

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Colossians 3:1-17 on February 8, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Profile

Today's Focus: Profile Restored

“Be Who God Has Made You to Be... Part of His Loving Family”

In the name of Jesus Christ, our all-sufficient Savior. Amen.

I'm going to start by just catching you up with what's going on in this series. And remember that you can always go on our website to watch or read any of our sermon messages in case you missed them or you want to share them with someone you love or care about.

So far in Colossians chapters one and two, the Apostle Paul has taught us about how Jesus Christ is so much more than just a good example for us to try and follow. He is actually God and our all-sufficient Savior whose perfect profile is given to each of us through baptism. At the end of chapter two last week we then heard Paul warn us not to let our perfect profile in Christ become compromised which can happen if we start to think there's anything religious looking that we need to do to become acceptable to God. What a disaster spiritually it would be to let our perfect spiritual profile in Christ become compromised!

But of course this happens sometimes. We have a perfect Savior, yet we remain imperfect people susceptible to compromise. We let our guard down and our faith gets hacked. So what do we do when our spiritual identity gets stolen? What do we do when we allow our integrity to become compromised? Does God restore us not *if* but *when* we fail? How do we then move forward in life? How do I deal with other people when I discover they have sins and shortcomings too?

Those are the questions now starting in Colossians chapter 3 that Paul addresses. In chapter 3 today the Holy Spirit wants to inspire us to see how our identity in Jesus Christ is restored and how we can live out our lives in relationship with other people. Now a quick disclaimer. We've got a chunk of verses today that could easily be its own sermon series. I encourage you to spend time this week reading through it. But there's one really big idea that I want to help you see in it today and it's this: **Be Who God Has Made You to Be... Part of His Loving Family!**

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on 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 now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Now how does that make you feel? In my study this week I tried to imagine that the Apostle Paul was writing this part of the letter directly to me. Like he was saying, "Ok Ben, put to death whatever belongs to *your* earthly nature." So maybe pretend for a moment that you just got this as an email personally sent to you and here's what the inspired apostle of Jesus Christ says to you: ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. What are you thinking about when you read that? How does that make you feel?

I wouldn't be surprised if there's a part of you that hears this and thinks, "But Mr. Apostle Paul, whoah...did I hear you right? *Put to death*? Because of these things *the wrath of God* is coming? I mean what you call the inclinations of my earthly nature, I'd like to call the unique expressions of my individuality. I'm supposed to pronounce a death sentence on that? Am I supposed to believe that the wrath of God is coming because of how I choose to express myself?

And besides this is the week that the latest Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue is coming out. It's right there in the checkout lane at every grocery store. And hardly anyone believes anymore that sex is a gift of God reserved just for married people or that lustful thoughts are somehow sinful. Marriage itself is so old-fashioned. It's evolving. And pornography, it's everywhere. They say the average age at which kids today are exposed to it is down to age 8 whereas before the internet it was age 13. And don't you know what else is happening this week? It's the great American holiday this week, Valentine's Day, and everybody's talking about the movie 50 Shades of Grey which will be playing right here in this very theater just in time for us to indulge our imagination about what pain and pleasure might feel like."

Friends, I understand how confrontational this is to hear Paul say, "Put to death" whatever belongs to your earthly nature. It confronts me too. Because I have to admit those aren't playful words as if we're all just in a game where the goal is to go to church to feel good about ourselves and then go home. They're marching orders as if we're in a war and the goal is to find out how to win the victory over the sins which condemn us and call down upon our heads the wrath of God. It's a spiritual war where the easy path that our sinful natures want to embrace is to cozy up to our pet sins, to make excuses for them as if they were just our self-expressions, and to say things like, "It can't be wrong if it feels right." "It can't be wrong if no one gets hurt." "It can't be wrong when that's just the way I am."

But you see here's the big lie that we need to excavate from our hearts. If you are in Christ, then this is no longer "just the way you are" anymore. No, this is not "who God has made you

to be". In Christ God has made you to be part of his loving family. So Paul says, "Put to death whatever belongs to your sinful nature" because in fact you've already died! Did you catch how he said this? It's meant to get our attention. Right before he says, "Put to death your sinful nature" he says, ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* In other words, "You died...here's who you really are in Christ...so now *put these things to death.*"

Ah now if you're like me you want to know, "*When exactly did I die? How did I die?*" Well Paul's talking about what happened when you were baptized (and if you're sitting here today and you're thinking "But I haven't been baptized" or "I wonder if I'm baptized" by all means I'd love to talk to you about this free gift of God!). Through baptism at the same time you were born again, a part of you also died. The old you. The sinful nature you. Your old self with its earthly desires. It was drowned. Killed. Buried. Sounds dramatic but this is terrific news!

