

The Sermon

Intro

Experiencing forgiveness of sins is a wonderful experience. The new heavens and new earth is something to long for. But what about today? Something great happened to me (forgiveness about sins). Something great awaits me (new heavens and new earth). But what is today all about? What should I pursue today?

One answer is what theologians call sanctification. Fancy word for spiritual depth, spiritual growth, spiritual maturity, spiritual progress, spiritual transformation. Sanctification is the process by which the believer becomes more Christlike. Addition (godliness) and subtraction (sin). New mouth. New thought life.

Sanctification is a cooperative activity of both God and man. God the Holy Spirit is working in us his good pleasure. At the same time, we make use of the means of grace, like the Bible, which furthers our spiritual progress.

READ PASSAGE

BIG IDEA: Establish spiritual goals. Use spiritual resources.

Body

Introduction Part 2

Recently I read an article by the Baptist Convention of New England that emphasized the importance of vision. The gist was our church needs a clear and compelling vision. We need to know what we're after as a church. We need to know how we get there. If I, as a pastor, don't communicate clearly, you might not know why we gather every Sunday morning, why we have Sunday school, why we have church membership, etc.

Our church mission statement reads: **"We exist to glorify God by building a community that is growing in Christlikeness and making new disciples."**

This statement highlights several things:

1. We exist for God's glory.

How do we glorify God, bring him honor? This statement notes three ways we practically do this.

2. We're building a community.

We're saved to be part of a local church where we live out the Christian life with other Christians. We glorify God by doing community in a way that pleases him.

3. We're seeking growth in Christlikeness, spiritual progress, sanctification.

We're saved to be transformed. We glorify God when our lives increasingly conform to his word.

4. We exist for making new disciples.

We're saved to live in the world and rub shoulders with non-Christians, live out of faith, tell others about our hope in Christ, and urge others to follow Jesus. We glorify God by speaking the gospel.

This four week series on spiritual passions is intended to give us some clarity on the things we're after.

When I preached Colossians, one concept stood out: no area of life untouched by God's word. That's sanctification. Lives increasingly altered by God's word.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ *For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.* – Colossians 1:28-29

Why did Paul teach? Why did Paul expend his physical body? Because he wanted every single believer to be mature, meaning complete. No area of life untouched by God's word.

Point 1: Kill sin (3:1-11)

My first two points answer the question, what spiritual goals should I have?

It's not enough for my children to know the basics of the Christian faith (cross, forgiveness of sins, faith and repentance), the big story of the whole Bible (the rescue of sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), or even the depths of systematic theology (e.g., Trinity, end times). It's not enough for my children to know the basic do's and don'ts of Christian morality (e.g., tell the truth, love your neighbor). It's not enough for my kids to believe in biblical manhood and womanhood. It's not enough for my kids to have confidence God created the world.

These are good things, but they're not enough. There's a need for personal spiritual ambition. The Christian life isn't just attending church gatherings and reading our Bibles at home. Again, good things, not bad things. But not enough. What my children need is godly goals for their lives. Godly goals rooted in the Bible.

What I want for my children I want for you. Paul says:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. – 3:1

We were once dead in sin. Now we're "raised with Christ" to newness of life to seek different things than we sought before: the things that are happening in heaven.

Well, what's happening in heaven today? Certainly not sin. In heaven there's the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the elect angels, the souls of dead believers (2 Cor 5:8). In heaven, there's love, joy, peace, harmony, unity, worship. No ones' jockeying for personal gain. No one's rebelling against God. All is well.

Paul's says pursue this.

Pursuit

A life without goals is aimless. The Christian life isn't aimless. We're not just passing time until Jesus returns. Why are you still here? Why aren't we transported to heaven immediately after we believe?

Paul provides us with two goals. First, to kill sin.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. – 3:5

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. – 3:8

The idea is simple. After becoming a Christian, there's things we need to eliminate from our lives. The sort of person Paul had in mind was a Gentile who lived a godless life for decades. When the gospel came to town they believed. Ingrained, sinful patterns had been with them for years. There was a lot to work on!

