

# Grateful for Who You Are

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's read Colossians chapter 3, verses 15 to 17. In the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

This is God's holy word. We've been working through Colossians chapter 3, the first 17 verses, on a series that we've called Practicing the Christian Life, and it's a series about how to change.

We're looking at Paul teaching us what it looks like to change. And every single week, Paul has said that the real secret, the real key to change as a Christian is to be who you already are, to become more and more who you already are, to embrace your identity, the identity that you've been given, to live out of a particular identity that God has given you.

And every single week, what he's done is he's given you identity statements, who you are, and then told you ways you can seek that in practice in your life to become more of who you are.

Now, nothing has changed. Today will be the exact same. Paul does it again. Three more times, he tells you something about who you are, and then gives you a practice to take up to seek the change that you're called to as a Christian.

[ 1 : 39 ] And so let's think about it. Let's look at the identity Paul is saying we have in Christ and some of the practices that he gives you for that. That's the first thing. We'll spend most of our time there. And then secondly, at the end, I just want to finish the series because this is what Paul does.

He gives you what I think is the secret to deep change. And it's right here in these three verses. So let's look at it together. First, Paul is coming back and saying, who are you?

Who are you? If you're a Christian, who are you? What's your identity? You've got to think about it. You've got to remember it. And the you that he keeps using throughout this passage is plural. So he's not just saying you as an individual.

He's saying all of us collectively together. Talking to the Colossian church, he says in verse 15, you are one body. These yous, these y'all's are for all of us. And so he's talking to every single one of us.

And I went back through and looked at all that he said in the first 17 verses about your identity as a Christian. And he says, here's the reminder. He says, you've been raised with Christ.

[ 2 : 41 ] You died with Christ. You're hidden with Christ. Christ is your life. You've already put off the old self. You've already put on the new self. You're chosen. You're holy.

You're beloved. Now he's going to give you three more. Who are you? And the first one is in verse 15. And he says in verse 15, he says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

Now at first you say, let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. That doesn't sound like an identity statement. That doesn't sound like a, this is who you are. But the reason for that is because this English word we have here at the beginning, let, let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.

There is no English equivalent to the Greek grammar that's being used here. We just don't have it. And so all we can do in translation is our very best to convey what's being said here.

Because the English just doesn't do what the Greek does here. And it's more like a benediction, what a benediction does at the end of a service. At the end of a service, I'll say, may the Lord bless you.

[ 3 : 45 ] And I know that I cannot give you that blessing. I'm just conveying what the Bible says that God wants you to know about from him to you. And I'm really just saying, may it be the case that God will bless you as he's promised.

And in the same way, the let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts is like that. So it's almost as if it's saying, may it really be the case that the peace of Christ you already have is more and more yours.

May it already be the case that what you have, the peace of Christ, sticks with you. Because it will. So it's saying that this is something God does. And it's like a benediction. Here's a way to think about it. Many of you will have followed the Los Angeles devastation, the fires that have burned throughout Southern California. And last week it finally rained. And it really helped put an end to this. And, you know, if you're in California and you're seeing all these homes burn and you walk outside and the rain starts to pour. It hasn't rained there since October.

[ 4 : 47 ] Very different from our experience. And what would you say? You would say, let it rain. Right? And you, you do absolutely nothing to get the rain to come down.

But what are you saying? You're saying, may it be the way it really is right now. And, you know, you would say, you might be so happy in that environment that you use the words of Adele, you know, and you say, let the sky fall.

Right? You let the sky fall. Let it be. Right? Or maybe you have the opportunity one day to open the Olympic Games. Amazing. If you do. And you would, you would say, let the games begin. And, you know, you have absolutely nothing to do with any of the games getting started. Right? And that's what he's doing here. He's saying it's an indicative. It's an indicative. It's a pronouncement. Let the peace you already have rule in your heart.

What is that peace? It's not inner emotional peace, though Jesus does give that. This is talking about the opposite of war and conflict. And it's saying that when Jesus Christ came in the first century and he died, so you died.

[ 5 : 51 ] He was raised from the dead, so you in him were raised. Spiritually, in that moment, the war that you have been waging between you and God since the day of your birth ended.

That the victory was already provided. That reconciliation was already had between you and the Father. That Jesus went into the heavenly realm and says, Lord, Father, the debt is paid and you do not demand repayment for that debt any longer.

Never again. That you've got peace, reconciliation with God. And so what is Paul saying? There's the indicative. There's the identity statement. Who you are. You have the peace of Christ. Meaning you are reconciled to God forever.

