

Challenges of a Christian

Colossians 3

In Colossians chapter three, the Apostle Paul is writing to Christians in the first century individuals that had been delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear son. It was in that sphere that Paul would say that they enjoyed redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of sins. That's found in Colossians chapter one in verses 13 and 14.

Over in chapter three, Paul would say, if then you've been raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. And the idea is, since you've been raised to walk in newness of life, the goal ought to be to seek things which are above. So he begins by talking about our position in Christ.

And then secondly, he zeroes in on our priority, and that is where to set our affection, set our mind on things above, and not on things which are upon this earth, which really presents to us a great challenge in this life. What I want to do in our study today is talk about some of the challenges that we face as members of the Body of Christ in the 21st century.

You know, we live in a day in time in which the world is constantly bombarding us. We're trying to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, and sometimes in striving to live a Christ centered life. The world bombards us and we're faced with so many challenges. So what are some of the challenges that we face as members of the Lord's church today?

Let me begin by maybe calling attention to some of the problems that we're facing. And then from a biblical perspective. Let's talk about the prescriptions set forth in the scriptures. Number one, I would submit to you that as members of the church that there is a real danger, a real challenge in terms of our becoming complacent in our relationship to the Lord.

Now think about what Jesus said in Matthew chapter six. In that great sermon on the Mount, Jesus accentuated putting spiritual things above any and everything. You remember, for example, in chapter six and verse 19. Jesus said, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, not on earth, but rather in heaven. Then in verse 33, Jesus would say, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

And the idea is that the Lord is to be preeminent in our lives. He is to take priority over any and everything. That word first there means first and in terms of place and time in life. And again, the idea is he is to be preeminent in our service to the Lord in our Christian walk. Are we allowing the Lord to be first?

Are we allowing him to be the focal point of our life? Complacency can rob us of a number of things in our spiritual life. Number one, it can rob us in terms of our walk with the Lord. You remember John would say in first John chapter one, that if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

The blood of His Son Jesus, cleanses us from all sin. I think about what the Bible says concerning a man by the name of Enoch in the long ago. You remember in Genesis chapter five and a verse in about verse 24, the Bible says that Enoch walked with God. In Genesis chapter six at verse nine, again the Bible says, talking about one of the great patriarchs of days gone by.

The Bible says that Noah walked with God and yet complacency can rob us of our walk with the

Lord on a daily basis. It really circumvents that walk. But then also, not only does complacency rob us in terms of our walk with the Lord, but I would submit to you that it can rob us of our study. When it comes to the Word of God.

Now we're talking about complacency. Some of the challenges that we face as members of the body of Christ. You know, there was a day, a time when members of churches of Christ were known as Bible believing, Bible toting people. We were often said to be people of the book. And for many people in the Lord's church, in days gone by, they knew the Bible from cover to cover.

That's not necessarily the case anymore. Well, why is that? Is it possible that we become lax in our study and meditation of the Word of God? It was said of the Psalmist in Psalm one at verse two, but he meditated on the law of Jehovah, and on that law he meditated both day and night. You remember in Psalm 119 at verse 97, the psalmist said, oh, how I love your Lord to my meditation all the day.

Well, why would we want to meditate on the truth of God? Well, because the psalmist said, your words are a lamp to my feet, a light under my pathway. Not if you would open the book of Hosea and Isaiah, chapter four, verse one. The prophet brought a strong indictment against those who were living in the northern kingdom. They would ultimately be taken into Assyria in captivity.

But God said concerning his people there was no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. Because of that, he said, there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery. He said they break all restraint with bloodshed after bloodshed. The byproduct of turning a deaf ear to the Word of God. Moral mayhem. But not, if you will.

Down in verse six, in verse six, the prophet said, my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Well, complacency will rob us of a desire to study and know the Word of God. The prophet said over in chapter eight, verse 12, the prophet said, on behalf of God, I've given to them the great things of my law. But they were counted as a strange thing.

How sad when people that at one time enjoyed such an intimate relationship with the Lord had become so complacent in their spiritual lives that the Word of God was strange to their ears. Now you think about the church today. Is it not the case that there are many people who occupy pews all across our brotherhood who, quite frankly, do not know the truth of God?

Can we know the truth? Well, Jesus said we can. Jesus said in John chapter eight, verse 32, you shall know the truth. The truth shall make you free. Paul said he received revelation from God. And Paul said, he took that revelation and wrote it down in a few words. Now listen to him, whereby when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.

