

Christmas, 2009 Message2

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[0 : 00] They operate on a completely opposite way of what the Word of God operates.

And that is, the world as a rule will approach these things that we have just seen here in Colossians and say that that is the prescribed plan or the formula for becoming a Christian.

This is the way you are supposed to behave. And when you do these things, that is, when you put aside these things like anger and wrath and malice and slander and abusive speech from your mouth, these things in verse 8 and then verse 9, do not lie one to another, that in doing these things, God will then reward you in your efforts and make you fit for heaven.

The reward will be heaven. And that is principally the way the world approaches this thing. They do that from time immemorial. It goes all the way back to the Old Testament and continues even to the day.

But the point the apostle is making is exactly the opposite. No, no, no, no. You do not do these things in order to become accepted of God and become a Christian and be rewarded with heaven.

[1 : 26] You do these things because you are accepted of God and because your citizenship is in heaven and because you are in Christ.

This is why you are supposed to do these things. So the world just reverses it. And there are Christians who even look at this and say, well, these things are all noble and good.

And boy, I sure do wish I could do them. But I am just not up to it. I am a weak creature. And I know my faults. And they are many.

And I yield the temptation too easily. And these things are just beyond me. But for a spiritual hotshot like the apostle Paul, yeah, he could probably pull this off. But not me.

No, that misses the whole point too. These directives are across the board for the whole body of Christ. No exceptions.

[2 : 28] These things represent the Christian norm. And what they do represent is nothing more than the adaptation and the adoption of a godly lifestyle through our behavior.

It is true that the change in behavior does not simply come from our ability to be better people. That which affects our change in behavior or which provides the dynamic for it or the capability of it is the spirit of God dwelling in us.

So that Paul could say, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I. But Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith or the faithfulness of the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

So there is a dichotomy here between the ability to live this life and the actual doing of it. And what we find is a remarkable kind of cooperation between the divine and the human.

God provides the power because we cannot do it. The flesh cannot do it. The flesh in a believer is no more adequate than the flesh in an unbeliever.

[3 : 54] It is the spiritual dynamic that is within us that enables us to do this. But, your will dramatically comes into play.

Because God will not force godliness upon you. He will make it available.

It is within your capability to realize this. But it is not automatic. And he does not just descend on certain people that he selects and makes them godly in their behavior and attitude.

And everybody else he just kind of ignores. It does not work that way. In the passage that we considered last week from Philippians 2, the great kenosis, the great emptying.

Christ emptied himself of his glory. He emptied himself of the rightful position that he occupied as the Son of God.

[5 : 05] And descended... Well, let's go back to the passage. It's right here in Paul's neighborhood. Philippians chapter 2. Very familiar. And he says, we began in verse 5.

Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus. Now, how do you do that? How do you have an attitude? A mindset?

How do you determine that? How do you select an attitude? How does this become part of you and your thinking and your behavior?

How? Well, let me tell you. It is not through some deep, dark, mysterious, vague whatever.

However, the way one adopts this attitude, which was in Christ, the way a believer adopts this attitude, is simply by a desire to do so and an exercise of the will to do so.

[6 : 22] That's it. Nothing puzzling about that. Nothing particularly dramatic about it. You have this mind in you the same way you have any other mind in you.

Whether it is a mind of elation or a mind of anger or whatever it is, it is that which you choose to have. But I want to emphasize this is only for believers.

This is not available to those who are not in the body of Christ. They do not have the ability to adopt the mind of Christ. They couldn't even if they want to. Because you have to be in Christ before you can adopt the mind of Christ.

But let me make it very, very clear. You can be in Christ and not have the mind of Christ. That's probably where most believers dwell.

And the apostle, through the Spirit of God, is calling us out of that, which is really nothing more than the flesh, calling us out of that and to adopt the mind of Christ.

[7 : 31] And it is done with the will. The human will. The will is intact. You can decide whether or not you want to do that.

Why do you think Paul says this in verse 5? Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus. If it is not within the capability of each and every one whom he is addressing in this epistle, including us as believers, if it is not within our capability, what a terribly unreasonable thing to expect of people.

We could just look at verse 5 where it says, have this attitude in yourselves and just respond to, Paul, I can't do that. I don't have that capability.

I'm confident the apostle would come back and say, Oh, yes, you do. Yes, you do. Let me ask you this. Do you have the ability to behave in an ungodly fashion?

Well, I won't answer for you, but I can answer for me. I sure do. I sure do. Do you have the ability to operate out of the flesh?

