

Big idea: Live as you are

FCF: The twin fallacies of antinomianism and legalism – if you are a Christian, you are different

Application: Live as you are!

1. 'So if...'

In 2019, I moved from Wee Waa to Narrabri. My postcode changed. I had transferred. And so I was transformed. I no longer bought the daily papers from Roxanne at Wee Waa Newsagency, and I now bought them from Jodie and Mel at Narrabri Newsagency. I no longer bought bread from Anthony at the Wee Waa Bakery, and I now bought bread from Watson's Bakery. I no longer went to Teneille at Palmer's Markets for my luxury treats, and I now bought them from Dave at Yield.

My postcode changed, and so did my behaviour. I had been transferred, and so I was transformed.

Now, that is a fairly trivial example but it captures a little of what we are turning to look at in the second part of Colossians. If Colossians 1-2 established the truth of who Christians are – in Christ, they have all they need to be fully human, and he is their Lord who is sufficient for all of life, having transferred them from the domain of darkness into his own kingdom – then Colossians 3-4 looks at how this leads to transformed behaviour.

Put simply, if this is who you are – as someone ‘in Jesus’, who knows that Jesus is Lord is enough – then live like it: live as you are.

PRAY...

2. ‘So if...’

Look at verse 1... READ.

The ‘if’ here is not a possibility – it is stating a fact. ‘If this is true’ – and we all know it is – then all this follows on (‘so’). What is the ‘if’ all about?

Well, Paul and Timothy make sure that we realise that the central figure in this ‘if’ is ‘the Messiah’, ‘the Christ’ – Jesus. He is the one promised by God to deal with human sin, to roll back all the sin and its consequences in this world. We have already seen who he is – remember what Neil talked about as we looked at Colossians 1:15-20?

He is unmistakably the key figure here – his title, or his role, is mentioned five times in four verses! And the key issue is this: ‘if you are connected to him’ – and we know that you are – then...

Did you see that repeated three times? In verse 1, in verse 3, and in verse 4... Paul and Timothy want to remind their readers of what people have – any person has – if they are connected to Jesus. Remember what Neil helped us understand in Colossians 2:8-15? That, if you are connected to Jesus – if you trust him taking him at his word and living like it – then ‘his story is now your story’: when

he died, you died, and your sins were paid for; when he was raised from the dead, you were raised to new life and your judgement was shown to be dealt with; when he lived the perfect life, it has now been granted to you; when we were dead in our rebellion against God, Jesus lived the life we couldn't live. And it was all done publicly, so that there was nothing secret or obscure or exclusive about what God was doing!

In all of this, Jesus was established as the Lord of all things. And through being the Lord of all things, those who are connected to him have a change of postcode – they are transferred from the domain of darkness (from death and rebellion and enmity with God) into Jesus' kingdom (to life and reconciliation with God, and a completely new life).

Because of all that Jesus has done, we need do no more (in fact, we can't do any more) and we can know God completely. Jesus has done it all for us – dealt with our sin – and through him we can know God perfectly – because he is fully God.

Paul and Timothy want their readers – the Christians in Colossae – to know that Jesus as Lord is enough – they must not be led from this truth. And Paul and Timothy want them to know what life with him as Lord is like – remember Colossians 2:6-7?

Now, I want you to notice the very careful way that Paul and Timothy have set this out, even as they have emphasized the general principle for their readers – 'walk with Jesus as Lord, just as you received him'. It all begins with getting their identity straight – they are in the kingdom of Jesus (transferred from darkness) by

what Jesus has done for them – not what they have done to get in. They know God because Jesus has revealed him, not because they have warranted such access or relationship. Their identity is established first – by Jesus as Lord – and then their behaviour flows. They are this – ‘in him’, with Jesus as Lord – and so they should live like it. The identity of Christians is fixed in, and by what, Jesus has done, and they so live like it – and never vice versa. They have been transferred, and so they live transformed.

