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**Off With the Old, On With the New:**  
**Keys to Growing in Grace**  
**Colossians 3:1-17**  
**June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Jeff Germo**

About four years ago, in one of my sermons, I gave an illustration about cuckoo birds. I'm going to use this crazy bird as an illustration again, but to make a different point. For most of my life I didn't know that the cuckoo bird was a real species.

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I thought it was a mythological creature that the famed cuckoo clock is modelled after. I didn't realize until few years ago that it really exists.

They are common in various parts of the world and you can even find them on the East coast of Canada. What I learned about them was that they are quite unprincipled and unethical in how they raise their children, and how they treat their neighbours. They have very unusual nesting habits. They lay up to 25 eggs in a season. But they don't lay them in their own nests. As a matter of fact, they don't even have their own nests. They are infamous for laying their eggs in the nests of other birds - one in each nest, up to 25. What they do is wait until the host mother has left her nest to go in search of food and then the cuckoo will lay her eggs with the others in the nest, and she may eat one or two of the others while she is there. Then she goes on to the next nest and does the same thing - up to twenty-five times.

When the host mothers return to their nests, unbeknownst to them, they will incubate the egg of the cuckoo bird, which will hatch several days before her own. Then the cuckoo chick will be mothered by the sparrow, or thrush. It really is quite a bizarre model of child rearing. They lay all these eggs and drop them off for other birds to raise.

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The cuckoo is a much bigger bird than the host chicks and will usually get most of the food the host mother brings, which leaves the host chicks weak and malnourished until they eventually die. It's really a strange scenario because sometimes the cuckoo will grow several times bigger than its surrogate mother. It has no resemblance to its mother whatsoever. It sounds nothing like the little thrush. It looks nothing like the thrush, but this mother is duped into feeding this illegitimate child and leaving her own biological kids to die.

The point in this illustration is this: there are two natures living in the nest. One is legitimate, and the other illegitimate. The one that survives and thrives is the one that gets fed the most - even if it has no right being there.

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As Christians we also have two natures. At the point in our lives when we receive Christ as our saviour we are given a new life. We are born again. A new life began. The new life is our legitimate God given life in Christ Jesus.

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**2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)**

***17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!***

Our old self was crucified with Christ.

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### **Galatians 2:20 (NLT)**

***20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

So, in one very real sense, when you submit to Christ's Spirit in your life, your old self dies. But, in another equally real sense, the old nature is still at work waging war against what God's Spirit wants to do in your heart.

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Paul talked about this struggle with sin in his own life in Romans 7. He said, in his natural self he does the thing he doesn't want to do and doesn't do the thing he wants to do. He said there is a fierce war raging in his heart for control, the old fleshly nature that wants to destroy him, and the new nature in Christ that wants to give him life. He said the only answer is surrendering to the power of Jesus and giving control to him.

Can anyone relate to this struggle with sin? If you are breathing this morning, and if you are honest, you will admit that you struggle with sin. The Apostle Paul did. There is a "cuckoo bird" living in you, waging war in your mind. It is illegitimate. It has no right being there, but it is there nonetheless, always trying to get you to feed him so he will become stronger. And the question we come up against is always this: Will I do it my way --the old way, or will I do it God's way -- the new way? Will I feed the illegitimate "cuckoo bird", or will I feed my new legitimate God-given nature in Christ?

We are going to look at Colossians 3:1-17 where Paul talks about this struggle. He actually gives us the secret to overcoming, so real change can be produced in us. The Christian life, following Jesus, is about change. It's about becoming new. In one sense, we became new by exchanging our life for Christ's. This is something that is instantaneous. This is why Christ died for you. In another sense, there is a change that happens as you submit yourself to God in the processes of life. It's ongoing. It will never stop.

So, positionally, on the one hand, when you received Christ as your Saviour, you were made perfect. You are accepted by a holy God, **not** because you have been able to be good enough, but because you said "yes" to Jesus Christ and received his righteousness, based on his death and resurrection. So, he is good enough for you. He paid your penalty.