Remember Nathan's sermon from Colossians chapter 2 a couple weeks ago. He talked about how you were buried with Christ through baptism. What this means is that all the thoroughly sinful expressions of your personal spiritual profile became *his* so that all his perfect expressions of obedience could become *yours*. Your greed. Your lies. Your lust. Dead and buried with Christ. And just as you were buried with Christ through baptism into death, so also God made you alive with Christ who rose from the dead and who now rules from heaven as the commander in chief of the universe and who is one day coming back to take us to be with him in glory. Paul says, "You died...and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." Mine too. Praise GOD!

Part of what this means though too is that much of who we really are remains hidden here this side of heaven. We won't always see each other as people who are continually living our lives in harmony with God's will. Unfortunately we won't always see ourselves as people who are part of God's loving family. So the battle is ongoing for each of us. "Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature" will always be a part of our marching orders here on earth. But because who we really are is part of God's family, we can fight this battle as people already possessing everything we need and with the confidence of the final victory handed to us in Jesus! So **Be who God has made you to be... part of his loving family.**

Notice how else Paul says this, ⁷ *You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.* ⁸ *But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.* ⁹ *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices* ¹⁰ *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* ¹¹ *Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

Again, *You have taken off your old self with its practices*¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. In other words, like a dirty, worn out set of work clothes, your old self has been cast aside and you've now been clothed with a new self that is being continually restored into the image of your Creator. Who has God made you to be? Part of his loving family—fully forgiven, fully loved! The perfect image of God that was once lost is restored through faith in Jesus Christ!

Have any of you seen the show *Fixer Upper* on HGTV? A married couple named Chip and Joanna help clients pick out an old, derelict, foreclosed home that they will renovate. Sometimes the houses that their clients pick are in such bad shape that I think, "They ought to just bulldoze that sucker to the ground." But they never do. It's as if they enjoy renovating what looks worthless into something that leaves people speechless. Somehow they see past the appearance of the building to its ultimate potential. Yet to reach its potential almost inevitably what they need to do is begin by gutting that old house down and stripping it down to the studs. They tear out the old parts that are worthless and they salvage what they can save. And in doing so they are able to refurbish many of the features of the house, sometimes repurposing things to serve a grander purpose than they ever did before. And the end result is that what was once a fixer upper becomes a show stopper.

Friends, that's what God has done for us in Christ. Each of us was a total fixer upper. Actually it's more like we were each a foreclosed and condemned building, bulldozer-of-wrath-ready! But in Christ God chose us to be his own. Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection the Holy Spirit has renovated our hearts and restored to us the image of God so that when God sees us now, what does he see? He doesn't see the fixer upper. He sees the show stopper {show pic}.



Just imagine if we saw ourselves in this same way...or we would choose to see other fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in this way!¹² *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved* [Listen to how God feels about us!], *clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* [To have compassion is to be genuinely concerned about people from the heart. To be kind is to seek what is good and helpful to someone else. Humility is putting yourself below others so that you seek their welfare above your own. And gentleness doesn't mean you're a pushover. It means you aren't harsh, controlling, and abusive. Patience here has the idea of especially holding back when someone tries to provoke you to anger or seek revenge.]¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance*

against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Friends, this week is Valentine's Day. Whether you're married, dating, single, or divorced...it's inescapable that you're going to hear many mixed messages about love. Right now listening to an ad on Spotify I'm being told that if I really love my wife I'll get her chocolate dipped strawberries. But the funny thing is I can't help but think that sounds like a great idea because of how much I would enjoy eating those strawberries too! Even as I consider my bride whom I love, I'm tempted to make my valentine's expression of love for her at least in part of a selfish act directed back towards myself. How are you tempted to bend love back to yourself? It's exactly that tendency that God calls us to put to death and instead to put into practice what true love is—God's kind of love.

God's kind of love that we hear about in these verses isn't a love where you go, "What can I get from this person to feel good about myself?" It's the kind of love that says, "What can I give of myself for the good of this person?" This kind of love, this radically selfless, giving, no strings attached, sacrificial, from the heart kind of love only comes about when you first experience it as part of God's loving family. After all this is the kind of love God has shown you in Christ. So **Be Who God Has Made You to Be...Part of His Loving Family.** Amen.