Paul focuses particularly on sexual sin, greed, anger, and verbal sin. There's many sins Paul doesn't list.

Paul focuses on external actions (sexual immorality, slander, obscene talk) and internal attitudes (passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger). Outward sin flows from inward sin.

Did you notice Paul equates covetousness with idolatry?

We might want something good (marriage). We might want something bad (sex before marriage). Either can be idolatry. We can want marriage more than God. We can want a car more than God.

How can we tell if we've crossed the line? Jesus said, "*You cannot serve God and money*" (**Matt 6:24**). Am I serving the thing? Is it ruling my thought life, my time, my resources? Do I want it more than sanctification? Is it interfering with spiritual goals? If we're willing to neglect biblical duties to get the thing (e.g., husband neglects their wife and children to get overtime for a boat), we're guilty of idolatry.

Idolatry is misplaced priorities. Idolatry is functional worship. Idolatry is being ruled by something other than God.

What does killing sin look like?

It's going to differ based on your experience. A child converted at a young age in the Christian home may not have established a long list sinful patterns. A person who's been converted for 60 years may have killed a lot of sin in their life. A middle-aged, newly converted person will have a lot to kill.

How did it look for me?

It started with things like no more getting drunk, no more cursing, can't watch those type of movies or read those magazines anymore, can only date a Christian girl. Some sins are obvious to the new Christian.

As life's progressed, I've become more aware of the less obvious sins. Failure to share the gospel, neglecting spiritual disciplines, anger, laziness on the job, talking about a person instead of to a person.

My brother-in-law put it something like this. I didn't know how selfish I was until I got married. Then I had kids and learned I was even more selfish than I thought. Circumstances, trials, life changes, people have a way of drawing out the sin that wouldn't have emerged otherwise.

The heart

But it all starts with the heart. It's sinful passions and out of proportion acceptable passions (idolatry) that lead to sin. To fix the behavior the heart needs to change. For the parent to move from selfishness to service, old passions have to be replaced with biblical passions.

Point 2: Put on godliness (3:12-15)

It's not enough to not get drunk. It's not enough to not curse. But these alone don't make us a faithful believer. Positive character must be formed.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. – 3:12-13

To "*put on*" means to clothe. Like you put on a sweatshirt, you put on godliness. Compassion, kindness, humility is what people should see when they look at us.

Note every positive character trait is communal. Compassion, kindness, bearing with one another, forgiveness are ways we deal with people. **“God’s chosen ones”** means he’s talking about what’s supposed to happen in the local church. Forgiveness and patience means Paul assumes sin will happen in the church.

Note there’s a mix of external behavior (kindness) and heart attitudes (compassion).

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. – 3:14-15

Paul’s concern is harmony in the body. Internal attitudes (love, peace, thankfulness) have external consequences: relational peace in the church.

Application

The Christian life is both addition and subtraction. Addition and subtraction serve the local church. We move towards completeness (sanctification) by addition and subtraction.

Point 3: Be indwelt by the Bible (3:16)

My last two points answer the question, how do I move towards completeness?

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. – 3:16

The Bible (“*word of Christ*” = word about/from Christ) does the internal work that stimulates addition and subtraction.

“richly” = abundantly. **“in you”** = in your heart. Rich people have a lot of money. The idea is have a lot of Bible in your heart. We’ll have a lot of Bible in our hearts if we teach (positive instruction) and admonish (correction) one another. We’ll have a lot of Bible in our hearts if we sing songs together that are rich in Bible content.

The Colossians didn’t have personal Bibles like we have. So, if they wanted to have a lot of Bible in their hearts they needed to memorize Scripture. **“speaking the truth in love”** (Eph 4:15) and singing gospel songs enabled Bible memorization.

Application

My point is a lot of Bible in us enables us to kill sin and add godliness.

Last weekend we had a men’s meeting on Saturday morning. The focus was godly dreams = goals we want to see come to pass, not prophetic dreams.

