

Living as God's New People Part 3

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- [0 : 0 0] Thank you, Graham, for reading. Hello, good evening. My name is Jack. I'm a ministry trainee here at St Silas. And as we start looking at God's word together, I'm just going to pray for us.
- Father God, we ask that you would be speaking to us by a word this evening. Please give us receptive hearts that want to listen to what you have to say.
- Please help us to better understand your son, Jesus, and what he has done for us and what that means for us. In Jesus' name, amen. I wonder if you ever felt that church can be very underwhelming.
- If you do feel that way, you're probably not the first person to have felt that way. And if you've never felt that way, I'm sorry for putting the idea into your head. So hopefully you never feel that way. And church stays feeling fresh and exciting and enjoyable.
- But sometimes it can be quite easy to ask yourself the question, why do I bother? It's got to say 7pm on a Wednesday evening. You've had a long day at work or a long day at uni.
- [1 : 0 6] And you think, I'd just like to chill out at home, have a glass of wine, watch some Netflix. But then you realise at 7.30, in 7.30, like half an hour, you've got a small group at church.
- And you think, ah, instead of enjoying my dinner, I had to wolf it down and get back out of the house quickly. Or maybe it's a Sunday morning feeling. You've had a late night the night before. It's 10am, it's time to go to church.
- And you're thinking, yeah, why do I bother? I could just stay at home and have a nice cup of coffee and chill out there. I guess there's a question there. Also, why do we feel that way?
- Perhaps it's our experience at church isn't what we think it should be. Not tonight, obviously the music has been great, but maybe the music, we might feel the music has been a bit average, or the teaching has been a bit uninspiring.
- Perhaps we have relationships with people who have become a bit frosty or a bit stale. And we might continue to go to church out of a duty to others because we feel like we should or we have to.
- [2 : 0 7] But the reality is that sometimes we just ask ourselves, why do I bother? And maybe it's your first time here, your first time here at St Silas, your first time at church.
- And I think that's a genuine question that it would be good to have an answer to, wouldn't it? Why do people go to church? What is church about? And what is it? What do you do? I think the first thing to say as part of that is church is not the building.
- Obviously, it's the building we're in St Silas. It's a great building. But really, it's mainly a rain shelter. And when I say church, I also don't mean a denomination like the Church of Scotland or the Church of England.
- When I say church, I mean people. So if you'd look around, everyone look around, actually, that would be quite a fun thing to do. Yeah, church is the people, the people who are here in this building.

So what does God have to say to us about church? Well, Paul, who's writing this letter to the Colossians, is writing to a brand new church. They have heard and believed the message, the good news of Jesus, and that Jesus is king, and that they have forgiveness of sin in him.

[3 : 15] And that kind of sounds great initially. It looks like not really that much has changed. They're still the same people, the same kind of normal, average people that they were before.

And then they have these people, what to make that worse, they have people coming in from the outside, telling them, although they have believed this message about Jesus, that they are not the real deal. If they really want to be spiritual, they need to be taking part in religious festivals, new moon festivals, or Sabbath festivals, that they need to have exceptional visions or experiences.

And they need to keep certain rules about what they eat and what they touch, particularly religious rules that they are allowed to do. And all of these things sound very spiritual, and so the Colossians are tempted away from the message that they heard at first.

And Paul is writing to them to try and convince them to stick to Jesus, not to go and do these things over here, because in Jesus, they have absolutely everything that they need.

When they trusted in Jesus, something amazing happened. All of reality changed for them. It changed who they are. They have a new life now, life with Christ.

[4 : 29] So when the false teachers come in and offer them all of these things, they can say, no, we already have what you are offering us, and more. And in the past couple of weeks, in the verses that we've just had read out to us, so particularly verses 9 to 14, we're focusing on verses 15 to 17 tonight.

We have seen that in Jesus, they have been made into a brand new humanity. They have a new self. And you see that there in verse 9. You've taken off your old self and put on a new self.

And consequently, they have also become a brand new community, not just new individuals, but a new community. And I wonder if Paul's saying to them, telling them about this, because I think these false teachers in Colossae, they would have looked down on church.

Church is too ordinary, or too mundane, and perhaps just a very small group of people meeting in someone's sitting room, just reading words from a scroll, I presume, they wouldn't have had books, doing some reading, they'd have singing a song, maybe Tychicus on the loot, if he remembers to bring it.

