
Colossians: Perspective and Practice

Col. 3:1-17

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Introduction

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After a week's pause, we have reached the halfway point and now continue with the third of four messages as we work through the book from Colossians. As I have noted in the previous two messages, this has been somewhat of a hop-skip-and-jump approach as we have worked through major passages and passed over a few sections so that this series could be fit into 4 messages. I would also like to note that the open forum we had been planning had to be taken out due to scheduling considerations. So if you have questions or are wondering about individual and corporate applications of the text, feel free to e-mail me or bring them up during a flock discussion in the coming weeks.

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I was driving through town a few weeks ago and came across a sign in front of a local church. How many of you unofficially are church sign inspectors? For some reason, I am always drawn to church signs and the catchy sayings that are often a part of the display. In a strange way, I suppose, I like to evaluate the catchy phrases and assign them to a category. My categories are generally along the lines of funny, wise, just ok, biblically sound, or biblically wrong. This particular sign gave the name of the church with this phrase underneath, "A pretty good church." Regardless of what you or I may think of this church, I had to give them points for humility. On a human level, no church is perfect.

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But the more I thought, the more I felt like the phrase stopped short. I know, you are probably thinking Mark thinks way too much about silly church signs. But I'm guessing I'm not the only one. When you think about it, the phrase, "A pretty good church" is a really man-centric assessment of the body of Christ. I would have added to the phrase and used these words, "A pretty good church; a really great God." You see it doesn't end with a moralistic view of believers being "pretty good" despite their human nature and sinful habits. We have been joined with, and are being transformed into, the image of Christ. As we saw last week, we are united with Christ and have received and will receive the full benefits of that union. So if you're going to let people driving by know that you are only a pretty good church, no matter how humble and true, I think you would also want them to know that you have a really great God.

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You may wonder, "What does that have to do with Colossians?" In a sense, what Paul does in his letter, is to start, by reminding the Colossians that they have a really great God. Christ, in whom dwells the fullness of God and is the fullest expression of God, is both supreme and sufficient to redeem the church and to prepare her to ascend with Him as His bride. And it is the preeminent Christ who abides with us and gives us a new identity so that we, who Paul says were once "*alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds*", now live in Christ and are united with Him in the fullness of His righteousness and power. And this is our marvelous hope, that we who humanly speaking, are a pretty good church, are now present and fully united with Christ in His power and righteousness. Paul makes sure that Colossians get the "really great God" part before he calls them to be the "pretty good church" Christ enables them to be.

So tonight we are going to look at what it means to be "in Christ" in practical ways. In other words, how does having a really great God enable and motivate us to live in a way that is consistent with our new identity and union with Christ? You see, God does not just save us and then leave us to our fragile and weak humanity. He does not abandon us to be just a pretty good church. He unites Himself with us with the fullness of His presence and the fullness of His power to make us into His image and to knit us together into a fellowship that is a beautiful and awe-inspiring community of believers. So that in Christ we are not just a pretty good church; we are THE church made perfect in Christ's righteousness. And this transformation is accomplished by and through our great God. He is preparing the church that one day we may be presented in the New Jerusalem as His holy bride. There Christ will not just abide with us spiritually, we will fully dwell in His presence. And on that day, we will gather with Him and celebrate the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

[opening prayer]

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A New Perspective

In tonight's passage, Paul reminds the Colossians that they are not what they once were. Being in Christ means being a new creature. We now have a new nature; we have been freed from bondage to sin. And, if we are not what we once were, then we should no longer live like the old is still true. So for the true believer, Christ has transformed who we are, at the very core; giving us a new perspective **to** life and a new practice **for** life. To not live like who we now are, is to deny the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ's work. It would be like Prince William, who is second in line to be King over England, living as a bum on the streets of London. It would be a life lived in a way that was absurdly inconsistent with who he was.

