

Colossians 3:11-4:1 // Let the Message of Christ Dwell Among You Richly

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[0 : 0 0] Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 to chapter 4 verse 1 and that's found on page 1184 in the church bibles so that's Colossians chapter 3 verse 12 to chapter 4 verse 1 on page 1184.

Therefore as God's chosen people holy and dearly loved clothe yourselves with compassion kindness humility gentleness and patience bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone forgive as the Lord forgave you and over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace and be thankful 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 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 wives submit yourselves to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them children obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord fathers do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged slaves obey your earthly masters in everything and do it not only when their eyes on you and to curry their favor but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord whatever you do work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord not for human masters since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward it is the Lord Christ you are serving anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs and there is no favoritism masters provide your slaves of what is right and fair because you know that you also have a master in heaven this is the word of the Lord thanks be to God

George thanks a lot for reading if we've not met I'm Martin Ayers the lead pastor here and it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Colossians chapter 3 if they've fallen closed mine has too it's page 1184 so you could have a look at that because it's important to us our conviction as a church is that the Bible is God's word to us and so my aim in the next the time we've got together now in the sermon is just to bring out what's there rather than be stuck talking about something different so having the Bible there is great and you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful as we go along just to follow the points as we go and let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word let's pray we praise you father God for your wisdom for your grace and kindness for your gospel plan in Christ for the nations that gives us confident hope for the future and we ask that your spirit will be with us now moving us to set our minds and hearts on things above that we would live lives that are for our good and for your glory amen so we've reached this point in our series in Colossians this letter where we're thinking about change in what ways does God call us to change and how do we change how do we make progress and whether or not people can change is a question that our world asks of people one character that helps us think about that in our culture is Gru in Despicable Me he at the start of the movie is a sadistic villain with the ambition to become the greatest greatest supervillain of all time by stealing the moon but then he picks up these three girls from an orphanage who he thinks can help him get his hands on a weapon that he needs and then he sees their need for a dad and his relationship with them starts to change him and by the end of the movie you find that he realizes he would if he's going to miss their dance performance that wouldn't be worth having the moon for missing that and you realize yeah Gru has changed he's a different person now but has he changed this is the thing with Gru can he keep the old Gru down or actually is he still gonna is he is the old Gru gonna keep rearing his ugly head and that was the theme of Farrell Williams recent song double life about Gru and I think we're going to try and I have a clip of it let's see it's time for me it's time for me it's time for me it's time for me watch watch watch watch watch watch watch watch watch watch

watch So, who will you be tonight? And who will Gru be tonight? Well, in the Christian life, we can sometimes find ourselves asking the same question of ourselves.

You know, we receive Jesus and we have the initial joy and thankfulness that we've discovered. Jesus died for me. And I'm loved by God and I'm a Christian now.

[6 : 32] And then our experience becomes frustrating with this ongoing struggle with sin. As though we're leading a double life. And, you know, we walk into church and with our Christian friends and we have this veneer of being transformed.

And then we find that just through life, the same struggles keep coming back to us. Well, we come to Colossians and the Apostle Paul is writing to this young church in Colossae.

And we've seen that he is convinced that there is hope for progress in the Christian life. We saw that in his prayer in chapter 1, which gave us this real indication of where he's going in the letter. In chapter 1, verses 9 to 14, he says he's not stopped praying for the Colossians that they would live a life that is worthy of the Lord. A fruitful life. A life that pleases the Lord in every way.

Paul anticipates that by growing in the gospel, the news about Jesus, you can be transformed to live a life that pleases God. And then Paul told us about his ministry.

[7 : 33] If you just go back a page, in chapter 1, verse 28, he describes his own ministry, which we access today through the pages of Scripture, as one with a clear outcome in mind at the end of verse 28, that we would be presented fully mature in Christ.

And how does he go about that? Verse 28, Christ is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

So how does it happen? Well, we started to see how it works last week in chapter 3, verses 1 to 4.

And it comes as we fill our minds with spiritual reality about our past, our present, and our future.

I'm not saying this is easy. It's God who does that work in us, and we have to be patient in it. And, you know, I wish that, you know, when I got ordained as a minister and the bishop put his hands on me, some kind of transformation had occurred that meant I don't struggle anymore.

But as a fellow struggler, I say, chapter 3, verses 1 to 4, is key for our lives as we see this past, present, and future. That in the past, if you're a Christian, you died.