And they could be tempted to go and seek something elsewhere, something that looks more spiritual, and more impressive. Paul wants them to say no to that.

[5 : 52] Because the life that we have together in Christ is a truly spiritual life, not just as individuals, but together, to become more truly human in community.

I don't think I really need to convince you, at the moment anyway, of the importance of community, of being part of a new community. I think lockdown has proved to us that being together with other people is really, really important.

We had months and months to try out being alone, and it was rubbish, unsurprisingly. Lockdown left millions of people feeling more and more isolated.

Apparently, if you're in the age bracket, 18 to 24, we did a survey back in April, you're three times more likely to experience loneliness during lockdown. Lockdown was and is miserable.

Isolation is utterly miserable. And that's why it's great, actually, we can be back at church. So that's perhaps one reason why it's wrong to look down on just normal church. But there's another reason, which I think we get more from these verses, of why the false teachers would have been wrong to look down on church.

[7 : 04] And that is because Christians would be made into a brand new humanity that belongs to the perfect world. Christians, when people put their trust in Jesus, they become part of a heavenly community, a community that belongs to the world to come, that belongs to the perfect world that Jesus is making.

You can see that it's all over this chapter. So if you've got the yellow sheet, I do have it in front of you so you can look at it and refer to it as we go along. So chapter three, verse one, at the top of your sheet there.

Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Your life is now with Christ.

Verse three, you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. As Christians, we belong to the world to come, to this, the heavenly throne room where God is and that one day we'll be united with earth, that has been united with earth and is going to be more completely united with earth one day in the future.

And then again, three, verse 12, therefore is God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. I think it's quite easy to skim over that verse and think, yes, yes, we're loved by God.

[8 : 19] We're his holy people, his set aside people that belong to the world where God is. Not just a new worldly community, but a brand new heavenly community that belongs to the future world that God is making.

They don't need to chase after all of these things to become this community. They already are it. They don't need to do something special to make it happen. They are the new creation, heavenly community, the community that humanity was supposed to be.

Last season, I think I'm right in saying that Celtic won the Scottish Premiership. Can someone give me a nod? Darren's giving me a nod. If you'd like, we'll chat to Darren afterwards. And that group of players, that Celtic team for the season 2019, 2020, can say that they are, are, yes, still are, I suppose, the best team in Scotland.

Darren's nodding even more vigorously. It's what they are. There's no point someone over the summer telling them they had to do even more things to become the best team in Scotland. No, they already were it.

They were the best team in Scotland for that season. And so it's similar with us. We already are something. So actually, we've got lots of instructions here in verse 15 to 17.

[9 : 35] Lots of instructions. But all of these instructions are rooted in who we already are as Christians. They're not something new to kind of, some extra to add on. They come out from who we are.

So it's a bit like telling Celtic, go and play like the champions that you know that you are. We are the new heavenly community. And so these verses, verses 15 to 17, are telling us to live like it.

They're telling us to live like it. And so I've got a quick exercise for us to do just to help us start to get our heads around that. So look at verses 15 to 17 again. I'm going to read it out. I want you to try and spot things in common between each verse.

I'll give you a clue. There's two things that I think that each verse has in common. So have a look at the verses 15 to 17. Think, what does each verse have in common? Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you are 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.

[10 : 48] 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 the two things that I spotted, you probably spotted more.

Jesus, I thought, was number one. Christ, the peace of Christ and the message of Christ and then the name of the Lord Jesus there in verse 17. And the other one was thankfulness. Be thankful, gratitude in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father.

So we've been made like Christ in this new heavenly community. So as Christians we are called to make Christ the centre of all the things that we do together. And we're also to be grateful, to be thankful for the things that we have in him.

So let's dig down into the detail and have a look at what Paul exactly has to say to them. So verse 15, and that's our first point really, I mean we've had lots of points, but the first point in this evening's verse is, you have the peace of Christ, let it rule.

You have the peace of Christ, let it rule. Verse 15 says, they have been members of one body, they have been called to peace, the peace of Christ.

[11 : 59] Christ. I think it's really useful here for us to understand the story of what has happened to us as Christians. Before we became a new community in Christ, I think our relationships were often defined by conflict and by war.

We're both at war with God and at war with each other. War with God and war with each other. Earlier in Colossians we saw about this war with God, this conflict with God.

Chapter 1, verse 21 says that we were enemies with God because of our evil behaviour. And you can see in chapter 3, verse 5, the idea is still there. It talks about the sins of the world in verse 5.

