

Colossians 3

Basic Christian Living (Authority: Christian Code of Conduct)

Introduction: As a Christian, where do you get your standard of living? How do you decide right from wrong? How do you decide what you should do and what you shouldn't do; where you should work and where you shouldn't work; who you should date and shouldn't date; who you can or should marry and who you shouldn't marry; whether you should remain single or not? How do you conduct business? How do you think about the World, yourself, others, sex, money, power...etc? Now it isn't the case that the Bible will tell you exactly who to marry or where to work but what I'm referring to is that the scriptures give us principles, a guide or grid, to apply in each situation of life... The problem is we don't think the Bible has anything of great importance to say to our modern lives or culture..

An article from *Christianity Today* states -“When it comes to deciding how to follow Jesus Christ in our time, the Bible often takes a backseat even for evangelicals, who have long held a high view of Scripture. Sometimes the desire to preserve relationships at all costs prompts us to ignore scriptural teachings. Other times, we have an ill-defined feeling of how the Lord is “leading” us, never mind that the leading often contradicts scriptural teaching. And when we do pull out the Bible, we are tempted to focus on one biblical theme to the exclusion of others, or treat it like a self-help book.Today we need a new battle for the Bible—not for a precise definition of biblical authority that all evangelicals can agree on, but a simple return to the Bible as the final authority in matters of faith and practice—and especially Christian doctrine.”

I realize that there are many churches today who teach all sorts of things in the name of Jesus and Christianity - Here at Refuge Christian Fellowship, the Elders have determined that we will be a Church that emphasizes the authority of God's Word over everything else. The teachings of Christianity were not and are not a new way to be religious, They are and were a new way to be human. God's Word is not a great book of suggestions and possible scenarios for your life. It is the story of a new way of life, an alternate kingdom. It's a Christian manifesto - a new way of thinking,

speaking, living, working, giving, loving, suffering and dying.... It is given to bring shape to every aspect of our lives. This is what Jesus himself, the Apostles, the early church, and Orthodox Christians taught throughout history. This does not mean that we cannot learn things elsewhere, from other philosophies or religions or life in general, but it does mean that when we hear things and are taught things that contradict the teachings of scripture, we throw them out.

If we are going to be Christian - citizens of heaven, members of God's family, a holy temple for God's spirit and Christ' Body, we must understand that there are standards, "house rules", a specific code of conduct that God calls his people to.

1. Obedience to God's commands is an essential part of being a Christian.

1. As I stated in our study on The Gospel- Christianity is fundamentally different than any other religion. Religion says, "I obey, therefore I am accepted." Whereas Christianity says, "I am accepted, therefore I obey."
 1. In many tribes of the Christian faith though, we have minimized obedience all together because we are afraid of undoing the doctrine of Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.
 2. "[To have Faith in Christ] means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you."— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity
 3. Christians are those who have become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven by faith/trust in the life death and resurrection of Jesus (that is a life changing event!), therefore, they live out that kingdom citizenship by putting into practice it's characteristics and principles first seen in Jesus, their King, and then taught by Jesus, and the Apostles. We are putting God's great story on

display- how he has broken back into the world to make all things new—

4. Therefore Scripture, where God instructs us in this new way of life, must become the number one source of information and truth for our lives. It must become the greatest influence. It must become for us more necessary than daily food, if we are to be formed, transformed, into people who reflect God's salvation, goodness and wholeness. Remember this is what Jesus taught us to do -
5. **“Jesus said to the people who believed in him, ‘You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings’.” - John 8:31 (NIV)**
6. **“If you love me you will keep my commandments.” - John 14:15**
 1. **“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.” - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20**
 2. **“it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” - 1 Peter 1:16**
2. **Why we Keep God's Commands - For God's Glory and our joy and good.**
 1. **God's Glory**
 1. The writers of Westminster Catechism wrote that the chief end/ purpose of mankind was to glorify God and to enjoy him forever..
 1. The Glory of God is not something we talk to much about in modern times. We tend to focus more on the personal benefits of keeping the commands of the scripture. But first we must understand the author and the architect of the commands and blessings of obedience before understanding the benefits of any command.
 2. The scriptures show us not just a vague ideal about the divine but introduce us to The Almighty God, the most high God who is also the personal God. Who makes a beautiful world in which his creation can flourish. Who creates human beings in his image, and therefore knows best how human life can flourish. A God who gives us richly all that we need, who fills