[8 : 52] Chapter 3, verse 3, you died. And your life is now hidden in Christ in God. There's the present for us, that we have a new life, a risen spiritual life.

And Jesus has ascended, he's by God's right hand, and our life is now hidden with his life in heaven. And then we have a new future, verse 4, when Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with him in glory.

And so, verses 1 and 2 of chapter 3, we are to set our hearts on things above, and set our minds on things above, on Jesus and where he is. And Paul wants us to get into that mindset to see that we're not living a double life.

Those struggles that we have every day, with temptation, with habits, with besetting sins, it's not that there's a double life, it's the old self that is already dead, coming back.

And we are to say, that's not who I am anymore. And we are to be who we are, leading a new life that God has given to us. You're like a footballer who has now signed for a new team.

[9 : 58] And you're being told, wear your new shirt, don't go back, don't go training with the old team. And he continues that in verse 12 this morning. Did you notice, just as he starts his instructions with the first verse we had read, he says, therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

Here is God getting us to grasp who we are now as Christians. And all around us, people don't know who they are. And if you don't know your identity in the world, you go through life, and whoever you're with, you're kind of with different people, you'll be a different person.

Because you're longing for other people's acceptance and other people's approval of you. And people struggle with that all around us. But in the Christian life, we're told by God, this is who you are.

You are chosen by me. I see you as holy, set apart for me. You are dearly loved by me. And knowing that, knowing who we are, liberates us and empowers us to be who we are, whoever we're with, to live distinctive lives that please our great Savior Jesus.

And Paul is saying here in this section, wear your new clothes that you've been given. And what we see this morning is how this can be played out in our relationships with other people.

[11 : 24] It transforms relationships. So our first point is get dressed in the loving virtues of Christ. Have a look with me again from halfway through verse 12.

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you. It's a picture for us of the church family reshaped by our faith in Jesus.

And Paul assumes here that we won't be sinless. I think that's very striking. He doesn't expect that his church community will be one without sin. His big concern seems to be how we will respond when other people sin.

When we find the people around us in church to be difficult people. And if you've not been coming to St. Silas very long, maybe you're in a phase with this church where you think, These are great people.

[12 : 30] I want to spend time with these people. Well, if you spend a long time with us, over time you'll realize, you'll discover that at St. Silas, some of us are very difficult people.

In fact, quite a lot of us here are very difficult people. And that's okay. That is good because it allows us to put on the compassion of Christ for those around us.

The humility and gentleness of Christ. The patience of Christ to bear with each other. And even the power to offer forgiveness to others.

I think of an old pastor, an older pastor who said to me that his experience had been in church life that far more of the problems in church life are caused by self-righteousness than by sin.

By people being unwilling to forgive others. When we feel self-righteous and we see someone else's sin and we think, I would never have done that.

[13 : 34] I can't believe they did that. And we're on our way to thinking, I've got the right not to forgive them for that. And that's how the world works, isn't it?

I mean, we see in our neighborhood, we meet people and you meet people and you meet someone else. And then you find out that those people don't speak to each other. They avoid each other. Because something was said years ago that went wrong. And the solution is avoidance. Just avoiding one another. And it was in the news just last week of students talking about how some students say that they have this underlying fear that partly shapes their experience of student life. That if they mess something up, if they do something wrong by the values of their peer group, they'll be cancelled, excluded, and there'll be no way back. That there's no opportunity for reconciliation and forgiveness in our culture.

Well, in the church, we offer forgiveness to one another. To people who do wrong against us. We seek reconciliation. And our power to do that comes in verse 13.

[14 : 48] Where God says, Forgive as the Lord forgave you. In other words, as we glimpse the wrong that he would have seen in us, that he had to forgive.

And that was very costly for him to forgive. And that he was glad to forgive. And freely has forgiven. So that enables us to reach out and offer forgiveness to other people when they've done wrong against us.

Then in verse 14, Paul says, Add to these clothes the overcoat. And over all these virtues, put on love. Which binds them all together in perfect unity.

So if you see a mechanic, you're taking your car for an MOT. Or you're a mechanic. Then your overclothes are tough. Ready for heavy manual work.

If you see a businessman, his overclothes are suave. Ready to impress. And if you see Christians, our overclothes are the clothes of a servant.

[15 : 55] Ready to love others like Jesus has loved us. And these clothes for God's new community, if we wear them practically, they make other people ask questions.

I've got a friend, Rene. I served in a church with him. And then we were at Bible college together. And Rene is an extremely clever, rational man. When we were at Bible college, Hebrew and Greek, he had this mastery of them.