It says, because of these, the wrath of God is coming. The wrath and the anger of God is coming to us because of our rebellion against him. And ever since the start of the Bible story, that has been the story of conflict between man and God.

It's been right there from the beginning. And it's a conflict where we are completely in the wrong and have absolutely no chance of winning. And we're also at war with each other.

[13 : 09] Look at 3, verse 8. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

This is Paul talking about the attributes that described a divided, warring humanity, a humanity that was at conflict with itself. And we might not be in conflict in the sense of all going around and attacking each other with weapons or physical violence.

That is very, very common. We're divided because of how we treated each other. A couple of years ago, there was a television show which I found really interesting. So I decided if I like TV, it's kind of survival reality television.

So like the island with Bear Grylls, maybe if it's like a kind of I'm a celebrity. There was a TV show called Eden. It was back in 2016, kind of 2017.

And it was a social experiment. They took 20, 20 or so people and took them to a remote place on the west coast of Scotland and asked them to start a new community, to start a fresh society.

[14 : 18] They all had lots of skills that would be useful for doing that. So they had like a doctor, someone knew how to fish, someone knew to keep sheep, a plumber, and so on.

And they were supposed to build this new sustainable community. And these were the words of one woman who was reflecting on her experience on the show. She thought, this is going to be brilliant. We all want to live in nature, sit on the beach and reduce our carbon footprint.

What could go wrong? I mean, we're on the west coast of Scotland, so sitting on the beach is already a bad start. However, what actually happened was it quickly descended into bullying, rivalry, cliques, fighting over resources, quite awful sexism, excluding people.

It was all basically a bit feral and lots and lots of people left and it was a terrible, terrible time for them. It was quite funny. I think you can watch it on Foreign Demand, so good, cheerful television for lockdown.

And I think we see that. We see that happen. We see people falling out. We see it happen on reality television and we think, you know, we're not like that. And that's them. They're just kind of reacting to fame. We're not like that. We're not this divided.

[15 : 28] But I think it's the same. We spend any amount of time with a group of people and eventually this sort of thing happens. Division and infighting and gossip. This anger and the slander and the language.

we have a world that desperately, desperately wants peace and unity but is unable to grasp it. But now, for us as people in Jesus, a change has happened and that change was Jesus.

Jesus took us from being hostile with God, enemies with God, and made peace between us and him, peace by his blood shed for us on the cross to take the punishment our sin deserved so that we can have peace with him.

And because we have peace with God, we also have peace with each other. It's there in verse 15. Since as members of one body, one body together, you have been called to peace.

And there's nothing that distinguishes heaven and a new creation from this old world and its ways than peace. no more conflict and no more war. And so, that's who we are as Christians.

[16 : 44] We have peace with God and we actually already have peace with each other. Those old divisions that Paul talks about in verse 11, Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, economic, ethnic and social divisions have been eradicated in Christ.

Christ. And so, this verse contains a challenge for us to make, let peace rule in our relationships. We are called to peace in our relationships with each other.

And that starts inside each and every one of us. Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. Because I know if you're anything like me, you love to grumble internally against people and to harbour hostility and division in our hearts.

to think they're not like me or we couldn't possibly get along. Did you hear what he said the other day? Or they just rubbed me up the wrong way. And there's nothing that is more sinfully human than to do that, to have small grudges.

To want to make it clear to people that they're not welcome or not to engage with them. And so, to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, we need to think about how God made peace with us when we had been nothing but hostile towards him.

[18 : 03] And so, we need to let that peace rule. I think that means that peace sets the rules for what we do, what we think, and what we feel, and what we say.

So, for everything, we can ask, we have peace with God, well, is my action now, is that going to create peace or is that going to create conflict? Or, I know I'm feeling this way about that person.

I know that they've wound me up whether they meant to or not, but I know that it's wrong for me to be at war with them. So, to ask God to help us to forgive them and to be at peace with them.

And that's just a huge perspective shift on church, isn't it? Church and the church community is the new, peaceful humanity. And how will that change how you feel about church?

To be part of this amazing, new, peaceful community, community, and the community that the world wants. It might mean all sorts of change in the way that we relate to people.

[19 : 04] But it's a peace you won't find elsewhere. But Paul gives us one way to feel about it, the end of verse 15, and be thankful. Give thanks for the peace that we do have in Jesus.