As children of the King of kings and joint heirs with Christ, our perspective on life is forever changed in Christ. Our outlook, our way of thinking and purposes are now aimed along a Christ-guided trajectory. Our practice and way of living is also forever changed in Christ. We must no longer be content to live in the flesh. We hate our sin and sinful tendencies. We desire to obey God and live a righteous life. We desire to be with God's people in fellowship and community. And we have a love for God's word, His worship, and His work. Much of what we will cover this evening, are themes and truths that have come across the Chapel pulpit many times before. But as we work through this passage of Colossians tonight, it is my hope that they will be new and fresh once more.

The first few verses of Chapter 3 are the hinge upon which this letter turns. It is the pivotal point at which Paul turns from a theology of who Christ is and who the Colossians are in Christ, to what this means in terms of day to day living. Again, the context of the instruction here is meant to counter the erroneous teaching the Colossians had recently been hearing. The false teachers were introducing new philosophies and religious alternatives that added to what Paul and Epaphrus had taught them.

No matter what others may say, one's doctrine and theology, whether it is right or wrong, determines one's practices. In the case of the false teachers, it was leading the Colossians into legalism, harsh forms of piety, and even, it appears, some form of angelic worship. All of these are seen at the end of Chapter 2. Therefore in a large sense, it is Paul's purpose and intent here, to link the right theology of Chapters 1 and 2 with right living in the remainder of his letter.

So Paul counters these troublemakers by connecting much of what has come before with practical implications for Christian living. The first of these is to encourage the Colossians to a new perspective; a new way of thinking. In a rough paraphrase, you could boil this passage down to the phrase, "Live like who you are." If you truly are in Christ, then you should be living with a new perspective. If you are now a new creature made in His image; if you share with Him in his death, burial, and resurrection; if you have been freed from the power of sin; then there should be, must be, a change of perspective that is consistent with these truths.

There is an important implication to the logic here that R. C. Lucas brings out in his commentary. And that is that **Paul does not expect the Colossians to live in Christ without first knowing what it means to be in Christ.** For the church to simply teach good behaviors without understanding the power and presence of Christ proclaimed in the Word is simply a form of moralism; teaching good behaviors without the context of who the believer is in Christ. If, as scripture says, words and deeds flow out of the heart of man, there can be no right living without a soul that is being shaped by right theology. And we would expect that any corruption or dilution of right theology will have a corresponding negative effect that shapes one's perspective of life.

Follow along as I read the first four verses of Chapter 3. *"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 things that are above, not on 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."*

The first part of the first verse provides the connection back to the previous chapters. Paul exhorts them that, if they have been raised with Christ, they share in His resurrection and their lives are to be different. There is to be a new perspective that is seen both in our seeking, that is the direction in which we orient our heart of verse 1; and in our setting, that is the direction in which we orient our thoughts of verses 2 through 4.

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In the latter part of verse 1 Paul urges the Colossians to seek things that are above. Since they have been raised with Christ they are to seek things consistent with that reality. They are to orient their hearts in a way that is consistent with their identity in Christ. There is to be a new perspective to life, one that seeks after Christ, aiming ambitions, passions, and desires toward spiritual realities. Paul's words are a reminder that Christ's realm and rule is to be the focal point of what we seek after. There is a new perspective that turns our attentions and affections from things of this world toward things of heaven. To seek things above is to regard and value our place in Christ and align our wants and desires toward Him and toward His rule.

Is this not the essence of faith; to accept, believe, and trust a reality that we cannot see? So why does Paul exhort them in the previous passage to be established in their faith? Because of the connection and importance of a strong faith to living with spiritual priorities. We must see through eyes of faith that our home, both now and in eternity, is with Christ. The basic sense of the text is that this new perspective changes the way we live. We now actively submit our life goals to the King. We now actively work at pursuing His Kingdom before all else. We now make relationships within the body of Christ a priority.

While this transformation begins at salvation, we do not mature automatically like the growth of an infant to an adult. Rather it takes place through the hearing and studying of the Word; a prayerful searching of our hearts; and a willing submission of our lives to Christ. It is a seeking of the Kingdom of God; a seeking that is firmly centered on Christ; that is the defining character of believing faith.