And we start to see that here in verses 1-4, as Paul and Timothy remind their readers of their identity, they constantly emphasise this fact – ‘live as you are’:

- In verse 1, ‘if’ your life is connected to Jesus who now lives and reigns over the whole universe, then your desires and priorities are connected to the desires and priorities of Jesus’ kingdom.
- In verses 2-3, ‘if’ your life is connected to Jesus, ‘if’ it is ‘hidden in Jesus’, ‘if’ your life (with you as God instead of God) has died, then live as if Jesus is your boss, in your mind, in your view of the world, in the way you think and assess and comprehend and understand.
- In verse 4, ‘if’ your life is Jesus (and it is – remember Colossians 2:13?), then your future is assured – and it is wonderful and defined and definite (even as this world decays and dies and ends).

Put simply, ‘if’ your life is connected to Jesus, ‘if’ Jesus is Lord is enough’, if you are ‘in him’, if he is your Lord completely, then live like it.

Now, before we go further, let me draw out three brief applications.

First, please make sure you get the order right. 'If' your life is 'in him', then certain behaviour follows. The behaviour never makes him Lord, never changes you, never deals with your sin – it is the result of Jesus doing all that for you.

Second, there is no negotiation here, no sub-clause that allows exceptions or exemptions: if your life is 'in him', he has all your life. He is Lord of all your life. He is the one who claims all of you.

Third, 'if' you are not in Jesus, then what defines you? You are 'in' you – you remain an enemy of God, still in death, still a rebel against God, still thinking you need to do more and know more to get right with God, still thinking Jesus isn't significant and you are more significant. And, where does this lead?

3. 'Put to death' (vs.5-7)

Reading sections like verses 1-4 can often lead to accusations that Christians can live with their 'heads-in-the-clouds' – they are so focused on 'stuff up there' that they are disconnected with 'life-down-here'. But nothing could be further from the truth. After all, Jesus achieved all he did for humans in this dusty, broken world; we live in this dusty, broken world; he rules in this dusty, broken world; and our lives as his people are expressed in this dusty, broken world. In fact, as Paul and Timothy unpack what it means to 'live as you are', to 'walk in him', they turn to concrete and tangible and real behaviour and relationships.

And the command highlights the finality and completeness of the change in identity that God's people have been granted – **look at verse 5... READ.**

To turn to our rather trivial opening illustration, I cannot drive to Wee Waa to buy my papers, bread and coffee – that would be ridiculous! I live in Narrabri, so I buy my bread, papers and coffee in Narrabri.

The reality the transformation in God's people – the transformation that comes BECAUSE they have been transferred, because they have a new identity, because they are 'in him' – is complete, final and all-encompassing. That is why the imagery of 'put to death' is so striking and in-your-face: death is final, complete and all-encompassing. There is no coming back from death. If you are 'in him', so your old way of life, the life of the domain of darkness, where you were the boss and everything was in rebellion against God – that is dead!

Paul and Timothy list five aspects – 'vices' – of that way of life. From a Jewish perspective, these were the marks of the life of people with no God. And our experience accords with that reality.

Look at the last one – 'greed which is idolatry'. The word for 'greed' here is one connected with an insatiable and unstoppable and ravenous desire for more and more. It is connected inseparably to idolatry because such a desire has only one focus: me! It places 'I' back in the middle of life, and so it is the key marker of what a sinful life is.

Whilst we rightly connect such greed to wealth and material resources, it can also be inseparably connected to pleasure and experience – a connection that is often seen in sexuality and its exploitation. That is why it is no surprise that the other four markers of the ‘worldly’ life are sexual – **look at them there in verse 5... READ.**

This world, broken and dusty, operates with ‘me’/‘I’ at the centre. With that centre, insatiable and unstoppable desire rules – the desire for ‘me’/‘I’ to be satisfied, materially, experientially and sexually. The damage that this causes is untold and heart-breaking, for both the sinner and those sinned against. It stains everything around us, if we live this way. That way of life brings God’s right judgement, for the perversion of his design and his image-bearers – **look at verse 6... READ.**

But, ‘if’ you are ‘in him’, then ‘I’ am not at the centre, and Jesus is, as Lord. ‘If’ you ‘in him’, then you have been transferred and so you are transformed, made fully human. This means that the old way of living has no place in your life – in the life of someone connected to Jesus – **look at verse 7... READ.**

Jesus is Lord, we are not, and our desire is now fixed on Jesus and his rule. In this we are fully human, and so we are not the slaves of insatiable desires for more and more, and we treat sexuality as it should be – part of the full expression of what it means to bear God’s image God’s way.