No changing it. And then he gives you the practice. And it's subtle. But it's let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. Rule in your spiritual life. And the word rule there is a Greek verb that does not refer to the way a king rules.

Not at all. It's the word for umpire, a referee in Greek. So it's picking up on like the games, the Roman games and things like that. And using the referee term, the verb.

[ 6 : 56 ] Alignsman, aligns judge, a referee in football. It's saying, let the peace you have with God, which was had at the cross, be the referee for the way you live the rest of your life.

So what's the practice? He's saying that when you have changed, deep change in your life, is when you've so realized that you already have reconciliation with God through the cross.

That the cross then becomes the referee, the judge by which you do your relationships in life. Let me make this more concrete. What's he talking about here?

He's talking about conflict. And he's talking to the church as a whole. And he's saying, you are one body. Let the cross be the referee in your conflict, in your arguments.

In Colossians, you've got Greeks and Jews all worshiping together, becoming Christians.

Christians, they did not like each other before that. There was a lot of racial animosity. And he's saying, you've got in the church to let the cross be the rules, set the rules for how you do conflict.

[ 7 : 58 ] So we said last week, how do jagged, rugged stones get smoothed out? They've got to hit each other. And in the same way, of course, there's going to be conflict sometimes. Of course, we are all having to bear with one another on different things.

Of course, none of us are ever getting our way exactly the way we want. And we said last week, that would not be good for us, none of us, to get our way all the time. And he's saying that in the local church, and of course, this extends beyond it, that the cross has to set the rules for how you treat one another.

What does that look like? When you're in conflict, when you're in argument, when you're in struggle with somebody, whether that's in the home or in the church or in business or anywhere out into the world, when the culture is setting the rules of the game, when the culture is refereeing, when you're letting your own heart simply be the referee, what does that look like?

That looks like thinking in our modern world that every single person who disagrees with me is my enemy. That every single person that disagrees with me on social media or at workplace becomes my nemesis, becomes my enemy.

And I'm defined by them, they're defined by me because we're opposites. And, you know, it means that you let social media continue to fuel the outrage machine that we struggle with in our hearts.

[ 9 : 11 ] We're always mad at somebody. We always need an enemy. And instead, to let the cross referee your conflict is to come into every situation where you're at a struggle with somebody and think, we're at odds right now, sure, but one thing I do know is that Jesus has shown me that I am to be for them no matter what.

Maybe I need to speak truth and love into their lives, but it's only because I'm for them, for their good, because I love them. That's what it means to let the cruciform pattern of life referee all your relationships.

So we saw this last week, but let me bring it forward to this week. It means that you can go, what does it mean, Jesus Christ bore your faults and your sins upon the cross. We put him there, and so I can go and bear the faults of others.

I can be patient with other people. That's to let the cross referee my relationship, right? Jesus Christ, boy, he was so humble, he forgot himself by becoming nothing all the way to the point of death.

So I can referee my relationships, the cross, with the deep humility to put on the humility of Christ, right? Patience, humility, kindness, meekness. The virtues we saw last week.

[ 10 : 22 ] I was taking a course once in a theological institution. I will not name to protect its identity because it was amazing overall. But I did have one class with a guest professor, and the guest professor came in, and they were teaching on sanctification, what we're talking about in this series.

And the professor said, do you have to forgive people who have never asked for forgiveness? I'll take a sip while you think about that. And he said, the answer is no, because God doesn't forgive you until you ask him for it.

And I thought, you know, no, no, I was a fledgling theological student, but I thought, oh boy, I hope not. Right? No, the indicatives, what do the indicatives say?

That when Jesus Christ died in the first century, you died with him before God the Father. That God placed upon you reconciliation from the moment of the death of Christ in the middle of human history before you were a twinkle in your parents' eyes.

Right? And that means God forgave you long before you asked for it. That's at the heart of what we believe about salvation. What does it mean? It means when I go to get into conflict with people, that, that, the referee of Christ, the cross, becomes the referee of my relationships.

[ 11 : 40 ] I can forgive without even being asked. I can forgive all the way to the point of forgetting because Christ cast my sins as far as the east is from the west. Boy.

Okay. Come back tonight because tonight, Lewis is going to lead us in looking at this issue. And the question will be, who right now do you need to reconcile with? Who right now do you need to have quick reconciliation with?

The second thing, and I'll have to be brief here. You see, if you look down at verse 16, it gives you a second identity marker and a practice as well. And in verse 16, you'll see, notice how parallel these sentences are.

Verse 16 says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Go back to 15. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. So the peace of Christ rules in your heart, so let it rule.

