

## 6. Jesus Christ, Captain of Everything

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to continue now reading from Colossians chapter 3 verse 12 down to chapter 4 verse 1. That's on page 984 in the Blue Bibles. 984. Let me catch up a little bit with Paul's train of thought.

3 verse 1 Paul said, if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Verse 5 put to death therefore what is earthly in you. Verse 11 here, that is in Christ's new creation, the church, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, but Christ is all that matters and in all of his people. So verse 12, put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, 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.

And above all these, put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you are called in one body.

And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 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. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and don't be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters. Not by way of eye service, as people pleases, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You're serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdo will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven.

[ 3 : 09 ] Well, let's pray together before we come to look at this. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you have called us in Christ to be one new, redeemed, distinctive people. We thank you for the time we have together to look at the end of this letter, to learn about the son you have set on the throne of heaven. We thank you, Father, for the ordinary lives you've given us to live out under his loving rule, serving our churches, caring for our children, our grandchildren, working in our offices and our homes. And we pray, Lord, that you would use this time together now to renew those lives after the image of your son. In his name we pray. Amen.

Well, what does it take to please the man we most love and admire? Growing men sometimes go to extraordinary lengths, don't they, just to hear their father utter the words, I'm proud of you. The great military commanders often make history not so much through heroism, but because they were loved and respected by their men, men who would follow them wherever they asked. And without a captain who commands the loyalty and respect of his teammates, no sporting side will ever achieve glory, will it? Well, any Christian should be able to answer without a moment's hesitation. That the man they most love and admire, the man they want to please above all, is the Lord

Jesus. In Paul's words last week, it's the things of his kingdom which we've set our minds on. And the wonderful thing is that when we died with Jesus and God's anger at our old lives was turned away, then we were freed to live a life which truly does please him. And it's that new life which Paul turns to now. If you like, this is about what happens when you realize that Jesus is the person who matters to you the most. That he is the man you most love and admire and want to please. Or to put it in the Christian jargon, it's about what it means to call Jesus Lord. Christ's lordship, his rule, is a massively important theme in this letter. It began, remember, with Jesus the creator, chapter one, set over everything and everyone in his cosmos. And then in chapter two, we saw his rule over the

rebel powers.

Every one of them disarmed and disgraced at his cross. Even the dark spiritual forces fooling the Colossian Christians. And now at the end of chapter three, the focus is on Christ's rule over his new creation. His church. Five times in the Greek, Paul will stress his rule over everything. Everything in the Christian's life. Relationships in the church, the home, even the office place. And the staggering truth is that this Jesus Christ, captain of everything, has picked us.

Knowing that we don't deserve a thing, he's chosen us to play for his side. And for the Christian, that grace means that we can't help but look up to him and long to be like him. And amazingly, these verses show us how to do just that. Not in a way that only special Colossian Christians can do.

[ 7 : 25 ] This is how us ordinary Christians please the King of the universe through our ordinary day-to-day lives.

So what does it mean for us mere Christians to call Jesus Lord? We're going to take this in just two points. Firstly, verses 12 to 17, it means putting on the captain's colors. Putting on the captain's colors. I was never very good at sports, let alone football. But when you're picked to play for a team and the captain hands you that strip, then you immediately take on a new identity, don't you?

Even if you're a terrible player like me, you become part of something much bigger. And if you look up to your captain and admire him, then you want to play in a way which emulates him.

Especially if, like me, you know that you don't really deserve your place on the team at all. Well, Paul is saying something very similar about the Christian life in verses 12 to 17.

Verse 12 is where Christ hands the Colossians their new colors. Having literally stripped off the old man back in verse 9, now they get to put on or clothe themselves in the new.

[ 8 : 53 ] But before Paul describes that new identity, he gives it a name. They are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

And that is a team they will certainly have heard of before. They were the very words, weren't they, which God used to describe Israel.

His chosen people. His treasured possession. Rescued from Egypt and called to be holy, says Deuteronomy. Not because they were great, but because God loved them.

That is the team these ordinary Christians in Colossae now belong to. Do you see the irony there? They're being worried by a group of special, privileged Christians who pretend to have something more.

But there's surely no more privileged group on this earth to join than Christ's church. The church who belongs to the chosen one.

[ 10 : 00 ] The holy and beloved son. So it's no surprise then, is it, what the identity they put on looks like. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, long-suffering, forgiving each other.

Verse 13. They're called to be just like Christ. They're captain. After all, it was his image back in verse 10 in which we're being renewed.

Last week we met the old life, which we were to strip away. And if you remember that life with its destructive sex and speech and sentiment, that life spoiled and tore apart Christ's church.

But how different this life, which we're to put on in verse 12 is. Everything Paul mentioned puts our brothers and sisters first.

And of course, you can always fake it. Humility, remember, was the very thing these frauds made such a big deal of. Our Bibles translated it asceticism back then, but it's the same thing.

[ 11 : 13 ] What a world of difference, though, here. They were piously drawing attention to themselves. But Jesus is actually like this.

He actually did put us first. And if he forgave us, verse 13, and put his shirt on our backs, then how can we possibly not forgive each other?

The frauds, remember, would disqualify lesser Christians. But Jesus said that the greatest commandment for his people is love. Love for our captain.

Love for each other. Why? Because, verse 14, this is what real love looks like. Our translation gets a little bit flowery in verse 14.

What Paul's saying is that loving Jesus is what perfectly binds his people together. Loving the way he loves is what brings that perfect bond.