It's amazing, your community, it's amazing, your peace with God that we have. And that's not an experience you can have by yourself at home sat on the sofa. And then secondly, you have the word of Christ, let him dwell.

That's verse 16. You have the word of Christ, let him dwell. And one problem that the false teachers might have tried to make the Colossians feel is that they weren't connected to God enough.

They didn't really have an experience of the divine. If they wanted to truly worship God and be close to him, they needed to go and do all of these extra experiences, these festivals and visions, things that are very tangible, things that might give you a sense of awe and wonder, something physical that you can join in with.

But Paul says that as Christians, you have already been connected to God in Christ. So I'm going to just read out some verses from chapter 2, verses 9 to 10. Chapter 2, verses 9 to 10.

[20 : 16] For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ, you have been brought to fullness. I mean, it's a crazy verse.

I don't think I'd believe it if it wasn't written in the Bible. But Christ, the real man, was full with the presence of God. And so, by trusting in Jesus, you have also been connected to God.

You have been filled in Christ, just as he was filled. We might not feel like it. I definitely don't feel like that. But it is the reality that describes us if you trust in Jesus.

So in Christ, they already have what the false teachers are trying to sell them. But if that is what they are, what are they supposed to do? The answer is more Jesus and more Jesus by Jesus' words.

I wondered if you thought that the word dwell in verse 16 was an odd choice of words. Verse 3, verse 16. Let the message of Christ dwell. Because words don't dwell for us normally.

[21 : 20] People do. Like, people live in places. I don't think this is an accident by Paul or just a nice way of putting it. Dwelling is what God does in his temple and where he lives.

He stays there. And so that means in this verse, the way that we live out who we are in Christ, the way that we express that we are dwelt in by God, is that Jesus' words dwell among us.

Jesus' presence is expressed for us by his words. And you'll remember perhaps Paul's prayer from earlier in Colossians, asking that God would fill them with all the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that they might be brought to maturity, to a life that pleases God.

And how does that happen? How do we grow up? How do we become mature and filled with wisdom and understanding? It happens as Jesus' word dwells among us.

It's something we already have. We already have Jesus' words. But now there's something to do with it. Wanting to experience more of God, to know more of God, but not to do that through his words.

[22 : 34] It's like a small child who pleads and pleads and pleads their parents for a particular present for Christmas. Let's say it's a Nerf gun. And Robbie got a Nerf gun upstairs in the office for some reason.

He said it's for teenagers. I'm not sure if I believe him. But the small child that pleads for a present, pleads for a Nerf gun, comes down, it's Christmas Day, they wake up at 5am, their parents say you can open one present.

So they drag them downstairs, tears off the wrapping paper, opens up the present, gets out the Nerf gun, and Nerf gun that really, really wanted. Says, thanks mum, thanks dad, puts it down and then just walks off again.

To want more of God, but not to go to his words is like doing that. That's the thing, we can have Christ dwelling, but it happens through his words. Don't ignore his words. We have the way that God is among us.

And that happens in two ways, mainly. It happens by speaking and it happens by singing. I think this singing in this case is a subset of the speaking. I think in the NIV here, it sounds like it's two things, one thing, and let the message of Christ dwell as you teach and admonish and then by singing, singing to God at the end of the verse.

[23 : 46] But I think it's two separate things, or two connected, but separate things. But so the first way that Christ's word dwells among us is as we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.

And notice the words here, one another. I think it's really easy to think that the teaching and admonishing happens basically when someone like me or James or Martin stands at the front, we open up a Bible passage, and try our very best to explain it to you.

But the remarkable truth in this verse is that all of you, everyone here, everyone who comes to church, is part of a church family at St. Silas, has a job to do. It's more about what happens after I finish speaking, or what happens when you meet up with a friend from church to go for a coffee during the week, or when we are back to normal and going to our, going out for dinner or going to the pub, or even what happens with our small groups midweek.

It's the job of all Christians to teach each other. We need to talk to each other, reminding each other about Jesus using words from the Bible.

He says here, Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. He means the Old Testament book of the Psalms, which is what they would have had. And so we also have a revelation of Christ that involves both the whole Old Testament and the whole New Testament with words to use to teach one another.

[25 : 14] And so as people who are connected to God, we express that by speaking to one another. So we talk to each other about Jesus. We remind each other of what he has done for us, of how amazing what he has done is.

And talking about what it means for us, asking others what it means for them. And this isn't just something that we do to other people. We should want other people to do that to us. It might not be particularly comfortable, so the word admonish, well that just means warning.