He's just a really rational guy. He's got a big brain. But Rene became a Christian because he was invited in his 20s on a holiday that was run by Christians by a friend.

And he went because it was cheap, I think. I think it was an alcohol holiday or something. And he says, by the end of that holiday, he knew that the gospel was true. He knew that Christianity was true.

Because he could see from the way people treated each other and the way they were treating him, that transformation showed him that Jesus is real.

[17:01] So how will we grow into this? Our second point, grow joyfully together in the rich word of Christ. Let's pick things up again in verse 15. And I'm just going to pick out here, as we look down at 15 to 17, Notice how often Paul mentions gratitude and being thankful.

Verse 15, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Then in verse 16, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And verse 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.

So here are the marks of Christian maturity that we've seen all through this letter. Colossians, thankfulness, thankfulness, thankfulness. That as you grow in the Christian life, thankfulness and joy should grow in your heart and flow out from you in a way that other people can see.

And here Paul adds to that, that the peace of Christ reigns in our hearts. So in an anxious world, in an uncertain world, where there might be lots to worry about, what reigns in our hearts is that we have a peace with God in Christ.

[18:19] And it gives us a different perspective on what's going on. So how do we get there? Well, we get there to that maturity by being steeped in God's word.

Verse 16, Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly. It's very striking language, isn't it, that Paul uses. That there's nothing dry or cerebral in Paul's mind from being Bible people.

It's the language of the word dwelling in us in a way that is lavish, that is sumptuous, that is opulent, that is lush, as the word of Christ fills us and it stays with us.

I was thinking of when, some years ago, we were visited here by a Canadian bishop, Charlie Masters, those of you who can remember him. We interviewed him up front and as he spoke in his interview, just Bible verses just kept coming out of him, as though he was preaching, but it was just that every time he was speaking about something, he just remembered a Bible verse.

And the call here is to have that ambition that the word of Christ would dwell richly, not just for ourselves, but for the people around us, so that we would be in word ministry for them.

[19:35] If you look at verse 16, this is written, remember, to a church, written to a whole church, not to the minister, as we would think of them. 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.

And what's extraordinary here is that the words that Paul uses here for all of us, if you're a Christian, teach and admonish one another with all wisdom are exactly the same words that he, the apostle, uses in chapter 1, verse 28 that we've just seen to describe his ministry.

Paul, the apostle, the eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection, the appointed preacher to the Gentiles of the gospel to make it known, says, I proclaim Christ, admonishing and teaching with all wisdom.

And then he says to us as forgiven people in Christ, teach and admonish one another in Christ, in all wisdom. This is the move in church life from the ministry of the few to the ministry of the pew, as it's sometimes said.

That if as a church, what proportion? 30% of us, 50% of us could grasp this vision for us, this call on our lives, so that we would pray before we come into church on a Sunday, or before, when we're on our way to the small group, we would pray that God would be at work through us to serve the people around us by giving us opportunities to speak true, helpful, encouraging words to them about Jesus, so that we are a means by which the word of Christ dwells in them richly, and they grow up in him in thanks and joy and peace.

[21:35] And Paul says that's to be our aim when we sing in verse 17. He says singing to God, so our singing is vertical, singing to God with gratitude in our hearts. And in verse 16, our singing is horizontal.

We sing to one another. We sing God's word. And there are all sorts of different ideas about why we sing at church and what we're aiming for with the songs at church, all kinds of views and opinions across a church about what makes for a good sing on a Sunday and what we would call that.

But God's aim is here for our singing that we sing songs full of the message of Christ so that we set our hearts on him and we fill our minds with him and what flows out of us all through the week is a life of worship, joyful, willing, thankful service of Jesus helped by the singing that we did together on

a Sunday.

So that's our second point. Grow joyfully together in the rich word of Christ. And in the rest of the chapter we see how that thankfulness can express itself in our homes and families and in our workplaces.

In the first century, for many people, those would have been the same place. You would have perhaps lived in a large household where you'd have family members who live with you and servants also who work there and who live there as well.

[23 : 09] But we're going to look at them separately given that for most of us, for many of us, family and work are different spheres. So our next point, place family life under the rule of Christ.

Paul addresses wives, husbands, children, fathers. and each just gets a line, a principle.

We might feel we want more details, more do's and don'ts. Help me out, Paul. What does this look like in my life? But there's freedom from God in just giving us principles that we can take away and reflect on and work out in the places that he's given us, the relationships he's given us.

