

Sermon Series:

New Life in Christ

A study of the book of Colossians



NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

(Colossians 1:1-2:7) Becky Douglass

John 3:16 – I don't know how many times I have taught that verse to children over the years. How many of you learned that verse as a child and can still say it almost without thinking?

I often add verse 17 to it these days and teach it in the NIV version:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16,17)

There is a reason why it is so popular. It sums up so much about the Gospel. It all starts with God's love. We didn't ask God to save us – He initiated it all on His own out of His love for us. Salvation comes through the Son, who is freely sent and freely given. All we are asked to do is to turn to God, believe and accept His gift. God responds by taking us out of the way of death and giving us His life, eternal life.

I have come to appreciate as I study the Bible that the promise of eternal life – God's life – is more than just something I will experience someday when I die. Instead, it is a quality of life I can know here on earth, today. It is the new life that comes to us in Christ in which we are called to walk every minute of every day. God desires for us to experience eternal life right now.

Over the past couple of months, we've been looking at what Paul wrote to the Colossians about that life in Christ. Next week we will take a break from Colossians as we remember the climax of Jesus' life and His final days on earth. Before we do that, however, I thought it would be helpful to take the opportunity to review some of the things we've discovered so far in Colossians. Paul is reminding them of the realities of their new life in Christ. Just what are those realities?

A New Start – *forgiven and freed in Christ*

Firstly, in Christ, we have been given a New Start. We are all sinners and in slavery to sin. We all know the weight of sin that is not forgiven and cleansed. But Christ is God's *“beloved Son who purchased our freedom and forgave our sin”*. (1:14) With the past taken care of, we have a clean slate and *“He has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault”*. (1:22) As I read these verses, I am reminded of the book 'Pilgrim's Progress'. In the beginning, when Christian comes to the cross and accepts all that Christ did there for him, his burden of sin, which he had carried all

his life, falls off his back, and he discovers freedom he never knew possible. This is our new start.

A New King – Christ, the supreme one

We also come under a New King. *“For he (the Father) has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son ...”* (1:13) We are not only freed from bondage to sin, but we are also removed from the power of Satan who seeks to bend us to his will and ultimately destroy us. Once we were enemies of God, but now we have been made subjects under His rule. We are under the Kingship of Christ who loves us is all-powerful and fully able to protect us from Satan and bring us wholeness and peace.

Christ our King *“is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation ...”* (1:15). Paul goes on to lay out the greatness of Christ, the creator and redeemer of all the earth. He is above all and holds all together. And we are now citizens of His kingdom and members of His new creation, the church. As a good king, he constantly seeks the welfare of His people and protects them. He cares for His own.

A New Family – brothers and sisters in Christ

We are not only citizens of a new kingdom but also members of a new family, the family of God. Before we were saved, our sinfulness came between God and us, but also between other people and us. But now, God has broken down the barriers between us and brought all who look to Him into His family. We are *“God’s holy people ... who are faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.”* (1:2) We are not alone, but we are part of a family in which there are unity and equality.

Even as Christians, this love and unity don’t come naturally. We need to be bound together by *“the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you”*. (1:8) As we grow closer to God, we grow closer to each other. We are able to open ourselves to each other and forgive each other (because we are still learning to love and we don’t always get it right!) and are able to help each other in this new life in Christ.

As citizens in Christ’s kingdom and members of His family, we have a new identity. This is our identity and status. This is who we are. But how are we to live in this new identity?

A New Source of Life – Christ in you

God doesn’t leave us to work it out on our own; He has given us a new source of life. As we turn away from our sin and to God and accept His salvation, we are born again with His life. As John says, *“Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life”*. (John 3:6) This life finds its source in the life of Christ within us. This life enables us to live as His people and be transformed into His likeness.

Jesus, in the night before His death, said:

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

In this picture, we are the branches, and Christ is the vine. As branches, we need the life of the vine flowing through us. Can a dead branch grow and produce fruit? No. Can a dead

person walk? Or love? Or make righteous choices? No. We need the life of God to live the life of God's people.

A New Kind of Life – walk in Christ

But receiving God's life is just the beginning. We are born again, to use Jesus' words, into a new life in Christ. *"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him ..."* (2:6). We receive Christ Jesus by faith – not by any merit of our own. We walk or live in Him by faith as well. Day by day, we trust Him to be changing us into His likeness and enabling us to live as He intends us to live.