So that means some of our conversations might be a bit uncomfortable because we are all prone to do things that are wrong. It's part of being human. We might need to remind someone that the old sinful self, their old sinful self in Adam is dead in Christ.

And so perhaps there are things that might need to stop doing. Stop doing the things of chapter 3 verse 5 or chapter 3 verse 8, the things that belong to the earthly nature.

I think it's really possible actually to come to church and to feel like you don't really have anything useful to say to people. But that's not true. I mean it is possible to feel that you have things that can't help people.

[26 : 27] What do I have to say that is rich and useful and wise? I know in my case not very much. But the amazing thing is that as Christians as we listen to teaching from the Bible is that you know things about Jesus from the Bible.

It's something you already have. Whether you've just heard a sermon or been in the Bible study, or whatever you've been looking at in your quiet time that morning, you'll know at least one thing. And Paul says that in Christ, if you have words about Christ, you have all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

You have something in the words of Jesus that is infinitely rich and wise. So that means you or me, we can speak to people with all wisdom and all knowledge. You don't need a degree or a course or a qualification to be able to teach another Christian.

all you need is a desire to serve them and words from the Bible. So perhaps make this a reason that you come to church, to talk to people about Jesus and what he has done and what that means for you and for them.

And it doesn't just dwell, Christ's word doesn't just dwell by a conversation, it also dwells by singing. Our singing is a way that Christ's word dwells among us. Now this is sad actually because we can't do this at the moment.

[27 : 42] It is really sad that we cannot sing together because as we sing we are reminded of what God has done for us. We are reminded of it in such a way that it doesn't just engage with our minds, our intellect, but also with our emotions and with our hearts because we remember the things that we sing and we engage the things that we sing with.

And that's why we want to sing songs that are scriptural, that reflect truths that the Bible teaches us. Our singing is vertical to God, we sing with gratitude in our hearts to God, but it's also horizontal.

It's something that we do to each other. I think that's actually the primary thing in this verse is we sing to teach one another, to encourage one another. And our singing is not something that we do to get God to do something for us, it's to remind us of what we already have in him.

it's not an offering or a sacrifice or something that we get to be, that God comes down in a special way when we sing, because we've already been filled with all the fullness of God.

Singing helps these, the truths, these amazing truths that we have about Jesus stay in our hearts. And maybe this might change how we feel about church, about looking at the Bible with other people, something that looks so ordinary and so mundane.

[29 : 05] If you've grown up in church, you've been doing that week in, week out for years and years and years. It looks so ordinary, but it's the way that Christ dwells among us, that we are brought up to maturity in him, and how we become more like Jesus.

We already have something amazing, we already are filled with the fullness of God, so it's just for us to live it. And so all of that leads to our final thing in verse 17, that Jesus is to govern everything that we do together.

We have been made into a new community, a new heavenly community in him. And so he forms a reference point for all of our life together. Verse 17, I don't think it means, you know, whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

I don't think that's like a blank check that we can write to do whatever we like, and then just to put in the name of Jesus on the end of it, and all of a sudden it's okay. I don't think that's how it works. But as a new humanity and a new community, we are to do everything with reference to him.

He sets the agenda. I think that's what it means to do things in the name of the Lord Jesus, to let Jesus set the agenda in what we do together and in how we live. So just in case there was something in the past couple of verses that you think Paul has missed out, well, we can ask ourselves, how would Christ want me to act in this situation?

[30 : 32] What does he want me to do? How does being in Jesus change how I talk and how I treat others? We are in Christ.

We are the new true humanity. We've been remade into the image of God like Jesus and been made into a new community, the place where God lives, by his word.

And that is something amazing to give thanks for. What looks like ordinary church is in fact something amazing. We have a new life to live in Christ and we have absolutely everything that we need to live it.

I'm going to pray for us as we close, as I finish. Father God, thank you that you have given us everything that we need in Jesus. Thank you that we have his word.

Thank you that we have you dwelling in us. Please help us to live as this new community that we already are, to let your peace rule in our hearts, to let your word dwell among us, and for us to do everything in your name.

[31 : 36] And please help us to be more and more grateful for what we have in Jesus, so that we might stick to him. In Jesus' name. Amen. So I think we're now going to have our final song.

I encourage you, we can't sing along, but do the second half of verse 17 and sing along in your hearts and with gratitude as we think about what we can be thanking God for.

Thank you.