

Remember Who You Are (Colossians 3:1-17)

Big Idea: Remember who you are; act in light of who you are.

In my mind, one of the most fascinating characters of the 20th century was Edward Albert Christian George Andrew Patrick David, better known as King Edward VIII of the United Kingdom and the Dominions of the British Empire and Emperor of India from 20 January 1936 until he abdicated in December of the same year and became simply the Duke of Windsor.

What's so interesting about him? Any king who abdicates is fascinating. Even before he became king, people worried about his suitability for the role he was to inherit. They were right. Only months into his reign, he decided he wanted to marry Wallis Simpson, a married woman from America. This precipitated a constitutional crisis and led to the king stepping down. Even after his abdication, he remained a controversial figure.

On May 28, 1972, the Duke of Windsor died in Paris. On the same evening, a television program recounted the main events of his life. Viewers watched film footage in which the duke answered questions about his upbringing, his brief reign, and his eventual abdication.

Recalling his boyhood as Prince of Wales, he said: "My father [King George V] was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes when I had done something wrong, he would admonish me, saying, 'My dear boy, you must always remember who you are.'"

And that's exactly the message that today's passage has for us: my dear man, my dear woman, remember who you are.

For the past couple of months, we've been working through a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a small church in Colossæ, which is in modern-day Turkey. The church there was a good one, but faced the temptation to change the gospel message, to think that maybe Jesus isn't enough.

And the message of Colossians in the first two chapters has been clear: Nothing needs to be added to the person or work of Jesus. He is more than enough. You don't need anything other than Jesus. You just need more of Jesus.

And now, in chapter 3, Paul turns the corner. In chapter 3 we get to the "so what?" part of the letter. If Jesus really is enough, how should that change how we live?

And Paul's answer is clear: it changes everything when we remember who we are in light of what Jesus has done for us. Remember who you are; act in light of who you are.

First: Remember Who You Are

Who are you?

Verses 1 to 4 remind us who we are and then tells us to set our minds on this reality.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Two truths in this passage, one harder to believe than the other.

First truth: Christ is seated at the right hand of God. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he was on earth for forty days. But then he ascended to heaven. This is called the ascension and session of Christ. Just like a court is in session or Parliament is in session, Jesus is in session.

Right now, Jesus is exalted to God's right hand and reigns over everything. As Jesus himself said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18).

The U.S. just held its midterm election. This election decided who is going to be elected to the 435 seats of the House of Representatives and a third of the seats of the Senate.

Verse 1 tells us that it has been decided who is going to sit on heaven's throne and reign over everything, not just for two or six years, but for eternity. Jesus is on heaven's throne. That's the first truth that Paul wants us to know.

Second truth, and this one's harder to believe: what's true of Jesus becomes true of you as well. When you trust Jesus, you become so closely associated with Jesus that everything that is true of him becomes true of you as well. Charles Spurgeon put it this way:

Next in importance to the fact of the resurrection is the doctrine of the federal headship of Christ, and the unity of all his people with him. It is because we are in Christ that we become partakers of everything that Christ did,—we are circumcised with him, dead with him, buried with him, risen with him, because we cannot be separated from him. We are members of his body, and not a bone of him can be broken. Because that union is most intimate, continuous, and indissoluble, therefore all that concerns him concerns us, and as he rose so all his people have arisen in him.

Who are you? You have been raised with Christ. You have died; your old life has gone. And now, your life is hidden in Christ. Your heavenly identity is real right now. It is secure but hidden, although it will be revealed in the future.

In the future, you will join Jesus in his eternal reign. We will get to reign alongside Jesus. Revelation 3:21 says, "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."

In a sense, we already participate in this now. Ephesians 2:6 says that he has "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

The whole point of verses 1 to 4 is to remind us of what is true of us if we are in Jesus Christ, and then tell us to set our minds where Christ has already put us. Remember who you are.

Paul isn't telling us to abandon this world. He's not telling us to quit our jobs or to stop caring about being spouses and employees or business owners. In fact, Paul is going to give us instructions on how to act in these areas in just a few verses.

What Paul is saying is to live our lives here on earth, doing very ordinary things like working and paying bills, in light of our identity. Never let who you are in Jesus be too far from your mind. Always remember who you are.

And then Paul gets really practical. There is one way in particular that you can remember who you are, and it's this:

Second: Act in Light of Who You Are

Remember who you are; act in light of who you are. How? By doing two things.

Put off certain attitudes and actions (3:5-11)

Verse 5 says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." This is violent! As one old Christian (John Owen) said, "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you." There are times when violence is okay. Murder the sin in your life. Verse 8 switches metaphors: "But now you must put them all away..."

Certain behaviors are incompatible with who we are. When we remember who we are, we will have to put these things away. What are they?

Paul focuses on three areas:

- **Sexual immorality** – "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire..." (3:5). Paul here talks about sexual acts as well as sexual thoughts. What he's saying is that when we remember who we are, we will put to death the areas of our sex lives that are dishonoring to him. We'll honor God with our sex lives. Don't misunderstand what Paul is saying here: sex is good. It's a gift from God. Enjoy sex within the boundaries God has given it. But don't pollute sex by going out of bounds.
- **Covetousness** – "and covetousness, which is idolatry." Again, Paul goes for our hearts. God is so good to us. He's given us so much. But there's something in us that thinks that we need more, that we have to have more if we're going to be happy. Paul calls this covetousness, and even more, he says it's a form of idolatry. It's making stuff our god instead of God.
- **Relational sins** – And then he mentions relational sins. "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk [abusive speech] from your mouth. Do not lie to one another..." (3:8-9).

Paul warns us what's at stake: "On account of these the wrath of God is coming" (3:6). This is serious! He also reminds us *why* we no longer have to do these things: "seeing

that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (3:9-10).

He's not putting us on a guilt trip. He's telling us that certain behaviors – sex outside of the boundaries God has set, covetousness, and relational sins – are incompatible with who we are now. We've got to kill them. We've got to hunt them down relentlessly and get rid of them because they're just not who you are anymore.

Here's the flip side:

Put on certain attitudes and actions (3:12-17)

In verse 12, Paul lists 5 virtues we should put on:

- compassionate hearts
- kindness
- humility
- meekness
- patience

What a list. Notice how relational all of this is. And just in case we miss the point, Paul underlines the importance of forgiveness and love:

...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (3:13-14)

Verses 15 to 17 apply this specifically to the church, where we'll live all of this out as we serve and sing and minister to each other with all of these qualities in play all the

time. One of the ways we live out who we are is to live it out in the context of the church. It's why what we're doing here – our ministry of the word and song and life together – is so important. It's not optional. It's living out who we are.

This letter was not written to imaginary people. It was written by somebody in jail to people with real lives and real problems. It reminds them of who they are in Jesus and how it affects their everyday lives.

But here's what Paul is saying. Jesus is enough. If we really understood who he is, it would blow our minds. We don't need anything other than Jesus because there is nothing and nobody better than Jesus.

But it doesn't end there. When you trust Jesus, what's true of Jesus becomes true of you too. You are raised with him. You reign with him. So remember who you are, and act like it.

King Edward VIII never followed his father's advice. His father said, "My dear boy, you must always remember who you are," but he didn't. But Paul turns to us and says, "Remember who you are in Jesus." Will we?