[8 : 58] Oh, yeah. Why do you? Why do you? Because you choose to. Because something happens, some event comes into your life, and you respond to it in a non-Christian way.

We're all capable of that. And what do you use to respond with it? Your will. Your human spirit. Your attitude is such that it is not Christ-like. Where did you get that? Of course it came from the flesh.

But what gave it legs? Your will. Your will. You chose to respond that way.

You did it because you wanted to. Now, that takes a lot of the mystery out of it. And what it also does is it puts you in control.

[10 : 06] It puts you in charge. It makes you responsible. You are accountable. There's no one else that we can blame for that. Well, the example that he gives is that this one, through an act of his will, Christ subjected his will to his Father's will.

Repeatedly. I come to do thy will, O God. Father, if there is any way that this cup can pass from me, nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done.

That was Christ's modus operandi. That was his mindset. That was his burning passion. That was his only desire in life. Was to do his Father's will.

And Paul the Apostle is saying, and folks, as members of the body of Christ, that's just the way you are supposed to be.

Have this mind in you, which was in Christ Jesus. his will was to do his Father's will. That which comes naturally to me is to do Marv's will.

[11 : 55] I don't have any problem working that up. But it takes a deliberate decision, an act of my will, to subject my will to God's will.

Frankly, God's will is incapable of being improved upon. Now, there are times when all of us think we have found a secret that enables us to do that so that our will is actually better than his will. But in our heart of hearts, we always know that that's not the case. And it's never proven to be because God's will cannot be improved upon. So, when this mind is in us that was in Christ, a mind

of self-sacrificing, a mind of giving, a mind of obedience, when that mind is in you, guess what you will be like?

You will be like him. And this is the objective, that we might be conformed to the image of Christ.

And when Paul says, let this mind be in you, it is because this mind can be in you.

You can have this mind. It's under your control as to whether or not you will. Now, what that does is it puts the ball in my court.

[13:25] While we're here in the neighborhood, come over, if you will, to Ephesians. Just back a couple of pages. Ephesians chapter 4, and these are all related passages actually dealing with the same issue.

In verse 25, the apostle says, therefore, well, let's go back a little bit. in verse 17 of chapter 4, he is contrasting unbelievers with believers.

And he says in verse 17, this I say, therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk in the futility of their mind.

Now, he's talking to people who have come out of a pagan lifestyle. These were formerly unbelievers who lived just like the world.

Polytheism, paganism, debauchery, and all the rest of it. And then in verse 17, he says, you walk no longer. This is the way you used to walk.

[14:41] You don't do that anymore. You don't have to, and you have no cause to. Because now you have a new dynamic within you, a new capability, a new potential that you never had before.

And it is imperative that you utilize it. So, you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk in the futility of their mind.

And here's where they were coming from. Darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart. They have become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

This is a depraved, debauched, immoral lifestyle which these people had been living and it was the only thing they knew. Now, everything has changed.

Now, they have embraced Christ and it's a whole new world. If anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. Old things have passed away and we are supposed to begin living like that.

[15:54] In verse 20, he talks about where they have come from and now he says in verse 20, but you did not learn Christ in this way. These things out of which you came, they were not in keeping with who Christ is and what he is about.

They are the opposite. When you came to Christ, you learned something entirely new. If indeed you have heard him and have been taught in him just as the truth is in Jesus, that in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self.

Who is to lay aside the old self? You do. You do. How do you do that? You just do it. You just say, I'm not going to go that way anymore.

Christ has come in, has given me a new life and a new power and I don't have to live that way anymore. And I'm not going to. That's it. Now, I realize that sounds too easy.

And I'm not suggesting that if you adopt that and embrace that, it's just going to be smooth sailing from here on. Of course not. There will be some failures along the way.

[17:12] That's part of your humanity. There will be some embarrassments. There will be some times when you will disappoint yourself and disappoint the Lord. The flesh always finds a way to pop through there, sometimes when we don't expect it.

But the decision is yours and it can be made. And it should be made. And it should be made. You lay aside the old self which is being corrupted in accordance with the lust of deceit and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

Here's what he's saying. Listen folks. Now that you are in Christ, there is available to you a whole new way of thinking.

A whole new world is opened up. you no longer have to be slaves to what you were slaves to. Tied down. Full of guilt.

Racked with all kinds of instability and uncertainty and everything that went with it. Jesus Christ coming into your life makes all the difference in the world and you need to derive all of the benefit from it that God intended.