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The second part of this new perspective is seen in setting our minds on things above. Here Paul makes a direct contrast between things that are above and things that are of the earth. It was not enough to just set their affections and attention on the Kingdom above. There was to be a placing of their thoughts and minds upon what was above as well. It has the same sense as Romans 12:2, where Paul writes, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*" This setting of their minds was to be a "thinking about" and an "understanding of" who they were in Christ and of the truths of Christ they had been taught. By doing this, they would be able to know God's will and live in a way that pleases Him.

This does not mean that we live our lives with no consideration to the world in which we live. We are not to walk around with our noses in our bibles oblivious to the realities of the world we live in. Rather, we are to be subjecting all our thoughts and all our lives within this world to the will of God. Rather than isolating ourselves from the things of the world, we are to transform all we do in the world for God's glory. If we work, no matter how menial the task, we work as unto the Lord. If we speak, no matter how mundane, we speak in way that reflects His purpose and character. And as we think in our minds, no matter how private the thoughts, we align them with the commands and character of scripture that we would be renewed according to the image of Christ.

It is possible that Paul may have in mind some form of false teaching that emphasized certain actions and philosophies as being more spiritual than others. Paul wanted the Colossians to understand that setting one's mind on things above is recognizing that nothing we do is separate or independent from our presence with Christ. In fact it is quite the opposite. It is recognizing that our presence with Christ in the spiritual realm is a present reality. It is knowing that all we think and do is done before the face of God and in union with Christ. It is conforming of one's thoughts and life to scripture in willing obedience to our identity in Christ.

Paul conveys this sense in verse 3 where he writes that our old lives are dead and gone. Our new life is in union with Christ. It is hidden from human eyes and may be seen only through eyes of faith. And it is in this new life that we find the faith to persistently measure the thoughts and words that run through our minds against Christ and His word. Setting our minds on things above, is knowing how to please Him and understanding His character in a way that allows Christ to shape the very fabric of our lives. It is directing the path of our lives and lighting our way by the truth of scripture, that through the Spirit, shapes our wills to the contours of our new nature in Christ.

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A New Practice

So Paul turns the letter in Chapter 3, calling the Colossians to a new perspective in Christ. But the new life in Christ is not just about a new perspective. It is also about a new practice. Imagine a football or soccer team with a new coach who comes in and says he is going turn things around. He has a new perspective on the game that will transform the way they play. So he gets them to think about the game in a new way and transforms their self-image into one of a winning team. But if that way of thinking never makes its way onto the field of play, has there really been any transformation? If the new perspective is only an intellectual exercise and never changes the way they play the game, is the transformation of the team complete?

In the final section of this passage, Paul speaks into the lives of the Colossians with practical instruction on what living in Christ looks like. What he describes is a natural pattern of living that flows out of the previous four verses. In other words, out of a new perspective in Christ, there flows a new practice that is equally shaped by our identity in Him. Our walk will match that which we seek after and set our minds upon. If all Christ has done is transform our perspective and not our practice, how can we say we have been truly transformed into His image? How can we say we are a new creature and have been united with Christ? Even as we yearn for the fullness of Christ's transforming presence in glory, there is fullness of transformation that changes our perspective and practice while we wait for that day.

This section is neatly divided into two parts. The first is found in verses 5 through 11 where Paul urges the Colossians to put away that which was part of who they were prior to their union with Christ. The second part is found in verses 12 through 17 where Paul defines a model of practice that the Colossians were to put on as part of their union with Christ. These two parts form a transforming pattern of putting away and putting on that is to be found in the lives of believers.

Let's look at the first part of this passage. Please follow along as I read verses 5 through 11. *"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 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 not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."*

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We often use the phrase to "put off" when speaking of this and similar passages. But I think the best sense of Paul's words here, is to "put away". What is being commanded here is deeper than the imagery of a temporary changing back and forth between two sets of clothes. It is not exchanging the character and image of the old and new person, back and forth as our spiritual strength ebbs and flows; which is often all too true in the lives of some believers. Rather, there is a sense here of permanently putting away and replacing what was true of the old self. This is seen in Paul's use of several phrases from the passage we just read. Look back at words used in this passage. He tells the Colossians to "put to **death**", to "put them all **away**", and refers to the way "you too **once** walked." These all have the stronger feel of distancing, placing far away, or a final separating from these old practices.

