

Experiencing New Identity in the Gospel of Jesus

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God gives those who trust in Christ a new identity and calls on them to put away the behavior of their old selves and put on the behavior of their new selves.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Colossians 2:1–3:17

As children grow up, they can amass quite a collection of costumes. On a whim, they can transform from a firefighter to a superhero, from a ninja to a princess. All a child needs to do to change from one identity to another is take off one set of clothing and put on a different set. A hat or a mask might be involved. Some equipment may also be required to complete the ensemble. But once the look is right, the actions and mannerisms just follow naturally. Even the voice changes tone for the occasion, and the words follow suit.



What are some reasons children enjoy playing dress-up?

Group Time

Point 1: Set your mind on things above (Col. 3:1-4).

¹ So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

As human beings descended from Adam, the first man who chose sin in the garden of Eden, we have inherited a sin nature from birth and even conception (Ps. 51:5). Not only are we predisposed to sin, we are consumed by it. As Paul said elsewhere, “everything that is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23), and not one of us has faith in God by nature. So, our default state as human beings is one focused on sin, or “earthly things.” This includes lust, greed, envy, and hatred, among other sins, but it also includes the whole host of earthly, man-centered ways we try to overcome our sin.



What are some ways people try to find salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ?

Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, we are doomed to set our sights too low to achieve the eternal safety and security we all instinctively want. In this condition, we are like a pilot focused on the ground looking for a place to land while aiming straight for a mountain! But for those who have believed, eternal life has been found in the resurrection of Jesus, which we share in through faith and baptism, being united to Christ (Col. 2:11-12). In Christ, we have died to our sin, been raised to a new way of living, and now anticipate Jesus’ return to fulfill the promise of eternal life. Therefore, we should go about our days with a **heavenly perspective**, one that honors and reflects Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

Union with Christ: At the heart of our _____ is our union with Christ. Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through _____ (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him. This union is indissoluble; it will last for all _____.

Point 2: Put to death the deeds of the flesh (Col. 3:5-11).

⁵ Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, God's wrath is coming upon the disobedient, ⁷ and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. ⁸ But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. ¹¹ In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

Believers are commanded to kill those parts of us that distract from our faith-filled focus on Jesus. We have a vested interest in removing these sins and evil desires from our lives because God hates them, as shown in His plan to judge the ones doing them one day. But our solution cannot be merely putting up barriers as the false teachers did: “Don’t handle, don’t taste, don’t touch” (2:21-23). These may forestall the sinful deeds of the hands for a time, but they cannot address the sinful desires of the heart.

If we are to “put to death” and “put away” the sins that are both external and internal, how do we do this? The answer is based on a life in Jesus. Believers live out what is already true of us because of our faith in Jesus—we have died to sin with Christ (3:3), so we stop living in, walking in, and entertaining the lifestyle and choices that lead to temptation and sin. We also have been raised with Christ as new people—we have a new identity through faith in Jesus: not sinners but saints in Christ Jesus (1:2).

New Identity of the Believer: When a person places faith in Christ, no longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. Anyone who is in Christ is a “_____” in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is _____ and progressing, becoming more and more like _____.



Why is faith in Jesus necessary for putting to death the deeds of the flesh?

Point 3: Put on the works of the Spirit (Col. 3:12-17).

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

From birth, we are dressed in our sin nature with its corresponding sinful deeds. But when we come to faith in Christ, we exchange that outfit for the righteousness of Christ (Gal. 3:27). We also begin the faith-filled work of putting away the deeds of the flesh. Yet we must dispense with our evil deeds by replacing them with compassion, humility, patience, and more. We must "put on" and cultivate these characteristics of Jesus, yet the growth comes from the work of the Holy Spirit.



Voices from Church History

"When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found; Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne."¹

—Edward Mote (1797-1874)



Can a believer put on the characteristics of Christ without first putting away the characteristics of our sin nature? Why or why not?

One practical outworking of putting on the characteristics of Christ is that His body, the church, would be unified in love. Why should unity matter? Because our triune God is one, and we should reflect His unified glory to the world (John 17:20-23). This unity comes through steps backward and steps forward because we still struggle with sin and also are putting on what pleases God (Col. 1:10). So while we may sin against one another, in Christ we can and should forgive and love one another. This unity also comes through dwelling together on the word of Christ, building one another up with our songs of worship to God, and doing everything in Jesus' name.



How has the singing of the church convicted or encouraged you in the faith?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Colossians 1:1-29

How important do you think obedience to Christ is? On a personal level, we often can find reasons to justify our disobedience: “No one will know”; “This won’t hurt anyone”; “Payback is just fair.” We are a little more rigid with other people, expecting people to obey God’s commands and questioning people’s hearts and motives when we see them struggle and fail.