Remember what Paul prayed for the Colossians?

"We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honour and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better." (1:9,10)

It is a process of knowing and doing God's will in increasing closeness to Him. It is a process only possible because of Christ's life within us, fuelling our growth, giving us insight into His will and drawing us closer to Himself. If we are His, growth is inevitable, we can never stay the same.

But if you are like me, you don't find it easy to do the right thing. It is much easier to follow the world around us and our own hearts' natural desires, doing what we think is best rather than what God knows is best for us. We give in to the same temptation as Adam and Eve. We stumble along, wanting to do better but failing most of the time.

The other danger is thinking that it is about our own ability to change and do what is right. We can become legalistic, setting high standards and working hard to fulfil them. Here we fall into the same trap that the Galatians did whom Paul had to reprimand by saying, *"How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?"* (Galatians 3:3) The truth is that we can no more grow as a Christ by trying harder than we can save ourselves in the first place.

So what do we do? How do we walk in Christ, becoming more like Him and reflecting His character as His people? Many years ago, I heard a saying that I have kept coming back to over the years. It is something of which I have to remind myself often. It is simply an admission of my dependence on God and His promise that He will do what I cannot.

*I can't – You never said I could.
You can – You always said You would.*

I can't live the Christian life – I can't walk the Christian walk – on my own. And God never intended me to do so. Right from creation, it has always been His plan that He would live in and through us. He planned that His Spirit in communion with our spirit would be the guiding force of our lives. But when Adam and Eve turned their back on God and stopped trusting Him to know what was best for them, they broke the bond between them and God. And that bond is broken in us before we turn back to God. When we turn to Him in repentance and trust, He removes the barriers between us. He begins to build the bonds between His Spirit and our spirit again so that He can once again be the guiding force in our lives.

I can't change myself. I can't walk in Him. He knows that and never expects me to do it by trying harder. All He expects of me is that I trust Him and allow Him to work in my life. In each and every situation I find myself in, I can turn to Him and admit that I can't be the person He made me to be. I am too damaged by sin and influenced by the world around me.

Many times I don't even know what is the right thing to do. And I still have a strong tendency to want to go my own way. But as I surrender to Him and His work in my life, I can trust Him to show me what is right and enable me to do it. It doesn't mean I never do the wrong thing. Thank God for His forgiveness!

I certainly don't stand here before you as someone who has got this all figured out. I have to remind myself of this often. And I can fall into both traps – thinking I know better than God or thinking I can do it by trying harder. But over time, often without me even realising it, He is changing me into His likeness. He is perfecting me, enabling me to walk in Him and using me in His work.

A New Goal in Life – *perfect in Christ*

And that is the goal of all of this. To be “*perfect in our relationship to Christ*”. (1:28) Not ‘perfect’ in that we stop growing and learning, but ‘perfect’ in that we are exactly where God wants us to be in this season of our lives. This will look different for every person in every season of their life. We are not measured against an external standard, but God who knows our hearts knows when we are abiding in Him and allowing Him to work in our lives as He desires. Conversely, He knows when we are rebelling against Him or trying to do it in our own strength – both signs of pride in ourselves and our ability to know and do what is best.

Our ultimate ‘perfection’ will come one day when we are with God and sin has been finally removed. What a day that will be! But even now, we can know a level of ‘perfection’ in our relationship with Christ as we open ourselves to Him and allow Him to work in us. This is what we are working towards; this is the goal of those who are His people.

“My Heart is Filled with Thankfulness”

Over 2,000 years ago, God sent His Son into the world to save us. Even though we didn't deserve it, didn't even want it. Christ came to break the power of sin over us, to provide forgiveness and give us a new start. God transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son and made us a part of His family, giving us a new identity. Now He enables us to live or to walk as His people through the power of the indwelling Christ through His Spirit.

How can we respond to this? Two ways – firstly through opening our selves to Him and allowing Him to work in us, trusting Him to do what is best and surrendering our lives to Him; and secondly by looking to Him in thankfulness. As we remind ourselves of His love for us and work in us, what else can we do?