These morning we’ve seen two dreams, goals every Christian ought to have: killing sin and putting on godliness. That’s completeness: no area of life untouched by God’s word.

It’s not enough to stop at generic sin and generic godliness. We have to get specific.

As we read our Bibles, we do a little self-examination. We measure our lives against what we read. We note the sin to subtract. We note the godliness to add. We note specific sins, internal and external, we need to kill. God’s showing me I need to root out covetousness and slander. We note expected character, internal and external, that’s lacking. God’s showing me I need to have compassion and be generous with my money.

Then we memorize Scriptures that speak to what we need to add and subtract.

So that when the situation arises (my kid didn't obey me, my co-worker mocked me, my car broke down, my Christian friend isn't showing me compassion), we're aware of our own hearts and we've already settled how we're going to respond. We remind ourselves of memorized truth, we speak the truth to ourselves, and we ask for God's help in the moment.

A lot of Bible on hand in the heart kills sin and yields character.

"renewed in knowledge" (3:10) = made new by Bible knowledge..

Point 4: Be thankful (in everything) (3:17)

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. – 3:17

"whatever you do, in word or deed" = everything. Talking to a brother or sister. Talking about a brother or sister. Cleaning the wood stove, stacking the wood, working in the sound booth, serving at the Senior Dinner.

"in the name of the Lord Jesus" = doing everything with Jesus in mind. Reminding ourselves of Jesus' character, that Jesus is Lord.

"giving thanks to God the Father through him" = in whatever we're doing, in whatever we're saying we do it giving thanks to the Father. This is radical if we understand what's being said.

Application

The idea is we kill sin and add godliness by giving thanks. If I'm giving thanks to God I won't be likely to commit sexual immorality or engage in slander. Why? When giving thanks, I'm reminded of the gospel. That Jesus died in my place to take the wrath I deserve. In giving thanks, I'm reminded of God's holiness that required Jesus to be punished for my sin so that I could be forgiven. So I won't take sins like sexual immorality lightly. As I give thanks, I'm reminded that Jesus willingly endured the slander of the religious establishment for my good. So how could I be okay with slandering my brothers and sisters?

Positively, I'm more likely to give my fellow Christians compassion and kindness and forgiveness if I'm giving God thanks for his compassion and kindness and forgiveness.

In everything means if there's an activity I need to do, and I don't want to do it, I need to give thanks. Maybe I'm lazy and selfish and I don't want to stack wood. I thank God there's a heated building where we can gather together. Maybe I'm afraid to have a hard conversation. I thank God for guidance in the Bible.

When you don't want to do the dishes, you thank God you have plates to eat on and food to eat. You thank God for opportunity to serve like Jesus served.

Recap

Christian, what goals should you have?

1. Kill sin.
2. Put on godliness.

Our passion needs to be spiritual progress.

Christian, how do we make progress?

1. Be indwelt by the Bible.
2. Be thankful (in everything).

Non-Christian

We've learned this morning that we humans are messed up. That's why we need to kill sin and put on godliness. We do life our own way. We reject God's commands. Which ruins our relationships.

Jesus came to give sinners peace with God. By dying on a cross so that whoever believes can have forgiveness of sins. Assurance that God is for us and not against us. God is merciful to sinners.

Jesus didn't come just to forgive us. He also came to change us. When you believe you're born again with a new heart with new desires and spiritual sight. Turn to Christ for rescue from sin. Trust in him.

Conclusion

Earlier I said we as a church need to know what we're after. And how to get there. What are we after? Spiritual progress. Completeness. No area of life untouched by God's word. This involves killing sin and adding godliness.

How do we get there? More and more Bible. Bible knowledge. Memorizing Scripture. Speaking the truth to ourselves when we're tempted or lazy. And thankfulness. Thanking God throughout the day. Thanking God when life's hard. Thanking God when you don't want to do it.

Establish spiritual goals. Use spiritual resources.

Is your life aim your own spiritual progress? Do you want more of your life touched by God's word?