Paul was greatly concerned for obedience in himself and others. Later in his letter to the Colossian believers, he asked them to pray for his opportunities to share the gospel (4:2-4). But here he prayed for those who would receive his letter. He wanted them to obey, to grow, and to mature in Christ.

Notice the connection between prayer and spiritual growth. Paul did something more than just give steps toward a goal. He prayed the Colossian believers would grow in their knowledge of God and be strengthened for the road of obedience ahead. He knew that while we have a part to play in putting on those things that please God, God is the One who makes the growth possible. Consequently, this is why thanksgiving to God plays such a prominent role in Paul’s letter—God is in control and we owe every blessing to Him.



What do you need to pray to God about? What do you need to thank God for?



Voices from Church History

“Here is how we can be irreproachable and blameless in God’s sight: by persisting in faith and never being cast out or carried away from the foundation of Christ. We persevere by remaining firm in the hope proclaimed in the gospel. That hope of eternal life is through Christ and is conceived in those who receive him by faith. For them, their impieties and crimes will not disqualify them from life everlasting. This is true even if they slip up frequently with grave sins. For it is completely impossible for them to be deprived of life, seeing that faith constantly stirs up renewed repentance and is consoled and encouraged by the proclamation of the Good News.”³

—Heinrich Bullinger
(1504–1575)

Day 2: Read Colossians 2:1-23

In this letter, Paul addressed what is often called “the Colossian heresy.” It seems to be a mishmash of elements from different religious systems, such as Judaism (2:16-17), mysticism (2:18), and asceticism (2:20-23). Aside from these generalities, it is impossible to nail down exactly what the Colossian believers were facing, but there is no question about the solution. Whether facing false teaching or the temptation toward immoral behavior, the response must always be the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The false teachers in Colossae wanted to look and sound wise, so they prescribed some extremes that would set themselves apart. “Look at how disciplined they are,” some might have said. But for all the attention they could garner, that was the extent of their benefit. They were no closer to salvation or righteousness because these cannot be found apart from faith in Christ. Paul condemned these false teachers for focusing on what is on the earth in their prohibitions and plans. And he would go on to teach the truth that righteousness only comes through setting our eyes on Christ, who is in heaven.



How might you be addressing temptation and sin in your life in ways apart from faith in Jesus?

Day 3: Read Colossians 3:1-4

Jesus taught His disciples that where your treasure is, there is your heart also (Matt. 6:21). He said this in the Sermon on the Mount as He taught about how disciples should not worry but trust the Lord to provide for their needs. Rather than worry about food or clothing, seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness, trusting in God’s provision, and thereby store up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20,33). Jesus was teaching His disciples to have a heavenly perspective.

Paul picks up on that same idea in this passage. We should set our sights on things above rather than earthly things because the things on earth will pass away but the things in heaven, such as life in Christ, are forever (Matt. 6:20). Furthermore, if Jesus, while He was on earth, directed His followers’ attention to heavenly things, how much more should we be focused on heaven now that our Savior is there! By faith, we have died to ourselves; now our entire lives, both now and for eternity, are wrapped up in Christ. This should change how we live.



How will setting your mind on things above help you resist the temptations and sins that plague you?

Day 4: Read Colossians 3:5-11

When reading and studying the Bible, paying attention to the verbs is an important step (but, of course, every word is inspired by God and therefore important). In this passage, we read some statements declaring the reality for the Christian and we hear some commands for the Christian to obey. Some of these verbs are in the past tense and some are in the present tense.

The imperatives—“put to death” and “put away,” for example—are commands to obey today. Believers must actively strive, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to rid themselves of the evil desires associated with the things of this world. But these imperatives hit home with us today because of two past tense verbs—“have put off” and “have put on.” On the day we believed in Jesus for our salvation, we made an exchange: the old self for the new self. Believers work to put to death the deeds of the flesh because we are new people and the old ways don’t fit comfortably anymore.



With your eyes on Christ, what steps will you take to put to death your evil desires?

Day 5: Read Colossians 3:12–4:18

Believers are people who strive to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (3:17). This includes the things we do and the things we say. Of course, the things we do and say in private should honor our Lord. But the vast majority of life is lived out among people, so it is only natural to see obedience to this command played out in our relationships with other people. We must honor Jesus in the things we do for and say toward the people God has placed in our lives.

Husbands and wives; fathers (parents) and children—the interactions within a family, some of the toughest relationships we have, should bring glory to Jesus. Slaves and masters, a significant economic relationship of the day, also were to please the Father as they carried out their responsibilities as if they were working for Jesus Himself. In the midst of this contractual relationship, slaves and masters were to do right by one another.

Recognizing Christ’s authority over all as our Creator and Savior, we must live for Him in the midst of every relationship and circumstance.



How will you honor your Savior through your relationships with other people?