So, what does this walk look like in everyday life? Let me make four simple observations:

- First, if Jesus is our Lord, and we are ‘in him, and ‘if’ we have been transferred, then this transforms our attitude to desire and our attitude to sex. This foundation ‘in him’ should permeate every decision we make about sex. I don’t just mean in terms of keeping sex for marriage – I mean how we view sex in our music, in our favourite TV shows, in our movies, and in our internet usage.
- Second, we must remember that God actually created sex for a specific place and relationship: between a husband and a wife in marriage. For this, we should give thanks – here is protection and safety and wisdom and rightness and a life-long expression of love.
- Third, we must recognise the incredible damage that sexual sin brings within God’s people. On the one hand, there are the spectacular sins that garner a fair bit of attention – the failure of affairs and the failure through pornography. The damage these failures bring is deep and far-reaching. On the other hand, the damage wrought by loose attitudes towards sex – not treating the images and music and downloads seriously – can be just as significant. Such laziness brings a gradual inoculation against the damage wrought by sexual sin, and this leads down a gradual slope where our walk becomes indistinct from the world around us.
- Fourth, we must bear in mind the strenuous nature of the command here – ‘put to death’. In all seriousness, we should take advantage of every available means to apply this. At Moore College, in our second year, the College recognised the danger of not ‘putting to death’, and so they bought us all subscriptions to Covenant Eyes, an internet accountability program. Every student and staff member had

it. The same goes in this Diocese – every ministry worker has access to this same program. It means transparency in relationship and conversation – the ‘you’ here is plural; it means accountability to each other. It means making sure that our desires are reworked as we read God’s self-revelation daily. It means constant prayer.

4. ‘Put away’ (vs.8-9)

Whilst not as stark or final as ‘put to death’, the next command in this section is equally final – **look at verses 8-9... READ.**

It is almost a mirror structure – a command, five ‘vices’ with the last expanded, and then a statement of why this must be the case.

In this command the focus is not on the idolatrous nature of sin but on the communal nature. It is worth remembering that this whole book is communal – singular personal pronouns are few and far between, and all the ‘you’s’ of this section are plural.

The vices here – and this carries on into the command in verse 9 – are all community based. They are well-nigh impossible outside relationship. When people are ‘in Christ’, they are in a new community, with everyone else connected to Jesus. This is the body imagery from earlier, in everyday life.

Put even more specifically, this list focusses on the things we say and especially the things we say in relationship to other people. Humans are verbal communicators. We are created to speak and so it is no surprise to see Paul focus on our speaking – and what it communicates – when he considers our walk with Jesus as boss.

How God's people speak, and what they say to each other, and about each other, is an indicator of where their identity is founded. Our lips express what we think – nothing we say is accidental! They must communicate that we are citizens in God's kingdom. Our language and speech must be rid of anger and rage. It is language that must not be malicious nor slanderous. Even more so, our humour and communication should never be filthy or impure.

Let me make three quick observations about how this might look in every-day life:

- All of us speak and so all of us must put off certain ways of speaking. For those of us who have quick tongues, then we must be extra careful with how we use them – the discipline of pausing and praying is a good one to develop.
- Part of implementing this 'putting off' is realising the need for discretion. Our world is the world of immediate and uncensored communication. Only today, would there be a means of communication called Twitter. Whilst not all of us use such means of communication, its prevalence affects all of us. Not everything need be said, or every emotion communicated.
- Understanding God's grace towards us will, inevitably, help us control our anger, rage, slander and malice, especially in our language. You see, grace should mean that we view each other realistically, and with great patience. The things that provoke our angry speech or slander or rage are actually the very sins that often lead to God's grace in our lives. In this sense, grace is the great leveller and the great cleanser.

The life of God's people is the walk with Jesus as Lord. It is living as we are, being what we are. It views essential human attributes, like sexuality and speech, in fundamentally different ways, in line with Jesus as Lord.