Now, there are some Christians who solely focus on this part of their salvation. They look back at the time when they were justified, live their lives there, and that's where they stay. And some of these people remain bitter, selfish, unloving, joyless people because they think all there is to their faith is that sometime in their past they prayed "the sinner's prayer" and were forgiven.

When we become spiritually reborn, or regenerate, by trusting in Christ's finished work on the cross, we are instantaneously made right with God. Positionally, we are righteous. God paid the penalty for our sin, and canceled all the charges against us so we could enter into relationship with a holy God. That is our positional state. But, how many of you feel like you are perfect this morning?

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In the Bible we can see **three clear tenses of salvation.**

1. We **have been** saved – made holy—justified in Christ because of Christ’s finished work on the cross.  
[8b]
2. We **are being** saved. There is an ongoing work the Holy Spirit is doing in our hearts to bring us to maturity down here on earth where our lives are lived out.  
[8c]
3. We **will be** saved when Christ returns to take us home.

So, **we have been saved** because of what happened at the cross. That is called positional sanctification. We **will be saved** when Christ returns to take us home. And, right now we are living between the these events, or between what is called the “already” and the “not yet”. And right now, during this time, God **is saving us**. He is transforming us in our hearts to become like Jesus. This process is called progressive sanctification. It happens in an ongoing kind of way.

The new Christian living out his or her life on earth does not emerge fully mature. It’s not one of those instant pudding things – you know, just add water, stir a little and you’ve got the perfect Christian.

One commentator put it this way,

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***“The dynamic process of saint making is to work out in fact what is already true in principle.”<sup>1</sup>***

This is where we live. We are in process. We live in this uncomfortable tension between the already and not yet. One day when Jesus returns he will take us home and we will take on his perfect character. For now, though, we are in the process of becoming. The Holy Spirit is chipping away at our rough edges and making us more like Jesus.

That is what Colossians three is about. If you have an older version of the NIV Bible, you will have a heading at Colossians 3, in your Bible that says, *Rules for Holy Living*. It’s unfortunate that the NIV chose this heading. Just so you know, these headings are not inspired by God. They are the Bible translators’ attempts at summing up the different sections of the Bible. They have since changed the heading to, *“Living as Those Made Alive in Christ,”* which is similar to the heading the NLT translators used, *“Living the New Life.”*

The Christian life is not about rules. Paul has just finished questioning the Colossian Christians in chapter two, asking why they would want to go back to religion or an adherence to rules when Christ brought in a new way. Those things, Paul said, are just a shadow of what Christ brought.

Don’t get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with rules. Because we are a sinful and broken people, we need rules in order to have a society that works well together. Without them we would have anarchy and we would be continually hurting one another.

The essence of the Christian faith, though, is not about an adherence to rules or principles or guidelines for holy living. The core of the Christian faith is that Christ’s work on the cross two thousand years ago paid the penalty for our sins so we could exchange his life for ours, so he can live his life through us. Rules will not transform us. Surrendering to the power of Jesus in us will, however. We need to invite him, not only to save

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<sup>1</sup> Maxie Dunnam, *Alive in Christ*

us positionally. We need to invite him into those dark places in our souls to do a major overhaul of our heart and our mind and our character.

There is a real problem with thinking or living like our faith is about rules.

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**If we are stuck on simply obeying rules we can avoid the pain of real heart change.** We will avoid looking at our sin, because as long as we feel like we are adhering to certain rules we will think we are ok and that we don't have to change our heart attitude. We will think we don't have to address our judgemental attitudes, or whatever. We have this list of rules, or religious things we do, and we subconsciously check each day to make sure we have done ok, and if we have, we feel good about ourselves, and if not, we try to do better next time so our good will always outweigh our bad. Our religion then becomes about sin management. Jesus went much further than that. And so did Paul in Colossians 3.