the earth with his steadfast love (Psalm 33:5). This is a covenant making and keeping God - The God who, at cost to his own self takes upon himself the debt of human sin and evil in order to rid the world of it.. the God who dies for his enemies and rises from the grave after defeating death for their eternal well being.. the God who will one day make all things new and will fill the earth with his glory.... this is the God of the Bible.

3. He is worthy of all of your allegiance and trust.. he is worthy of your obedience and worship.. As Creator, sustainer, redeemer, heavenly father he deserves your unwavering loyalty and love.
 1. Romans 12:1-2 tells us that in view of who God is, and what he has done, it is the most rational thing to respond in absolute allegiance, service and worship to him.
 2. If the saints of the OT Worshipped and obeyed God how much more incentive do we have living in light of the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God for us?
 1. Scripture never presents us with a dogma that says we must obey God because we must obey him, it always appeals to who he is and what he has done, and even appeals to the benefits and blessings of living in devotion to God.

2. Our Joy and Good

1. God speaks to us through the scriptures as a perfectly loving Father. Subsequently, we listen to what scripture says, learn what it teaches, and make every effort by the Holy Spirit's empowering grace to repent of our sin, renew our minds, and redeem our lives, for His glory and our good.
2. "Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn't do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn't mainly about you and what you should be doing. It's about God and what he has done." -Jesus Story book Bible
3. We also keep/obey God's word because of the blessing that comes with it. It's not the monetary blessing that we often find in the Old Testament, but it is the blessing of a whole life, a full life, a flourishing life - becoming who God created us to be. An invitation to become our true selves...

4. **“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.” -Proverbs 3:7-8**
5. “The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become – because He made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be. . .It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.” -C.S. Lewis
6. Sometimes, it is hard for us to reconcile our good, with God’s commands. In fact sometimes it seems like obedience to God is in exact opposition to our goodness. But in these moments we must remember the Great News of the Gospel. God gave us his greatest gift, his son Jesus, to save us from death and judgment, which we rightly deserve. When God did this we were still in direct rebellion to him. -You really think God wants to ruin your life? You really think God doesn’t care about your good, your wholeness and flourishing, or what is best for you? The Truth is, we are the creation, we don’t know what is best for us, but God our creator does, and he has given us his Word (The Bible) to direct us into the best way to live. - That does not mean that it’s necessarily easy (The good and right rarely ever is)- but it is full. God has given us his Spirit and the Church to come alongside us in this call of obedience. As Paul the Apostle says, **“The Kingdom of heaven is...righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” - These are qualities that human beings long for, and God’s desire is to give them to us.**
 1. The opposite of this is to give our allegiance and obedience to something else
 1. **“When human beings give their heartfelt allegiance to and worship that which is not God, they progressively cease to reflect the image of God. One of the primary laws of human life is that you become like what you worship; what’s more, you reflect what you worship not only to the object itself but also outward to the world around. Those who worship money increasingly define themselves in terms of it and increasingly treat other people as creditors, debtors, partners, or customers rather than as human beings. Those who worship sex**

define themselves in terms of it (their preferences, their practices, their past histories) and increasingly treat other people as actual or potential sex objects. Those who worship power define themselves in terms of it and treat other people as either collaborators, competitors, or pawns. These and many other forms of idolatry combine in a thousand ways, all of them damaging to the image-bearing quality of the people concerned and of those whose lives they touch.” -N.T. Wright

3. Eschatological Ethics

1. Another way in which the scripture appeals to our obedience and conformity to the scripture is in terms of the coming kingdom of God. (An invitation to become who God created and redeemed you to be). If God’s kingdom has already arrived, could culminate at any time, and is eternal - it only makes sense to conform our lives now to this eternal way of living - the kingdom ethics - righteousness, justice, shalom... (1 corinthians 15:58; Philippians 3:17-21; Ephesians 5:3-5)