Over in Ephesians chapter five. Paul would say, be not unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. So we can understand the Word of God. But if we become complacent in our spiritual lives, number one, it will rob us in terms of our walk with God. Number two, it will affect or impact our study of the Word of God.

Now listen to Peter and first Peter, chapter two. Peter is writing, talking about those who are infants in Christ. That is their babes in Christ. And he said, as a newborn baby, desire the sincere milk of the word. What, Peter, that you might grow thereby. Listen to him over in chapter three, verse 18. In his second letter Peter said, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Are you growing in your faith? Did you know if you're not developing a strong faith in the Lord when troubles and trials and temptations come your way, you'll fold. You remember in Matthew chapter six, the passage we alluded to a moment ago, Jesus was talking about the danger of worry and how worry can impact our faith. It's in that context that Jesus said, O you of little faith.

So one of the real challenges that we're facing, complacency, which again, impacts our walk with God. Our study of the word of God. I would also submit to you that it can impact our worship to God. Is it not the case that there are some who are members of the Body of Christ, who are not regular in their worship, attendance, or worship assembly?

The Bible talks about how on the Lord's Day, we come together for the purpose of engaging in various acts of worship. In John chapter four, Jesus said, God is spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth. In verse 23, Jesus prefaced that statement by saying, the Father seeketh such to worship him. The word worship means acts of reverence paid to deity.

To stand in the presence of God and to give him the honor and glory and adoration that he is rightfully do. The psalmist many years ago said, oh, come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker. How sad that some Christians in the body of Christ have become complacent when it comes to their attendance, to the worship.

Sometimes individuals will come sporadically on Sundays. Maybe they're here one Sunday. They're not here the next Sunday. If they're not regular on Sunday morning, you know they're not going to be regular on Sunday evening or Sunday afternoon. And you can sure bet they're not going to be back on Wednesday night. Well, why would somebody regularly absent themselves from worship and corporate Bible study?

Well, complacency. You know, Jesus said in the great sermon on the Mount, back in Matthew chapter five, he said, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness sake. And the promise is, he said, they shall be filled. Then there's another, I think, important aspect to our study when we talk about complacency. It's true. It can rob us in terms of our walk with God.

Our study of the word of God. Our worship to God. It can also impact our work in the Kingdom of God. The Bible tells us that we have been saved to serve the Lord. In Ephesians chapter two at verse ten. Paul said that we are his workmanship, that we have been created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The word workmanship there really cares with the idea of masterpiece.

We are God's masterpiece. You look at what God has done in redeeming us. There's been a radical change in our lives. We're put on display before the world. We are to be the light of the world. Salt of the earth, if you please. So what about this idea of serving in the kingdom of God? Well, let me just direct your attention to the Book of Titus for a moment in Titus chapter two at verse seven.

Paul said, writing to Titus that we are to show ourselves as a pattern of good works. And the idea is that our lives are to be a blueprint or a pattern of working in the kingdom of God. In chapter two and verse 14. Paul would say, we're to be zealous of good works. Chapter three, verse one. He said, we're to be ready under every good work.

Chapter three, verse eight. He said, we're to be careful, to maintain good works. So the idea is that as a child of God, we're working and serving and laboring in the kingdom of God. But that's not going to happen if we're complacent. You remember when the Lord Jesus surveyed the seven churches of Asia? In revelation chapter three, the Lord identified one of

the congregations as lay out of sin, and the Lord placed that church under a microscope.

The Lord had nothing good to say about that church. As a matter of fact, the Lord said that they were lukewarm. They weren't hot. They weren't cold. He said, I could wish that you were hot or cold, but because you're not hot or cold. He said, I will spew you out of my mouth. What the Lord was saying is, and this is the Christians in the first century, people who are disciples of his.

In effect, he was saying, you make me nauseous when I evaluate your spiritual lives. I am nauseated and I'm sick to my stomach. Now, if you were to have asked him in the first century if you had the opportunity to sit down and talk to those who comprise the church that lay out of sin. Their response would have been, well, we're rich.

Increase with goods, we have need of nothing. And Jesus said, but you do not know that you're wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Sometimes what we think and what the Lord thinks are not the same. We're not on the same page. You remember back in chapter three at verse one, the Lord identified the saints in Sardis. They had the reputation in the community as being alive and well.