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Paul begins Colossians 3 with,

### **Colossians 3:1-17 (NLT)**

**<sup>1</sup> Since you have been raised to new life with Christ...**

**[12]**

In chapter two he said the opposite.

**<sup>20</sup> You have died with Christ.**

Chapter 3 begins, **Since you have been raised to new life with Christ.** Chapter 2:20, **You have died with Christ.**

What's going on here? On the one hand, he says we have died with Christ, and on the other hand he says we have been raised with Christ. Paul is talking about the difference between the old and the new life. The old me died when Christ took up residence in my heart. The new me, in Christ, has been raised to life. There has been a spiritual rebirth. When you plant a seed, that seed has to die before it can produce life, and that is the same with the seed of the Gospel.

Without Christ, there is the elusive hope of living life by rules and regulations so you will be good enough at the end of the day to be accepted by a holy perfect God. Paul says, you died to that kind of futile, impossible way of life, and so stop living as though it were possible. It's not!

The religious person thinks all he has to do is to try harder next time, and maybe it will be enough. "Maybe if I give more. Maybe if I pray more. Maybe if I read my Bible more. Maybe if I do more good things, go to church more..." Just maybe it will be enough to assuage my guilt.

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These are the kinds of people Jesus butted heads with most often. He said to the religious people things like, **"The corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do." (Matthew 21:31, NLT)**

***"You...are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are filthy...You ignore justice and the love of God...You are like hidden graves in the field...You crush people with unbearable religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease the burden."*** (Luke 11:39-46)

Jesus is talking about a heart problem – a need for heart change.

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Timothy Keller, in his book, ***The Reason For God***<sup>2</sup> wrote, ***"Jesus conducts a major critique of religion. His famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7) does not criticize irreligious people, but rather religious ones. In his famous discourse the people he criticizes pray, give to the poor, and seek to live according to the Bible, but they do so in order to get acclaim and power for themselves. They believe they will get leverage over others and even over God because of their spiritual performance... This makes them judgemental and condemning, quick to give criticism, and unwilling to take it."***<sup>3</sup>

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So, Paul says, you died to that way of life..., but you have been raised to a new way of life in Christ. And since that is true Paul says, ***<sup>1</sup>Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. <sup>2</sup> Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. <sup>3</sup> For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.***

Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 6:33.

**[16]**

**Matthew 6:33 (NLT)**

***<sup>33</sup> "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."***

What do you want out of life? What are you seeking? What are you waiting for before you decide you can trust God? Are you waiting for everything to be perfect? What is it you want from your life?

All we want, all we desire can only be found in Christ. Test yourself. Finish these sentences:

**[17]**

***"I'll be satisfied when..."*** or, ***"I'll be happy when..."*** How you finish these statements will reveal whether or not you are trusting in God, or in your circumstances. It will answer what you are placing your hope in, or who your God is.

**[18]**

***<sup>5</sup> So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. <sup>6</sup> Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world.***

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.amazon.ca/Reason-God-Timothy-Keller/dp/0525950494/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1240706688&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.ca/Reason-God-Timothy-Keller/dp/0525950494/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1240706688&sr=1-1)

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 58.

**<sup>8</sup> But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. <sup>9</sup>Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. <sup>10</sup> Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.**

There some interesting language here that is not peculiar to the letter to the Colossians. Paul talks about taking off the old self and putting on the new. He's saying that our faith is not passive. There is something we need to do if we want to grow.

He said the same thing to the Ephesian church.

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**Ephesians 4:21-25 (NLT)**

**<sup>21</sup> Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, <sup>22</sup> throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. <sup>23</sup> Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.**

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**<sup>24</sup> Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. <sup>25</sup> So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.**

Do you see how active our faith is supposed to be? I used to pray fervently that God would make me humble and that he would give me more faith. I was always shocked that when I prayed those things I would usually face a lot more trouble. And then when I would find myself still stricken with fear and a lack of faith, or still filled with pride, I would wonder why God hadn't answered my prayer. I actually thought that if I prayed for more faith somehow he would zap me so I would magically be filled with supernatural faith. Or if I prayed for humility, he would make me a super humble man of God.