Another way of saying this is that believers are to be in a state of constantly removing these old practices from their lives. This ties back to Chapter 2:11. There Paul reminds them that in Christ they had been circumcised by putting off the body of flesh. It is because of our union with Christ and His death, that we are to die to sinful and earthly ways of living. The old man has been separated from us and we are now raised in Christ. So there is to be an absenting and abandoning of the patterns and practices of the old life that are inconsistent with the new life and image that we now share with Christ.

We can divide those things which Paul calls the Colossians to put away into two categories, those things which are earthly sins and those that are evil ways. Each of these categories are patterns and practices of the old way of living and look back to our walking in the image of the sinful old man. These things encumber and hinder the believer from a life focused on things above. Moreover, the new perspective of a life in Christ will despise sinful ways and hate what is evil. The transformed heart of a believer will seek to root out the appetite and actions of sin and evil as they seek to conform to who they are in Christ.

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In verses 5 through 7 Paul provides the first of two lists of sinful patterns. The first list is descriptive of earthly sins and corresponds to their earthly and possibly former pagan ways. Verse 5 corresponds to verse 2 earlier in Chapter 3. The Colossians were not to set their minds on earthly things and were to put to death those practices that were part of their earthly nature or flesh. These earthly sins included sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness. In verse 7, Paul reminds them that these were the ways in which they once walked; former ways of lives that had been changed by Christ.

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In verse 8, Paul provides a second list of five additional sins of evil ways that include anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene or any type of filthy speech. In addition, to earthly sinful patterns the Colossians were to also put away evil ways. This list of sins in particular, seems to focus on sins of speech that would occur in relationship to others. Not only would these sins represent evils that would destroy harmony and peace, but an absence of them in their lives would be a testimony to those outside the church. The putting away of these sins, along with those of the first list, were important instructions to maintaining harmony, unity, and peace. Additionally, this was to be a defining pattern of Christian character and life within the body.

The contrast between the first and second list is also worth noting. It is often the case, that believers, and unbelievers to some extent, are able to avoid the perception of the major sinful patterns listed in verse 5, but are more accepting of evil patterns of speech within their lives listed in verse 8. Perhaps the presence of these sins is also due to the difficulty of taming the tongue that James refers to in the beginning of Chapter 3. Regardless, the believer is to put away the evil practices of all sinful speech. Whether it is an angry response to a spouse, speaking poorly of others, or coarse speech at work, the believer's life is to be free of these evil ways and instead exemplify the self-controlled and godly communication of a life lived in Christ.

Paul continues in verse 9 with an additional command to be truthful in communication. Believers are not to lie to one another. Perhaps within the context of the body of Christ, this sin is particularly vile and harmful. Believers are to be truthful in speech seeing that the old nature has been put away along with the sinful and evil practices Paul has just listed. The imagery of circumcision may again be intended here in that these past ways of living have been cut away or permanently put off from who they are in Christ. In Christ, the believer is free from the power and rule of sin in their lives. This is to be reflected by a life no longer characterized by the old man. We have been separated from these sinful and evil practices in Christ's death, and like the Colossians we are to absent ourselves from any form of evil speech or the other sinful ways listed in these verses.

Another reason that believers are to have a new practice, is that we have a new self or man that has replaced the old. The depth of change Paul describes here is not just at the level of what we do, but goes deeper into who we are. There has been a total change. We have been made in a new image and that image is Christ who now serves as the pattern after which we are to follow. And we are constantly being renewed in that image through the knowledge of that image; its character, commands, and will for the believer.

In verse 11 Paul notes that this image supersedes who we were and any worldly divisions we may have had prior to our redemption. It is important to note that all are now equally in Christ and Christ is now equally in all. There is no longer any distinction, none that are superior, and none that are inferior. Regardless of background, race, or economic class, we bear the same imprint of Christ upon our lives and owe the same allegiance to our one Lord. This is to be reflected in the practice of the church where these distinctions are not to affect our harmony, unity, or love for one another. For it is the church, the body of Christ, that corporately shares in His image, and represents the pattern of new practices that are to reflect the transforming power of the Gospel.