[18 : 34] Be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

And do you know what that means? What that involves that you will do? Well, for one thing, laying aside falsehood. A Christian liar.

is a noxymoron. It's a contradiction in terms. Christians are to be people of truth.

We believe the truth. We pursue the truth. We contend for the truth. We seek for the truth. We embrace the truth. All of that has to do with the denial of unreality because truth is that which corresponds to reality.

We are called upon to be people of truth. So, you lay aside falsehood.

[19 : 46] Who lays it aside? You do. How do you do that? You just say, I'm not going to lie. lie.

I am not going to lie. That is not an option to me. I have to be a person of truth, even if it gets me into trouble. Sometimes it can get you into big trouble.

But the truth will never fail you in the end. Speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

be angry? Be angry. Absolutely. I have nothing but disgust for Christians who say things like, a Christian should never get angry.

Where in the world do people get a flaky idea like that? If you're a Christian, you would never get angry. Nonsense. Christians are supposed to get angry, but it's a select anger.

[20 : 54] We are to be angry about the right things. And we are to follow the anger with a positive godly course of action, so that our motivation is to correct a problem.

Nothing wrong with being angry. Paul said, don't let the sun go down on your anger. Be angry, but sin not.

If you cannot get angry about certain things, there's something wrong with your value system. You ought to be able to be angry, but you deal with the anger in the right way.

You can be angry without sinning. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. Let him who steals, steal no longer.

And here's another oxymoron. If a man says, I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, I know him as my Savior and heaven is my home. Wonderful.

[21 : 58] I'm glad to hear that. What do you do to earn a living? Well, I'm a thief. I'm a second story man, one of the best that ever came along. I steal for a living.

I break into people's homes at night, and under the cover of darkness, I steal things. you know, laptops and TVs and things like that.

Now, wait a minute. There's something wrong with this picture, isn't there? Well, that too is an oxymoron. Let him who steals, steal no longer, but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good.

And why does he do that? In order that he may have something to share with him who has need.

So, we do not work and labor and perform with our own hands so that we can accumulate wealth to our own bank account, but rather so we can earn something in order to have something to give to those who are in need.

That's the rationale for working. And, let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.

[23 : 28] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. all of this, all of it, is addressed exclusively to believers.

This is not for non-Christians. This is only for those in the body of Christ. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

You know what malice is? To be malicious. It comes from the same root word as malignant.

We know what a malignant tumor is, don't we? A malignant tumor is destructive and it spreads. It spreads illness and disease. If it is benign, that means it's harmless.

[24 : 44] It won't kill you. But if it is malignant, you may be under a terminal sentence. That's related to this word malice.

Abraham Lincoln included that in his famous Gettysburg speech. With charity for all. With malice toward none.

men. You know why I put that in there? Because there were a lot of really bitter feelings engendered between the north and the south in that civil war.

It was a terrible war. And the tendency was, whether you were from the north or especially from the south and on the losing side, the tendency was to keep fighting that war after it was over. And for you being a Johnny Reb, it meant to continue to wish invective and bad feelings and reversals on the north.

[26 : 01] and for the north to feel the same way toward the south so that the bad feelings continue.

That's malice. And Lincoln said that there should be malice toward none.

I am not at all sure that unbelievers even have that capability. But I know believers have that capability because Christ has given us the ability.

The question is, will we activate that with our will? Let's go on. and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

And now what I want you to do is remember something that I have been teaching for many, many years, and that is ignore the chapter divisions.

[27 : 21] This is a terrible one. I'm sure that these chapters had to be broken up somewhere, but this was a bad place to make the break.

And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children.

Do you see the continuity? Do you see the connection? What a terrible place for a break. He is making a conclusion. that's the meaning of the word therefore.

It isn't to begin a new thought. It's to wrap up and put a lid on the previous thought. And when you break the chapter here, you disturb the continuity and the whole point that he is making, all of which has to do with, this is godly behavior.

This is the way Jesus Christ would behave. in all of these verses preceding this that we have just read. That's the way Christ would behave.

[28 : 29] And that's what you're supposed to be. And if you do, do you know what you'll be doing? You will be imitating God.

And that's exactly the way the verse reads. And that's exactly what it says in the Greek. Therefore, by way of conclusion to what I've said about all of this, be imitators of God.

And I know the natural reaction that wells up within each of us is imitators of God? You've got to be kidding! I can't do that! No mere man can do that!

Yes, you can! How? Just by imitating these things that are listed. How do you do that?