I didn't realize that I had to play an active role in my maturity. I will not mature by accident. We need to actively take off the old and then put on the new. It takes practice and training with Jesus.

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**"Put to death (5)... rid yourselves of (8)...for you have stripped off (9)..."** He talks about taking off the old way of life, first in regards to religion in chapter 2, and then here in regards to a selfish way of life that is focused on gratifying our sinful desires.

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**<sup>8</sup> But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. <sup>9</sup> Don't lie to each other...**

There is a mindset that is healthy for the follower of Jesus, and there is a mindset that is toxic and dangerous. And Paul urges us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he shows us what needs to go.

During the economic crisis that began in 2008 there was an interesting phrase that made its way into the headlines: **toxic assets**. Toxic assets were one of the factors that contributed to the trouble the banks got themselves into in the U.S. The assets are loans. Somebody owes the banks money. Normally banks want people to owe them money and pay them interest on the principal. But in that financial crisis, many of the loans had actually become liabilities, because the houses that secured the loans decreased in value below the amount of the loan. When assets become harmful to your bottom line, they are no longer really assets. They are liabilities. They are toxic.

Toxic assets are not just a banking phenomenon; toxic assets can also be spiritual.

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**A toxic asset, spiritually speaking, can be anything we think is an asset but is actually hurting our walk with Jesus, or our relationship with people.** Sins of the flesh, such as viewing pornography or abusing drugs or alcohol, are toxic assets. Slander and gossip sometimes, in weird sort of way, feel good, but they are extremely toxic.

We engage in these pleasures because we think they will benefit us, but the opposite is true. A house or a car can be a toxic asset when it takes over your life and pushes God or people to the periphery. A job can be a toxic asset. Money, education, family and friends, physical beauty—all these things can be great assets to you, unless you allow them to take God's place in your life. In that case they have become toxic assets. Even ministry can be a toxic asset. If it takes over and becomes more important to you than people, or your relationship with God, it is toxic.<sup>4</sup>

And Paul says, put them to death. Don't trust in them. They are fleeting at best.

Paul continues.

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**<sup>12</sup> Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.**

We are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. There are certain things that we, as God's people, should get rid of and there are certain things that should characterize us. When people look at us what should they see?

What does Paul say we should clothe ourselves with in verses 12 - 14? **tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience**, and, Paul says in verse 14, the one thing that is the glue that will hold it all together is love. **Clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.**

You know, we can get so wrapped up in our own lives and selfish pursuits that we forget what's important. We forget what God called us to.

There's a story in the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul* about a little girl named Schia. When Schia was 4 years old, her baby brother was born. "Little Schia began to ask her parents to leave her alone with the new baby. They worried that, like most 4-year-olds, she might want to hit or shake him, so they said no." Over time, though, since Schia wasn't showing signs of jealousy, they changed their minds and decided to let Schia have her private conference with the baby. "Elated, Schia went into the baby's room and shut the door, but it opened a crack—enough for her curious parents to peek in and listen. They saw little Schia walk quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his, and say, 'Baby, tell me what God feels like. I'm starting to forget.'"

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<sup>4</sup> Craig Brian Larson, editor, PreachingToday.com

Tell me what God feels like. I'm starting to forget.

It is so easy to get all wrapped up in our lives that we forget what's important. We are living between the already and the not yet, between the two advents. Our lives down here are spent focussing on those things we can experience with our five senses. It's easy as a Christian to have a mindset that says, "Praise God that I have my ticket to heaven," and then carry on in cruise control as if all there is to the Christian life is knowing that we have been justified before God. God has so much for us than that, and it takes a continual taking off of the old and putting on the new. We need to actively participate in our growth.

In closing, here is what Paul says we are supposed to fill our lives with. I am going to read it slowly. Let it sink in and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you.

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***<sup>15</sup> And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.***