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The second part of this section is contained in verses 12 through 17. Here Paul provides a description of the other side of the transformational process. There is both a putting away of sinful practices and there is a putting on of the practices of the new man in the pattern of Christ. These practices are to be put on in contrast to those of the old man and the previous way of life that are listed in the previous verses.

Let's read the remaining verses of this passage, verses 12 through 17. Follow along as I read. *"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. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*

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In verses 12 and 13, Paul refers to the church as God's chosen people. As in the previous verses, Paul provides a similar list of five virtues. Drawing from Old Testament language, Paul refers to believers as a chosen people who were to put on or wear these virtues. This list parallels the two previous lists in the preceding section. These virtues of grace were to differentiate and make them distinct from others.

The reference to being a chosen people, holy and beloved, are the same titles used of Israel in the Old Testament. Paul's use of these titles underscores the transference of God's calling to the church to be His own people through the chosen One. The church is the New Israel whom God has called to live in a way that reflects the image of His Son. We are His new creation, and have been called and transformed to be a Gospel light to the world so that all may see His glory. We are to be a blessed community that reflects His likeness through obedience to His character and purposes.

The Colossians were to put on these five virtues that included compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. As a result of being God's chosen people, they were to be a community characterized by grace and mercy. All of these qualities describe the nature of the new man and reflect the same virtues of grace that Christ has shown to us. In fact, the sense here is that the same measure of virtue reflected in Christ is what we are to show to others.

Additionally, Paul commands in verse 13 that they are to forgive one another just as the Lord had forgiven them. Those who are in Christ are to have a new and continued practice of forgiving one another. Set against the standard of conforming to Christ, there is to be a high commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation with the church.

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So the church is to put on these virtues as a reflection of their new identity in Christ. Additionally, it is also to put on a practice of love that leads to unity. In verse 14, Paul calls the Colossians to put on love above all the previous virtues so as to create a community that is defined by a harmony and peace that reflects their unity in Christ. It is this quality, above all others, that binds and unites them in perfect harmony. It is love and fellowship within the body that holds them together. It is a taste of heavenly fellowship that is to be both sought and desired by true believers. For those who are truly in Christ, will seek things above and find true harmony and great joy in the body of Christ.

In verse 15, Paul commands the Colossians to let the peace of God rule in their heart. Commentators specifically point out, that in this passage Paul is not referring to a peaceful feeling that to some is the affirmation of God's will in a decision. It is not referring to a sense of inner peace that God uses to direct the believer. Rather, it is the peace that comes within Christian community when they are united in submission to the presence and rule of Christ in their midst. It is a kind of peace that bows to Christ and prefers one another that produces a harmony and unity that reflects our chosen nature and calling to reflect the glory of God through our lives.

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Paul concludes his list of "put-ons" with a call to ministry and mission in verses 16 and 17. Just as the Colossians were to let the peace of God rule in their midst, so the Word of Christ was to dwell in them richly. Theirs was to be a new practice that reflected the value of the proclaimed word in their lives both at an individual and corporate level.

They were to teach one another, instruct and train in all wisdom, sing songs and hymns, with thankfulness and rejoicing at all that God had done. Paul provides a broad expression of proclamation and worship that is to characterize the life of the church. Here we have a brief summary of the ministry and mission of the church; that it is to be a community rich in teaching and worship. It is to be a joyous declaration of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ that combines with anthems of praise from God's chosen people. It is a unity of voice and purpose within the body of Christ that rises up to heaven; bringing joy and pleasure to God.

This general call to ministry and mission is extended in scope to do **all** things in the name of Christ. Believers are to do all things, whether it is word or deed, for the glory and honor our Lord Jesus. The phrase "word and deed" here is not meant to be distinctive or indicative of a particular pattern. It simply refers to the broader and comprehensive sense of whatever one does whether it is in speech or in action.