And then verse 16, the word of Christ dwells in you, so let it dwell in you richly. It's the same Greek grammar there. So it's, it's an indicative again. It's a statement. You have the word of Christ in you.

[ 12 : 41 ] The commentators say that the word of Christ there is not, is, is got the Bible in mind, the scriptures as they were written thus far. But this is first century.

Colossians is written in the late fifties. Lots of the New Testament is yet to be written at this point. And that means that the commentators will say that the word of Christ here is a reference to the gospel.

It's a reference to the good news pronouncement that you have what Jesus did in the first century for you already. It's dwelling in you already. The gospel is already yours. It's already over you.

And then, so then he says, and so let it dwell in you through reading scripture, through getting more and more of the good news into your soul all the time. And the word dwell there is a metaphor, like

rule, rule metaphor for referees and umpires dwell as a metaphor for moving house.

You know, that's one of the worst things, isn't it? When you have to move, it's one of the absolute worst things. But here it's saying you've got to, you have the word of Christ.

[13:42] You have the word of the gospel in your heart, but you've got to let it move into all the compartments of your soul and make home there. And so scripture is like a moving company. And scripture is, you're coming back to scripture and scripture is constantly putting the furniture of the gospel back into all the rooms of your heart.

You know, you keep like throwing stuff out on the streets. And it says, no, you've got to reestablish the furniture of the gospel in every single part of your soul all the time. Now, how does he do it? He says, you need to get the word into you all the time.

And what does Paul say? Now, this is the first century and there is no printed Bible. There is no, the codex of scripture, which is a way of kind of starting to form a book.

That's not around. You could get a hold of some scrolls here and there from the Old Testament.

What is the primary way people in the first century got the word into their souls? And what does he say?

He said, you've got to sing it. Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. And then he says, to one another, admonishing and exhorting and teaching one another. Now, Paul says, you, we've got, we do have this, you've got to read the Bible to get the word of the gospel into all the parts of your soul.

[14:51] But he's saying, you've got to sing to each other to get the word of the gospel into all the parts of your soul. And, oh boy, that's really, really important. I really enjoyed singing this new hymn we sang today.

And it made me think about, I knew it was coming, right, because I'm preaching. So I knew I was going to talk about this. But so I was thinking about it as we sang. One of the problems I think we might struggle with in our tradition of Christianity is that we might think that everything we do from the beginning of worship, from the call to worship, to the songs, to the prayers, is all the intro stuff to get to the real event.

The preaching segment. And I believe in preaching, as you know. But boy, what is Paul saying in here? He's saying singing is no addendum.

It's no introductory bit that you can take or leave in order to get to the main bit. Not at all. You know, you can't just say, well, I came late. I came, I've come late, but at least I got the sermon.

He's saying, no, you missed singing. He's saying, you've got to sing to each other. You've got to sing the word of the gospel into each other's souls and hearts and minds all the time.

[16:02] And he goes here, and well, let me say it like this. This is simple. This is a truism. If you've been around the church at all for much of your life, this will feel old hat to you.

But I want to ask you a question. What Paul, underneath this command to sing, what Paul is saying to us here is asking, do you love the word of God, the word of the gospel?

Do you, is it sweet to you, sweeter than the honeycomb? Is the word of the gospel, the word of scripture, sweet to your soul?

Is it? And he's saying that when it is, you know, when you experience the word of the gospel, and it's all of its sweetness, and sometimes you have moments in your life where you feel the fullness, where you might just be walking through the streets of Edinburgh.

I don't know if this has happened to you before. I had this experience walking over a bridge in Murrayfield once, where I was thinking about something completely other, and all of a sudden it hit me that I was forgiven.

[17:06] Has this ever happened to you? And everything you have is a gift, and it overwhelms you for a moment, and you just want to sing. He's saying that sometimes that happens to you, and you just want to sing the gospel to people and each other.

And then he's saying, but also sometimes, because that's not currently where you are in your existential space in your life, you need to come and sing. You need to come and sing until the word of the gospel becomes honey to you, sweet to you again.

And so let me say this. We've got to move on. Sing. And sing, and make sure the kids see you sing. Make sure the kids don't miss out on getting to see the adults in the room singing, belting. My favorite thing, one of my favorite things is, I'm not going to name you.

I'm not going to name you, but there are a few of you in here who cannot sing well. Now, I'm one of them, so I can say it. But boy, I do like it when I'm around somebody that doesn't sing very well, and

they're singing louder than everybody else.