With your will. By deciding to do that. Each time we are confronted with a situation, we respond with a course of action.

[29 : 34] That's just human nature. Everybody does. It doesn't make any difference what it is.

Whether it's being involved in an automobile accident at 3rd and Main, or whether it is a death in the family, or whether you fall down and break your leg, or whether somebody steals from you, whatever it is, in life situations that come to you all day long, there is a response that is required on your part.

And you will provide it just in the course of living. What is your response? Is it a godly response? Or is it a fleshly response? response? I am not particularly fond of the what would Jesus do thing, but I'll tell you what, it certainly has some validity to it, because to all of life situations, Jesus Christ had a certain kind of response.

That's the kind we're supposed to have. No, you won't do it perfectly, neither will I. You won't do it consistently, neither will I.

But the more you do it, the easier it is. And the more you do it, the more you will be conformed to the image of Christ.

[30 : 58] Listen, this is what is called growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It is behavior that is born out of an attitude. And Paul said, let this attitude be in you, which was in Christ Jesus, and if it was right for him, it's right for you.

And if you have that attitude, that will affect your actions, because actions stem from attitudes.

And as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he, and so does he. therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love just as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us.

An offering, and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. And then he goes on and elaborates further, all of which has to do with a godly lifestyle as opposed to a fleshly lifestyle.

[32 : 36] And one of the saddest, saddest things on the whole planet is for a believer in Christ to either not know these things or not implement them and consequently is consigned to living a

substandard life, not only morally, but in every other way, so that they are unable to appreciate in their life what God did for them in the person of Christ.

It's sad, but we all know that it is a reality for too many believers. believers. And do you know what we're talking about?

All we're talking about is this is what Christians are supposed to be as the norm the world over. This is what is supposed to make us different.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, let your light shine. Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

And what is it that produces good works? It's a good attitude. A right attitude produces right actions. wrong attitude, wrong thinking produces wrong actions.

[34 : 18] This is why we have said repeatedly for years now, the Christian faith is a thinking faith. It involves thinking, responding, acting.

It is a beautiful thing. It is nothing more than utilizing what God has committed and given to each and every one of us. And there is just no way that the world can duplicate this.

The world cannot copy this. It is beyond them. It is out of their realm entirely. But for those who are in Christ, this is supposed to be our standard operating procedure.

And when we do this, when we imitate God through our attitude and behavior, it is designed in part to make the world sit up and take notice and say, whoa, what is it about these people?

These people are incredible. They are amazing. I don't see how they do it. I don't see how they love one another like. I don't see how they're willing or able to sacrifice the way they do.

[35 : 33] I don't know why they are willing to go out of their way to help people in such a sacrificial way. What is it that makes these people this way anyway? What makes them click?

That is designed to arouse the curiosity of the world and to cause them to look at us and say, you know something, you've got something I don't know what it is.

I can't put my finger on it. I can't identify it, but I know you've got something that I need and want and I don't know what it is and I don't know how to get it. then you can tell them.

You had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and he changed your life, changed everything. Wow. That's the way the gospel is supposed to work.

Today, we all know, don't we, that sometimes the world has a great deal of difficulty noting any difference between those who name the name of Christ and those who don't.

[36 : 45] There just doesn't seem to be that much that separates us anymore. This is a personal, individual decision that each of us must make.

No one can assign or perform godliness for someone else. And I'm not talking about being some little goody two shoes who just runs around all day long saying, oh, Jesus is wonderful.

I'm not talking about slobbery, sentimental nonsense. I'm just talking about honest, truthful, sacrificial, upfront, living that causes the world to sit up and take notice because there is an undeniable difference.

That is the application of Philippians 2. The emptying, the kenosis, Christ came, did the Father's will so that he could give himself.

That's what we are to be about. Giving of ourselves time, talent, treasure, spending, being spent for the cause of Christ, and just being overjoyed in the process.

[38 : 20] wow, what a life we are called to. What an incredible, wonderful provision God has made for us.

My desire as your pastor is for every one of you to experience that. It's for me to experience it too. Nothing quite like it in all the world.

Questions or comments for a few moments we have left. Anybody? Feel free. Oh, come now.

Yes, Beth? Beth? You're talking about hatred toward the religious right or hatred from the religious right?

Okay. Now, let me make sure that, let me make sure I'm understanding your question.

[39 : 59] You are questioning or perplexed about hatred that is directed to the religious right?

Okay. Okay. What you're saying is that Christians would be an example of others that others would, you know, possibly want that too.