3. What Commands Do We Keep?

1. We began this study by reading from Colossians chapter 3 which is filled with teachings on both what Christians ought not to do and what they ought to do. All throughout the NT and the OT there is a code of conduct, a consistent pattern of characteristics among God’s kingdom citizens - Again, Christians are not obeying to be accepted, they are accepted therefore they are obeying....But there are standards, goals, rules that Christians are to live by. It’s not about perfection but it is about progress to Christlikeness, it’s about being devoted to Jesus and the way of Jesus. Some people try to create levels or categories for christian living - “There are christians and then there are disciples,” or people say, “I am a Christian but Jesus isn’t Lord over my life..” or “I’m a christian I’m just not walking with God right now” - but the Bible makes no such distinction. Everyone who names the name of Christ, must follow in his steps, and walk according to his word. **“Whoever claims to live in him (God) must live as Jesus did.” (1 John 2:6)**
2. **Put Away - “If you have been raised with Christ.....put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, shameful passion, evil desire, and greed which is**

idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience. 7 You also lived your lives in this way at one time, when you used to live among them. 8 But now, put off all such things as anger, rage, malice, slander, abusive language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with its practices 10 and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it.”

1. As Members of God’s Household we need to call sin, what God and the Bible calls sin and we are going to commit to having it eradicated from our lives....often times we become hardened to sin or calloused about sin, possibly because we are defining sin and righteousness according to our own taste, likes or dislikes, or the standard of our culture.
 1. If I only keep the commands of scripture make sense to me or resonate with our culture - then I’m not really following Jesus, I’m simply following the culture, or my own opinion or wisdom.
 2. As God’s people we must hate what God hates, and Love what God loves. We must call evil what God calls evil....Similar to what I was saying before, ideas that if I sin God will strike me down immediately or curse my life are few and far between in scripture. Sin, evil, injustice, and unrighteousness are warned against in scripture because they lead further and further away from True Humanness - what it means to bear God’s image. Sin, evil, unrighteousness and injustice lead further and further into the realm of death, destruction and chaos. - A dehumanizing state if you will.

3. **Put On - “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if someone happens to have a complaint against anyone else. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also forgive others. 14 And to all these virtues add love, which is the perfect bond. 15 Let the peace of Christ be in control in your heart (for you were in fact called as one body to this peace), and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you**

richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

1. As Members of God’s Household we’re going to call righteousness what the Bible calls righteousness, we are going to see that we live in a way that is worthy of the Gospel and in step with the Gospel.
4. We’re going to be a Church that pursues and encourages one another to pursue the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love.
 1. **Faith** means I am trusting God whether for salvation, sanctification, glorification, self worth, acceptance, provision, forgiveness. Therefore I’m not misusing you or abusing our relationship. I will be treating others as ends in themselves, rather than as means to other ends. Seeing and interacting with others the way God does.
 2. **Hope:** We can define hope, in the New Testament sense, as full assurance, or strong confidence that God is going to do good to us in the future. Hope as Virtue means that I do all sorts of things that only make sense if my best life is ahead of me (Eschatological Ethics).
 1. If resurrection life, blessings, glory, riches beyond all imagination, new heaven and new earth are a fixed reality to me.- Then generosity and selflessness should be a big part of my life - whether time, money and resources, dying to my self, putting others first, swallowing my pride..etc.
 3. **Love:** Loving God because of how much he has greatly loved me, and seeing that love worked out towards others. Again as Paul says, **“Love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never fails,”** and elsewhere he says, **“Love does no harm to our neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law.**
 1. Jesus succinctly sums up what God desires from his people - That we love God with all our heart soul mind and strength, and that we love our neighbor as our self. - In these two commandments all the law and the prophets are summarized.