But God said, you're dead. So what we want to do is examine ourselves and make sure that we are what we ought to be in the eyes of God. So, number one, one of the great challenges that we face in the church is complacency. But there's a second problem that I see in the world in which we live today, and that is conformity to the world.

Now the Bible tells us, think about for example, what Paul wrote in Romans chapter 12. Paul said, we're to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. He said, which is your spiritual or reasonable service, your logical service. In verse two he said, and be not conformed to this world. The idea is, don't allow the world to pour you into its mold.

No, he said, what I want you to do is be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The spiritual warfare that we're engaged in on a daily basis takes place where, between the ears, about a six inch piece of real estate, the battlefield that we are fighting on is a spiritual battlefield. And so Paul said, I don't want you to allow the world to encroach upon your spiritual life.

Now think about what John wrote in First John chapter two. John said, love not the world, neither of the things which are in the world. If any man loved the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, he said, is not of the father, but is of the world.

And the world passes away, and the lust thereof. But he who does the will of the father abides forever. You know what John saying there? If you allow yourself to literally hook your wagon to the world, you are hooking your wagon to a losing proposition. Because when it's all said and done, the world is going to pass away.

So what we want to do is focus our hearts and lives on the Lord. We want to try to live transformed lives. The Lord Jesus Christ came to radically alter the way we live. That he is. We're to try. We're to try to take his teaching, internalize it in our lives, and then live it out every day. Isn't that what Paul said in Colossians chapter three when he said, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.

And the idea is, you allow the Word of God to find a home in your heart. Now, again, going back to Romans chapter 12, Paul said, we're not to allow the world to remake us in its own

image. Is it not the case sometimes that as Christians we walk like the world. We act like the world. We dress like the world.

We talk like the world. We behave like the world. What's the old saying about a dog? If it looks like a dog, walks like a duck. Quacks like a duck. Guess what? It's a duck. So as a child of God, we're to be distinctive. We're to be different. Think about what Peter said in First Peter chapter two. Peter writes, you're an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession.

Now listen to what he said, whom God has called forth out of darkness into his marvelous light. Now, when we talk about the church, the ecclesia, the church is the called out. So when Peter said, we've been called out of darkness into his marvelous light in many ways that's a picture of what it means to be a member of the church.

And the idea is we are different. We're distinctive. We don't belong to the world. We don't live like the world. We don't act like the world. We don't dress like the world. No, we're trying to conform our lives to the teaching of Scripture. We're trying to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. You remember Paul said on one occasion, be followers or imitators of me, as I also am of Christ Jesus.

Peter would say that Christ last left us an example that we should follow in his steps. And so the idea is, I'm trying to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. I'm trying to live my life like him, Christ like God, like when the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy many years ago. You remember in first Timothy chapter six, Paul said, but you, oh, man of God.

As a Christian, we're a man of God. We are a woman of God. We're a child of God. We're a son of God. But the goal is to live like a disciple of Jesus, to walk in cadence with his will. As John said, hereby we do know that we know him if we keep his commandments. Now there's a third challenge that I think we face in the church today.

The first would be complacency. The second has to do with conformity, allowing the world to remake us in its own image. The third challenge has to do with compromise.

Sadly, sometimes as members of the body of Christ, we concede divine truth. You look around in the world today. The church is to be the pillar and ground of the truth. That's what Paul said in first Timothy chapter three and about verse 15. And the idea is, if the world is going to know anything about truth, then it will come from those of us who are members of the body of Christ.

We're not to alter our teaching to fit the world. No, the idea of Scripture is that we alter our lives. We bend our lives to fit the teaching of the Bible. Sadly, there are those among us today that have the idea that what we need to do is look out and identify what the world wants and whatever it is the world wants.

We're going to give it to them. That's not biblical. You remember in the days of Samuel, when the children of Israel approached him and they said, we want a king, and why do we want a king? We want a king so that we might be like all the nations around us in a very plain and forthright way. We need to understand that the world has nothing to offer the church.

I'm concerned when I see congregations of God's people bringing the instrument into the worship service. There's no authority for that. I'm concerned when I see congregations of God's people allowing women to function in leadership positions in the Lord's church. There's no authority for women elders or women deacons in that special role set forth by Paul and First Timothy.

Chapter three. Titus chapter one. I'm concerned when we have women teaching in mixed assemblies, which is a clear violation of First Timothy chapter two. That's compromise. Does it matter whether or not we stay true to the Word of God? Listen, if we fail to walk in cadence with truth of the doctrine of Christ, we risk our fellowship with the Lord.