They were different and that's wonderful and that's what we want too. Okay. Well, there are a number of reasons for that. It's a very good question, Beth. I appreciate that. There are a number of reasons why there is a lot of hatred directed toward the religious right.

And one of the reasons is because they see a standard that is lived out by the religious, if the religious right is living the way they are supposed to be living, they reflect a standard that is unattainable for anyone who is not in Christ.

They have a mindset and a value that the world simply cannot understand. And we tend to fear and hate anything we don't understand.

So, that is one reason why they have a disdain or a hatred. And, in fact, that response is somewhat predictable.

[41 : 25] Because Christ said, when he talked to his own disciples, he said, fellows, marvel not. In other words, don't be shocked and surprised if the world hates you.

Because it hated me before it hated you. So, you, the servants, not greater than the master. If they hate the master, they're going to hate you too. And sometimes Christians can engender hatred just by living Christianly.

Particularly if you are in certain parts of the world living as a Christian. I'm not talking about going about wearing a big sandwich sign, identifying your being in Christ, but I'm just talking about living out the principles of Christianity in a lot of different places in the world can be hazardous to your health.

There's no doubt about that. There's a lot of persecution that goes on in some of these places. And we ought not to be surprised if the world hates us because it is predicted that that's the way they're going to be.

What fellowship hath light with darkness? Or what concord hath Christ with Belial? These are coming from two different worlds and there is a natural ingrained animosity that has always been there and will always continue.

[42 : 52] It separates the them from the us. It has always been that way. And then there may be dislike or hatred directed toward some in the religious right because sometimes people in the religious right can be very hateful in their behavior and in their attitude.

Christians have the capability of being nasty. name calling and accusatory and condemning and judging.

Christians have the ability to do that and it is a turn off to a lot of people. Now sometimes they're just looking for something to justify their unbelief.

They're looking for flaws in Christians. They're looking for anything that smacks of non-Christian behavior because that will make them feel more justified in not being a Christian.

Because I don't want to be like them. At least I'm not a hypocrite like they are. You know, this kind of thing. So there's a certain amount of that that goes on too. And I'm sure there are other things that could be said regarding the hatred factor.

[44 : 11] Ron? I think sometimes religious right may magnify problems. For example, there was a church that had these sacred signs walking around saying all homosexuals are going to go to hell.

Well, that may be true. But there's a right way and a wrong way to approach things. Yeah. And that just creates animosity. Sure it does. Sure it does. It just flames the fuels the fire.

You know, we Christians absolutely have to be committed to the truth and to telling the truth and not backpedal the truth and not tone it down and not deny it.

But, I want to say this with every fiber of my being, we have got to be able to speak the truth in love. truth. You can speak the truth, but speak it so harshly and in such a condemning fashion and judgmental fashion that it is scarcely recognizable as the truth.

[45 : 24] And sometimes we can speak the truth harshly and unlovingly and it's a turn-off. love. Because attitudes, even though you've got truth in what you say, the attitude or the manner in which you say it can be very harsh and hurtful.

And it is not loving and it doesn't sound loving. And people tend to reject it because they have a right to expect a better attitude from someone who claims to be a Christian.

So we have got to speak the truth in love. If you've got a ton of truth, but you do not have a delivery system that allows it to be communicated in love, they just won't hear you.

They're turned off. what you do, speak so loud that the world can't hear what you say. So we've got to be committed to the truth and to the telling of the truth, but we have got to tell the truth in love.

Speak the truth in love. And on the other hand, you can be gushing and syrupy and sweet and sugary and nice and blah.

[46 : 50] But you don't have any truth. That too is a real detriment. That isn't going to help anybody. But when you take truth and marry it with love and communicate it, that's the ultimate.

That is the power of Christ. It's wonderful. Thank you, Father. for gracious provisions that you have made for us and we recognize that every one of them is an emblem of your grace.

We want to be responsible with what you've committed to us by way of potential and responsibility.

We want to be sensitive and open and eager as individuals and as a congregation.

congregation. We recognize we are flawed individually and as a congregation. And you know everything about us and all of our faults and failures and you still love us.

And we are so grateful. We pray now that you will enable us to take the things that we've learned this morning and determine, based on your grace and a commitment of our will.

[48 : 13] We want to see these things exemplified in each of our lives for the balance of this year, for the time until you take us home.

Thank you for the time that we have shared together this morning, for the truth of your wonderful word in Christ's name. Amen.

Happy New Year. You are dismissed.