4. 'New man' (vs.9-11)

As a way of summarising what they have already said, Paul and Timothy finish with identity and behaviour (albeit this time in the context of community) – **look at verses 9-11... READ.**

It is important to grasp, as a way of closing out here, the way in which Paul and Timothy have phrased this closing section. In the language of 'putting off' and 'putting on', they have captured a common day-to-day activity – just think of the end of a work-day, or the end of a sporting event.

But two things stand out here.

First, the tense of the phrases – and they are both participles – is aorist – it is a past event, viewed as a whole, complete. The 'putting off' and the 'putting on' are not the day-to-day activity of the Christian life – they have happened once and for all – in Christ.

Second, this 'putting off' and 'putting on' are not surface or cosmetic changes like clothes. No – they are complete human nature and identity changes. The 'putting off' was the dealing with our nature as people 'in Adam', a people who are by nature rebellious against God. That happened once. The 'putting on' is the taking on of the fullness of humanity in Jesus, in being so closely identified with him that 'his story is now our story'.

To experience this one-off event – to be connected to Jesus – is to be completely assured of the change in your human nature AND to be placed in a completely new community (remember that Jesus was the ‘firstborn from among the dead’?).

There is a renewal here that is at the level of what it means to be human and know humanity – the change comes from knowing God, knowing his will and, thus, by him being remade in his image. It is language that takes us back to the creation. It is language that recalls becoming full and complete, like in Colossians 2. It is language that captures the radical break being a Christian makes because Jesus is Lord, and has transferred us into his kingdom.

To put it simply, Paul and Timothy want to finish by reminding their readers – the Colossian Christians, and us – to ‘live as you are’.

In this community, then, there should be no lying. But, even more than that, the fundamental distinctions that the world enforces are removed. Here, in this new community of God, this new humanity, there is no racial or ethnic or social distinction – there is just unity because Jesus is our Lord.

Let me make three simple observations about how this might look day to day:

- I do not think I can be blunter than Paul, but I will try: there must be no dishonesty, no lying, no deceit, no lies amongst the people of God. That is a betrayal of trust and a denial of the grace and unity we share. I want to emphasise this point because I can think of a number of occasions where people

have said they have left Christian community because of this – fundamental dishonesty by Christians in business or social relationships. God’s community here in Narrabri should be known for its fundamental honesty and integrity and transparency and consistency. Bringing it down more closely, half-truths should be full truths, protection by twisting the truth should be done away with, exaggeration to improve my standing should be removed. All of our communication should be honest and clear and transparent.

- I do not think I can be blunter than Paul, but I will try again: there must be no hint of racism, sexism or snobbery within the community of God in Narrabri. There have been times in my interactions with God’s people over the last ten years where the casual racism, sexism and snobbery has shocked me, even left me speechless! Within this community, there should be no such hint – we all are sinners deserving judgement, and we all are sinners receiving grace, and we all are sinners with the same Lord. And, as this community relates to those outside, the same attitude should remain.
- Our transformation will deepen, in God’s grace, as we grasp his will and revelation more deeply. It is no mistake that Paul prays for our knowledge of God’s will in Colossians 1:9-10 and then links it to our complete transformation here in chapter 3. Knowledge of God and his will and his Lord Jesus – such knowledge is to be sought after and to be treasured. It is at this point that God’s Word should be read and read and meditated upon and meditated upon. Christian books should be devoured, and opportunities to know God seized. Let me give you two: Bible-study groups within our

community and external studies through Moore Theological College.

Being what we are is not just an individual thing – all of us as individuals are citizens of a kingdom and, thus, members of a community. Our community must also display its walk with Jesus as Lord.

5. Be what you are...

If Jesus is our Lord – and Paul's argument so far has said that he is – we must walk like he is our Lord. His Lordship has won us forgiveness that is undeserved, citizenship in heaven that is undeserved, reconciliation with God that is undeserved, new life when we were spiritually dead. Our identity, and life, is now inseparably bound to the truth that Jesus is Lord – and our Lord especially.

Our lives must display this truth. We must live as we are. Our lives are not a moral striving to be good, but a display that we are God's. Our lives are not a drudgery, weighed down by laws that cannot be kept, but a delightful display of being delivered into God's kingdom. Our lives are not an unrealistic pie in the sky existence, but an everyday exhibition that our day-to-day life is established on our eternal existence. Let me say it again: live as you are!