[18:12] You know, it's beautiful. It doesn't sound nice, but it is beautiful at the same time. It's because the word of the gospel is sweeter than honey, and you're singing it to each other. And that's why.

You know you don't have a good voice, but you've got to sing it. So sing it. Let me move on to our conclusion and summarize it like this.

In verse 17, he gives you a third, and all I'm going to say about it is in verse 17, he says, Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Now, there it is again.

He's saying, here's a way to summarize all 11 statements of identity. In Colossians 3, you bear the name of the Lord upon yourself. You carry the name of the Lord.

You are Christian. You have that name. That is your name. It's been placed upon you from the outside. And so maybe a better way to focus on the question of identity, Paul's not actually asking you to ask the question every day, Who am I?

[19:10] Who am I? Who am I? You know, that's the question that everybody in the modern world is always asking. That's the question Jason Bourne was asking, and Inside Out is asking. And every film, Who am I?

Who am I? Who am I? What is he doing? He's asking you to transfer that question to what? Every day, wake up and say, Whose am I? Not who am I, but whose am I?

Who do I belong to? That's the Christian posture. I am not my own. I belong to another. I have a master. I have the freedom to say, I have a master. We all do, actually. It's just, is yours great enough to bear the weight of being good?

Truly good. Right? He's saying that. I mentioned this last Sunday night, but what did Taylor Swift say at her NYU commencement address in 2022? She was speaking to the graduates at NYU, and she said, I know it can be really overwhelming figuring out who you're supposed to be, who to be in life.

She says, I've got good news for you. It's totally up to you. I've got terrifying news for you. It is totally up to you. The question, who am I, is the question that's always being put to us in our culture.

[20:17] And what it's saying to you is that the real path of life is to curate your own identity, to be totally free, to be autonomous, to figure out who you are from the inside out. What does Paul say?

That is not freedom. That is slavery. Real freedom is to wake up every day and to say, Whose am I? I was bought. I was purchased. I was redeemed. I belong to the Lord. That's the beginning of deep change.

Lastly, the secret of change as we conclude this series. The secret of change, it's right here. I'm glad we've saved it for the very end.

You see that there's three statements of identity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. You have the peace of Christ. Let the word of Christ dwell in you. You have the gospel.

You have the word in your heart. You bear the name. So in everything you do, do everything word or deed by the name, because you have that. Three statements of identity. But do you see with every single one of them, Paul says the same thing every time?

[21:18] What does he say? Look at it with me from verse 15 to 17. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. And then sentence two. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, singing in the last clause with thankfulness in your heart.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord. How? Giving thanks. All right. So Paul says the real secret, the real key to deep change is to walk away.

I hope you'll walk away from this series with one practice above all, and that's the practice of seeking the discipline of gratitude in your life. Gratitude is what he's talking about here.

Now, there is a difference. What does Paul do? He gives you a command. Go now and be thankful. Go and be thankful. And there is a difference between being thankful for things and being thankful to someone.

Right? Now, when I was living in the States, where I'm from, we have the holiday Thanksgiving, which is a natural thing to bring up in the light of be thankful.

[22:23] And in the States, we would celebrate Thanksgiving once every year, the final Thursday of November. And, but since I've moved here in a country that does not have the holiday of Thanksgiving, technically, officially, I tend to, on average, celebrate Thanksgiving three to four times.

So I don't know why, but it was once in the States, but here, every year, we celebrate Thanksgiving at least three times. And we do family Thanksgiving, and then some of you say, let's have a Friendsgiving, and we do that, and then others of you will say, let's do a Friendsgiving, let's do a Thanksgiving.

Everybody knows Thanksgiving is a great holiday. That's why I think, but here's the real reason. This is what I figured out. The reason that we celebrate Thanksgiving here more often, Thursday meal, Friday meal, Saturday meal, the next week somebody wants to do Thanksgiving again. Why? And I found out it's because of the sweet potato casserole. That's what it's about. Now, if you don't know about this, don't get involved.

Okay? Okay? You just don't even try to find out, because it is permission to eat candy as the primary, the main dish every single year, and you don't want to get involved in that.

[ 23 : 30 ] It's not, you regret it every time. But sweet potato casserole is the reason people here keep wanting to have Thanksgiving meals. And, you know, I realized you can be thankful.

You can be thankful for sweet potato casserole, and you can be thankful for, what do you, all of us experience this. You say, you know, I'm thankful for the good food that I like. I'm thankful for my job. I'm thankful for my relationships. I'm thankful for all sorts of things. And you can be Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Alex O'Connor for the most famous atheists of the last couple centuries.