The scope of putting-on here becomes all encompassing. Contrary to what some of the false teachers may have been teaching, there is no false dichotomy where some things we do are spiritual and others are not. In Christ, all things take on a spiritual reality and are to be done for the sake of His name. This is the culmination of a life that ruled and transformed by the powerful presence of Christ. Even the most humble and mundane task has spiritual qualities. This is not an external or superficial quality of life or state of mind that is manufactured during a Sunday service. It is a constant, day by day striving both personally and as a community, that seeks to glorify God in every area of life carried along by the indwelling of Christ and His word.

This is a life where there that strives for consistency in one's perspective and practice. This is a life that reflects the image of the one who has made the believer a new creation. This is a life where one's walk must match that which is sought after and has its mind set upon. This is a life where one's worship matches the reality of transformation within the heart. And when these are present, the believer can and will rise up in praise and thanksgiving to God the Father through Jesus Christ their Lord.

[Slide 6]

Conclusion

Tonight we have worked through a pivotal point in Paul's letter to the Colossians. Paul has clearly connected the all that Christ is and what He has accomplished with who believers are to be. In the first two chapters, Paul strengthens the Colossians faith by instructing them and exhorting them to remember sound doctrine. In tonight's passage, he turns to describe to them what it means to consistently live in the world based upon those truths. As a way of conclusion, let us look at few of these important points.

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First, the pattern of Paul's teaching is informative here. A life lived for Christ must be based upon a faith built upon knowing who we are in Christ. Our perspectives and practices in life will follow what we believe to be true. There can be no right living without a soul shaped by right theology or as R. C. Lucas puts it, "There can be no substantial goodness without godliness." This may be what was at the heart of Paul's concern for the Colossians; that any corruption or dilution in their understanding of doctrine would have a detrimental effect on how they lived.

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A second important point is that we must recognize that nothing we do is separate or independent from our presence with Christ. Just because we do not physically see or sense His presence does not mean God is unaware of the essence of our lives. Listen to the first five verses of Psalm 139. *"O Lord, you have searched me and **known** me! You **know** when I sit down and when I rise up; you **discern** my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are **acquainted** with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you **know** it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me."* The writer of this Psalm recognized the present reality of our lives before an all knowing God. Paul affirms this truth by teaching that all that we think and do is done before the face of God and in union with Christ. Therefore the believer is to conform thoughts, deeds, and even all of life to their identity in Christ.

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Another important point naturally follows. If everything we do has spiritual visibility then everything we do takes on a spiritual reality and is to be done for Christ and in His name. In Christ, there is a redeeming transformation that changes the very nature of all that we do. By acknowledging the rule and presence of Christ, all that we do in life, whether great or small is done with spiritual qualities. This transformation is to shape and govern our relationships in a way that brings the greatest glory to God and reflects the nature of Christ. This is to be true of believers both individually as well as corporately. For we share in His image and represent the transforming power of the Gospel to a lost world.

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A final point that should be noted is this. We are a chosen people. Paul's use of this title establishes God's holy calling to the church. They are to be His own people through Christ who is His chosen One. We are to live in a way that reflects the power of the gospel to transform those who were hostile to Him into image of His righteous Son.

But perhaps a caution is important here. Paul provides two lists of sins in verses 5 through 8 of this passage. As believers we are often good at avoiding major sins or at least their appearance. But often, the condition of our hearts is revealed by our words and thoughts. How do we respond when we are not treated as we think we deserve? What thoughts run through our minds when our children misbehave in public? What testimony do we leave with the world even when we have been treated unfairly?

The caution is this. As a chosen people we bear the responsibility to bear the image of Christ with great seriousness and care. We represent Christ to the world even if they do not know we are in Christ. Whether it is at home, at work, in our neighborhoods, or as we live out our lives within our communities. We live before others and before Christ. Even when no one is watching, we live before Christ and develop patterns and habits that are not easily broken. So let our hearts be grieved when we fail to honor God and reflect the image of Christ before others. And let us rejoice when our lives and our worship are lived in a way that reflects Christ, so that together we may rise up in praise and thanksgiving to Jesus Christ their Lord.

[closing prayer]