He starts with wives then and verse 18, wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. So this is an instruction to the wives.

Submission is something for a wife to freely volunteer to her husband, not something for a husband to demand. And the language is to lots of us confronting and we know it can be misused.

[24 : 22] So then how do we approach this as God's good word? Well, we can remember every Christian is called to be submissive, to submit ourselves to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

All of us do that, men and women. And every Christian gets our example of submission from Jesus. He's our Lord, but he submitted himself to his heavenly Father because he loves his Father.

And then we find here that in God's good design for marriage, he gives distinctive roles. He says to wives, give your husband the space to lead you and care for you.

He will have to give an account to God for how he has cared for you and how he's used the responsibilities God has given to him. So let him take that responsibility.

Lots of us will spend time in workplaces, in schools, in organizations where we see people have equal value, but they take on different roles.

[25 : 32] And God says, in a marriage, both husband and wife are equally valuable in his sight and they have different roles. just as when a couple dance.

My friend was telling me this week about Lindy Hop dancing. Lindy Hop. I have watched some. It's brilliant. And you can do it in Glasgow with Glasgow Jitterbugs as long as it doesn't clash with your home group night.

And it's a dance where the two partners look brilliant together if the man takes the lead and if the woman lets him take the lead so that her moves flourish around him.

And Colossians chapter 3 here sees that kind of flourishing happening in a marriage relationship.

And plenty of married couples can find ways to work on this together where the wife is a more mature Christian than her husband, where she's got more energy, where she's more competent. It doesn't mean that the wife can't give her opinion. It doesn't mean that they shouldn't disagree with their husband. In a healthy marriage, there will surely be strong views expressed, there'll be conversation, they will work together as a team, there'll be disputation, there'll be disagreement, and the couple will be talking together, praying together, planning together, and the wife will submit to her husband's lead.

[27 : 02] Then he turns to the husband. Have a look at verse 19. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

So first, let's notice the negative. He says, do not be harsh with them. And in any marriage, a husband might use his words or his strength harshly in moments of misjudgment or through failure. failure. And he might not even be aware of that. And maybe one of the conversations to have from this morning, from today, is for those of us who are husbands, to ask our wives, are there times when you feel that I'm harsh with you, or that I've been harsh?

And if our wife gives us an example of that, that she found harsh, are we willing to listen to that and to repent? You then get other situations where things are significantly worse than that, where a husband is actually using his strength abusively or coercively against his wife.

And there is no place for that in a marriage. If you're struggling in that kind of situation, then bring it into the light by speaking to somebody about it. And you could talk to one of the ministry staff here in confidence if you need to chat to someone about that.

[28 : 31] Those are the negatives. But then the positive, husbands are called to love their wives. And Jesus, he's our example of submission in the way he submits to his father.

He's also our example of the loving husband in the way that he loved his people, the church, his bride. He is the bridegroom for the church and he sacrificially loved the church.

He came and found us and he died for us. So husbands, we're called to step up and take up this responsibility in our marriage relationship of sacrificial love.

That people could see in the way that we love our wives a glimpse of Christ's love for his people. We're to take the time to ask ourselves, how can I make sure that my wife is joyful in Christ and secure in life?

How can I make sure that she knows that she is appreciated and cherished so that she goes out into the world in strength because of that security? The husband is to take a lead spiritually in working out how to aim in life for him and his wife to be growing in prayer, growing in knowledge of Christ, growing in gospel priorities for their lives and investing in church fellowship as a family.

[30 : 01] And of course we're all works in progress at this. These are high bars and lots of us will feel convicted that we fall short of them. But we need to remember that God is gracious and kind with us when we fall short.

And if you're finding this quite challenging and awkward, just remember that my in-laws are here and I'm having to preach this sermon. Honestly.

And the husband doesn't wait until he's got a great wife to do all of this. That's not how Jesus loves his church, is it? Rather, we're to keep setting our heart on Christ and our mind on Christ and find from him the strength to day by day keep loving your wife, appreciating her, thanking God for her, protecting and providing for her, and setting the pace spiritually in your home for you both.

Then he addresses children, verse 20. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

So Paul assumes that children are part of the church family. Sunday school or junior church, Sunday club, is not just a holding pen for children until they make their own minds up whether they want to be a Christian.

[31 : 31] Now as a church, the children God has given to us in our church family, we pray that there'll never be a day when they don't know God as their heavenly father and know that Jesus died for them.

