challenge is to be who you are this is who you are just be who God made you to be live in that truth rejoice in who he is and the hope that you have always in him let's pray Lord your word is a mirror that accurately reflects who we truly are God it tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God Lord all of us as we've sung earlier are prone to wander prone to go our own way easily deceived into thinking that we need to look a certain way or act a certain way or like a certain thing or love a certain thing so that we'll find satisfaction and that the world will accept us God I pray that today through your word you have opened our eyes to see that those things are lies and they're wrong and that you've given us a better way to be known and to live through knowing our identity in

[46 : 09] Jesus Christ your son for your church that we would obey the commands of this scripture as they are divisive and as they fracture over all of these different things that they seek to label and identify and categorize people by Lord may we be united in our love for you and our love for one another and the mission that you've given us to be your church which reflects you accurately to this world and need that disciples would be made and that people would come to the saving faith and the hope that is to be found and knowing Christ and being hidden in him so God we pray that we would be those kinds of people and that you would be pleased with what results and glorified by it all Lord help us to focus our attention heavenward God that we would be more heavenly minded so that we would be of earthly good as a result and we ask these things in

Jesus name Amen