And you can be thankful for lots of things. Alex talks about that on his podcast, how thankful he is for many things. But what I realized is there's a big difference being walking around and saying, I'm thankful for it and being thankful to.

And the practice of gratitude is the transition, where you say, it's not just that I'm thankful for, and I'm not thankful just to relative dependent people like me all around me that give me some nice things.

[ 24 : 29 ] But when you realize, boy, without belief in God, I do not have an absolute personal conscious gift giver that continues to supply everything that's good in my life to be thankful unto, right?

And the practice of gratitude is not just saying, I'm thankful, I'm thankful, I'm thankful, but turning every day and expressing deep thanksgiving gratitude to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and recognizing that you are utterly dependent in all things.

And Paul says the secret to change is really just to be thankful, to grow and grow in this practice.

And so I read a book this week, I read a book this week about this by a guy who said that he, quote, I'm a professional grumbler.

Any professional grumblers in here? I'm a professional grumbler. I complain, I look at the negative every time. And so he said, so I've decided to write a book about gratitude to try to fix it. And so for three months, he took on the discipline, the habit of writing down everything he was thankful for in a little notebook in his pocket, wherever he went, and then he would write prayers of thanksgiving every day to the Lord.

I thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. He would thank God, as Philippians 4 says, before he asked God for anything. And this is what he writes. He said, when I did that, quote, he said, the practice of gratitude wickered away my grumbling and my negative spirit like your windscreen fluid with the wiper blades turned on max throws the dust off the windscreen.

[ 26 : 01 ] He says, the practice of gratitude wickered away, what have we been talking about in the series? Mortification. Killing your sin. Kill your sin, lest it be killing you. And he said, boy, I was fighting and I was fighting and I was fighting and nothing changed in me.

And he said, and I started thanking God all day long throughout the day, writing it down. And he said, it wickered away my sin desires like dust off the windscreen. He said, gratitude, I realized, was the secret.

It cast away my discontentment, my covetousness, my idolatry, everything I wanted to chase that wasn't God I found in him. And I wonder today, even if you're not a Christian today, there's a woman named Kristen Dombach who wrote in the Paris Review about this experience she had. She said, she writes this, she was an atheist, she had become an atheist. She said, it has been 15 years since I stopped believing and I've been able to explain to myself almost everything about the faith I grew up with.

But I have not been able to explain an experience. She says, it's an experience of God so real that he entered the bedrooms of my soul, lit them up with joy and made me generous.

[ 27 : 10 ] And for a long time, it puzzled me why if I made God up in my mind, I couldn't make up this feeling I kept having, this experience of God where I realized I'm just grateful.

And I wonder if you've had something like that where you, you don't know, maybe you don't know what you believe today, maybe you do, but you've had an experience where you said, I'm overwhelmed by how dependent I am. I'm overwhelmed and it just makes you pour forth in gratitude.

I'll close with this. I was thinking about it this morning and I thought, I was looking at my cup of coffee and thinking, okay, is coffee an essential drink for the day?

To me, absolutely it is. And I thought, and I said, the Machu Picchu coffee that we like to buy at my house, I thought, the farmer that put these beans into the ground, he lives a thousand miles away from here and I'll never meet him.

And boy, so many, so many events had to transpire to get this to me. So many gifts and, you know, the farmer put the beans down but the Lord gave the harvest, right? The farmer watered, the Lord gave the harvest and I said, I'm, thank you.

[ 28 : 17 ] You can say, thank you Lord for this morning coffee but boy, coffee is nothing. It's nothing. We don't need it. It's a gift. Can you say, will you say tomorrow, my sins, they are many, Lord, your mercy is more?

I killed you, Lord Jesus. I put you on the cross. You hung there for me and yet by that very act, you saved me. My sins, they are many, Lord, your mercy is more.

Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord. And throughout the day, just take up the practice of gratitude and what will happen in your life will be verse 17. The more you practice gratitude, the more verse 17 will become true that you'll walk around in your words and in your deeds, whatever you do, bearing the name of the Lord, conveying, I'm a Christian in word and deed.

Why? Because gratitude, gratitude will change you from the inside out. Lord, I don't deserve it.

Everything I have is a gift. Let's pray.

Father, Lord, we don't deserve it. We don't deserve the coffee. We don't deserve the mercy.

Everything we have is a gift. And so now, as we come to this table of thanksgiving, this meal of thanksgiving, we ask that you would give us grateful, thankful hearts.

[ 29 : 38 ] Help us, O Lord, we pray now. Come and meet with us, O God, we ask now. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.