I take it here that the children here includes youth, it's people still under their parents care in their home, and Paul is assuming here they're part of the church today.

They're not just the church of tomorrow, they are part of the church for today, being encouraged here to grow to maturity as disciples. And parents, I wonder if that means sometimes we can set the bar too low in the way we're raising our kids, where we might think, oh it's so hard growing up in today's world, if my kid can just manage to get through to adult and say they're a Christian, we've won.

And the ambition here is for children to be godly, to be authentic disciples themselves, seeking to choose to grow to maturity.

And he's picturing here with this principle, children who hear their parents' instruction, a command from their parents, and they roll their eyes and they think to themselves, honestly, how on earth did my mum and dad get this far in life and be this clueless?

[32 : 58] How can they be this out of touch? And he says to them, even in those moments, obey your parents. Why? Because you want to please Jesus.

Children, Jesus died for you. He rose again to be your Lord. So set your mind on him, set your hearts on him, so that you want to please him, and that can be your motivation to obey your mum and dad.

And then he turns to fathers, verse 21. Fathers, do not embitter your children, them, or they will become discouraged. So those of us who are dads, a father is not to be harsh or heavy-handed or hypercritical of their son or daughter so that they end up feeling unloved or insecure or desperate to leave home and break free.

Now sometimes in our culture we have the opposite problem. We have parents around us who don't feel they have any authority over their children. children, even to command them, to say no to them.

And there's no discipline. And I take it from the Bible that when children grow up in that kind of environment, it will not be good for them. They will grow up unhappy because they will think they're the center of the universe because no one ever said no to them.

[34 : 22] There's been no boundaries. And God says, parents have authority over their children. But he warns the dads, I take it, parents, but he warns the dads, don't go too far the other way.

Don't leave your child with a picture of fatherhood that is cold, that is harsh. We want to strive to be dads like our heavenly father is for us.

And he is full of generosity and loving delight towards us and absolutely committed to doing everything for our good and for our encouragement.

So that's our third point. Place family life under the rule of Christ. And finally, today, make working life a way that you worship Christ.

Now what you hear about slaves and masters here from verse 22, and we're not to think of what we naturally think of today, which is the slave trade, which is an evil that is condemned by the Bible in 1 Timothy chapter 1.

[35 : 31] But Paul's simply not concerned here with the rights and wrongs of slavery in the Roman world. Rather, he's addressing slaves and masters who have become Christians, and he's calling them to see their roles as ways that they can please their master, the Lord Jesus.

And our time has gone this morning to look at this in detail. But I looked at these verses with a Christian I was reading the Bible with. We read Colossians, me and a Christian lawyer, when I was in Beijing.

And we got to this bit, and we looked at this teaching, and he'd never read it before. And he said to me at the end of our meeting, he said, well then, everyone should hope that their boss becomes a Christian.

And every boss should hope that their workers become a Christian. And I thought that was an amazing thing to see from this passage, that if Christians are living this out, even if you're not a Christian, and you think, you know, I hate what Christians believe about the claims of Jesus and about how you do life.

You would still think if you're a boss, but I hope the people who work for me become Christians. Or if you're a work, you think, but I hope my boss becomes a Christian because of this.

[36 : 57] Because Paul says, if you're employed, you can make your act, or make your work a place of worship of Jesus. So that even the mundane tasks, even the unnoticed tasks, become jobs that have dignity, ways that you can glorify Jesus.

And if you're a boss, you are to remember that you're not the boss. Even if you're very senior at work, even if you own the business, even if you work in a place where everyone listens to what you have to say.

Chapter 4, verse 1 says, remember you've got a boss, your master in heaven. And however else other people treat their workers in your industry, the Lord Jesus is looking for you to provide for your workers and to provide them with what is right and what is fair.

So Paul has painted a picture for us of the spiritually mature life. And it is rubber-hits-the-road Christianity. It's about character. It's about relationships being restored.

He says, know that you are chosen, know that you are holy, know that you are dearly loved, and put on the clothes that are fitting for who you are.

[38 : 21] Let's pray together. Just a moment of quiet to reflect, perhaps on a verse that we particularly want to reflect on, God having spoken to us today.

Father God, we thank you that you are a restorer of relationships. May you be at work in our minds and hearts set on Christ.

And may you be at work through us to encourage others that the word of Christ will dwell among us richly, that we will clothe ourselves with the new self in your strength, in our church family, in our homes, in our places of work.

For Jesus' name's sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we've heard...