2. As Members of God's Household we are going to bring every part of our lives under the scrutiny of God's word, asking to be brought by obedience, through the working of the Holy Spirit, in step with this new way to be human - for God's glory and our joy and good.

4. How we keep God's Commands

1. As a reasonable response of worship - If it hasn't been clear till now, I hope to make it very clear: We are to obey the commands of Scripture not in order to be saved, or to earn God's favor, but because we are saved, because we have obtained favor through the work of Christ Jesus.
 1. True obedience comes from deep gratitude. Like we sing, "Oh to grace, how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be, let your goodness like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to you.." Every one of the commands of the NT are written as logical response to what God has done for us in Christ.
2. **Humility, Faith and Repentance** - Trusting that God is working in us and through us and that even when we fail God does not give up on us.
 1. **Humility** - Sin is not spurned by Christians because we are somehow above it and we cannot understand how it has any appeal. Or because God is going to strike us with lightning if we commit these things, and He doesn't want anyone to have a good time. Not even, but because it is so appealing, yet unsatisfying, promising yet destructive, pulling us away from true fulfillment and wholeness found in God alone and is counter productive to God's kingdom. Because these styles of behavior lead directly, as a matter of necessity, into corruption, decay and death and away from Life and specifically life in the the new creation - They are to be avoided at all cost.
 2. We are all prone to wander, prone to temptation, each of us are sinner's in the midst of our own sanctification. This should make us humble and gracious. Nobody gets it all right, we fall, we fail , we fumble.
3. **Faith** - As Christians we should not have consistent patterns or habits of sin in our lives - but we must also remember that as James says, "**We all stumble in many ways**" - Not as excuse, but as fact. As we follow Christ, and his word we must always remember the

abundant grace of God, that justifies us, sanctifies and will glorify us.. we can never lose focus of our total inability apart from Christ and his Spirit working in us.

4. Repentance -

1. The first theses in Martin Luther's famous 95 theses was, "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ..willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance " At first glance this appears to be saying that Christians never make any progress, that they are always asking forgiveness for repeated failures. Actually he's saying the opposite. Repentance is the way we make progress in the Christian life. It is the key to growing deeply and steadily in the character of Jesus.
2. The Gospel of God's free grace is what changes the nature of repentance. If we aren't sure God loves us in Christ, then confession and repentance become a way of keeping on God's good side.Hoping that our expressions of sorrow will impress him, that he'll take notice, and he'll to take pity on us.
3. If that is what repentance becomes, it is self righteous and will be bitter all the way to the bottom. It will lead to a forced compliance of the will - not a change of view, motivation, and heart.
4. This kind of legalistic repentance is self righteous because it is essentially an attempt to atone for our own sin. a kind of self flagellation where we try to convince God, ourselves and others that we are unhappy, regretful and deserve to be forgiven.
5. The Gospel tells us that Jesus suffered for our sin. We do not have to make ourselves suffer to merit God's forgiveness. we simply receive the forgiveness earned by Jesus.
6. **"If we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all sin"** - faithful and Just - why Just? Because Jesus has already paid for our sins. It would therefore be unjust for God to withhold forgiveness because Jesus has already earned our acceptance....This profound assurance and security transforms repentance from being a means of atoning for sin into a means of honoring God and realigning our lives with him..

Conclusion: Here's the big idea. Christianity is not a choose your own adventure type scenario when it comes to sin and righteousness. For the standard, we look to Scripture alone - sometimes having to wrestle to

understand the application in today's world, our specific scenario and our culture. Here at Refuge Christian Fellowship we desire to hold each other to the standard of God's word. Sin is totally out of place in the life of a follower of Jesus and at the same time when we deal with sin we always do it with mercy and humility. Righteous living however, comes from someone who has received and properly appropriated the good news of what God has done for them through Jesus. It is our aim to see that we walk worthy of the Gospel and the great name of our savior. For his Glory and our Joy and Good.

last thing - what if you feel stuck. You hear and agree with everything I'm saying but you just can't seem to break your patterns of sin? what then? Praying for freedom from bondage to sin and destructive behavior.. praying against the power behind sin in the name of Jesus...