Why is that? Because John said, whosoever goeth onward and abides not in the teaching of Christ or doctrine of Christ has not God. So that tells me that if I fail to walk according to the precepts of the doctrine of Christ, then I lose fellowship with the Lord. Now there's a second thing I want to talk about. On the one hand, we talk about some of the problems that we're facing in the church.

But then what's the prescription? In other words, how then do we overcome the challenges that we face in the 21st century? Number one, I believe first and foremost, we have to become and we have to be people of deep and abiding conviction. That is, we have to be rock solid in our convictions. You remember the Apostle Paul who said, it's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me?

Paul would say, we walk by faith and not by sight. Paul would also teach over in Second Timothy chapter one, that we're to hold fast that form or pattern of sound doctrine. And so the idea is that I have some conviction in my life. Peter would say in first Peter chapter three, you remember Peter said, sanctify the Lord God in your heart always, and be ready to give an answer of defense, an apologetic to every member that ask you of the hope that's in you with meekness and fear.

I've got to know what I believe and why I believe it. In acts chapter four, we read about Peter and John who were called before the Sanhedrin council. And you remember they were interrogated because they had healed a man at the gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. They wanted to know by what power, what name have you done, this great miracle?

And they acknowledged that it was by Christ, by his power, by his authority. It's in that context that they said before the council, neither is there salvation in any other. There is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now, in verse 13, the Bible tells us that when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, when they recognized or realized that they were uneducated, untrained men, the idea was they hadn't been to any formal rabbinical school.

They weren't on a plane equal to, say, a Nicodemus of that day and time. Nicodemus, identified by Jesus as the teacher of Israel in John chapter three and about verse ten. They weren't on a plane equal to a Gamaliel, at whose feet Saul of Tarsus had said, but rather these men, according to what the record says, though they were uneducated, untrained men.

The Bible says they realized they had been with Jesus, and because for three, three and a half years they had been in the midst of Jesus. They had deep and abiding conviction in him. You remember back in John chapter six, when Jesus identified himself as the bread of life, that living bread that came down from heaven? And John said, from that time many of his disciples went back, walk no more with him.

Jesus then turned to the 12, and he asked them, we also go away. And what was it? Peter said, Lord, to whom shall we go? For you have the words of life eternal. Peter and the apostles had come to understand that the one before whom they stood had the words of life eternal. Now that's conviction. Then they went on to say, Peter went on to say, and we come to believe, and to know that you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

That's the kind of conviction that we need today. Now we talk about conviction. But I would

also add to that we need consecration to God. Now, the Bible tells us that in Acts chapter four, the Sanhedrin council, they conferred among themselves. They couldn't deny that on the notable miracle had occurred. They couldn't deny that because it was evident to all who were present.

But here's what they did. They commanded Peter and John not to speak nor teach in the name of Jesus anymore. Well, how did that go over? You remember the Bible says Peter. And John responded by saying, we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard. Now listen, that's conviction and that's consecration. They weren't going to back down.

They weren't going to concede. True. They weren't. They were not going to compromise truth. No, they were going to stand tall in the saddle. They were going to continue preaching and teaching Jesus, the divine Son of all of the Almighty God. Now that being the case, we today we need that same kind of conviction and we need to be consecrated to the Lord.

Going back to Matthew six, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. It was said of the early church in Acts chapter two, verse 42. They continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers. Look at what the church did in the first century. They literally turned the world upside down. That was the charge made in Thessalonica.

But then there's a third thought here. Number one, we need conviction. Number two, we need consecration. And number three, we need courage. We need courage to stand for what's right. Paul said on one occasion, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. When Peter and John were commanded not to preach or teach in the name of Christ, and their response was, we can't but speak the things we've seen and heard.

You remember they went back after having been released, went back and rehearsed the events that it transpired with their fellow disciples. And the Bible tells us that they prayed to God, and their prayer was that they might have the boldness necessary to preach the Word of God. Acts chapter four. And about verse 31 tells us, but they spoke the word of God with boldness.

We need that same holy boldness today. We live in an untried and in an unrighteous world, and what this world needs today is a heavy dose of righteousness. Listen to what Solomon said many years ago. Righteousness exalteth a nation. Sin is a reproach on the people is true. We're facing some real challenges in the Church of Christ in the 21st century, but with God's help and with strong determination, we can be exactly what he wants us to be so that we might turn this world, that we might turn this world around and ultimately lead souls to Christ.

God bless you.