[ 12 : 17 ] It's the thing which unites his church, treating each other the way he has graciously and kindly treated us. All real Christians know, don't we, that we never earned our spot on this team.

Who on earth would take an honest look around this room on the average Wednesday and pick a slot? You can imagine Sir Alex Ferguson holding his head in the hands as he tallies up the hip replacements.

Even the preacher looks like he can barely change a nappy. But just imagine if Jesus' church actually played like this.

If we put on these Christ-like ways of dealing with each other, then what a tight, disciplined team we'd be. Verse 15 sums it up with the sort of verse we're used to seeing on a Christian calendar, next to a picture of a waterfall and a fluffy bunny.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. But do you see what Paul is actually saying there? He's saying let Christ's peace rule you as a church.

[13:32] That's what we've been called to, says the end of the verse, to be one, thankful, united body. Let this team be one where Jesus, the King of grace, is joyfully acknowledged as the captain.

And here's how the captain rules his team, verse 16. His word dwells in us richly. We listen to him. We teach and encourage each other with his wisdom.

We sing the team's songs, spiritual psalms and hymns, which encourage us to seek the things of heaven. That's how the new self uses its tongue, not the divisive ways we saw last week.

And the more we speak of him together, the more thankful our hearts become. We grow so proud to wear his colors that everything we do, verse 17, will want to do for him.

That's what it means to be raised with Christ, to call him Lord. Not just putting to death the old self, as we saw last week, but putting on his ways, allowing his rule to extend to everything we say to each other and every deed.

[14:57] Friends, if you're new to this, then you need to know that being a Christian is not going to church and acting nicely. It means that we've torn off our own identities and we've put on the colors of a far better man.

And that is costly. It's difficult to do. But belonging to Jesus Christ is something we will never, ever regret. Every breath we draw in his name, verse 17, is filled with thanks to God the Father for calling us his.

Calling Christ our Lord means putting on the captain's colors. And secondly, from verse 18 down to chapter 4, verse 1, it means fitting in to the captain's team.

This little section is often called the household code, as if it were some boring rule book which just landed in the middle of the letter like a spaceship. But Paul has just told us that Christianity can't be a matter of wooden rules.

It's doing everything for Jesus' sake. Verse 17. And that takes a grown-up relationship, doesn't it? It means knowing our captain, knowing his will, as Paul prayed in chapter 1.

[16:23] Do you see how real and human this is? So what Paul does now is to flesh that out in a really tangible, practical set of ways. He narrows down from relationships in the church in general, which he's just been talking about, to relationships within the Christian home.

First to wives and husbands, and then to parents and children, and finally to household slaves and their employers. And what's radical and transforming here to the pagan world is not the behavior.

That was something that everyone respected. It's the reasons Paul gives. The heart behind the behavior. So all the way through this supposed rule book, Paul keeps reminding us that it's about a person, the Lord Jesus.

This is what's fitting in the Lord, verse 18. It's what pleases the Lord, verse 20. It's his opinion, verse 23, which matters the most, not men's.

So what does it take to please the person we most love and admire? Well, none of the fancy spiritual talk of those Colossian fraudsters. If you're an ordinary, mere Christian, then this so-called household code actually tells us something very exciting.

[17:52] All we have to do to earn the praise of our new captain is live out our ordinary day-to-day lives in his name.

Washing the dishes and putting the children to bed counts more in his sight than a hundred of their puffed-up prophetic visions. The picture Paul gives us here is one of a church living orderly, grace-driven lives.

These three sets of relationships all have a pattern to them of glad submission and gentle authority. Now, it's worth saying that human beings have never liked the idea of submission and obedience.

That's nothing new. Just look at the first set of relationships, verses 18 and 19. Wives have never liked submitting to their husbands, have they? And we husbands have never been terribly good at dealing tenderly with our wives.

We just don't like authority, do we? And we don't use our authority the way Jesus uses his. Isn't the chaos and the brutality on the streets of Egypt today just living proof of that?

[ 19 : 10 ] Human beings don't like submission and authority. But Paul's appeal here is not to natural human beings. It's to those who have put on Jesus' new identity.

This is what kindness and humility looks like at work in human society. Surely it is fitting, verse 18, to submit in the name of a king who submitted even to the point of giving up his life.

It's fitting, isn't it, husbands, to love our wives in his name, not just with sentimental talk, which we're all too good at, but indeed, putting on Christ means we love by curbing our tongues, curbing our cruel tempers.

next, children and parents. How often as a child I refused to listen simply because I thought my parents didn't deserve it.

And if only I'd had a Christian to sit me down and explain from verse 20 that we obey because Jesus deserves it. It pleases him.

[ 20 : 28 ] Isn't it wonderful as a child to know that the king is pleased with you just because you obey the frustrating parents he's given you? But fathers, verse 21, fitting in to Jesus team means using your authority well, making it easy for your children to obey you and not exasperating them, not setting them up to fail.

why am I so much less patient with my own little girls than Jesus is with me as a grown man? That's not grace, is it?

It's not real authority. I think it's the final couple, slaves and masters, where you see the most radical transformation. what happens when a slave calls Jesus his lord?

Remember, Paul is writing this letter to real people. It's not like a message that he's put in a bottle and sent off to sea. And surely as this bit of the letter was read out in Colossae, there was a pretty large elephant in the room.

Along with the letter, chapter 4 tells us that Paul sent a runaway slave called Onesimus. And his name meant useful.

[ 21 : 50 ] But everyone knew that he had been nothing of the sort. Now though, according to Paul, useless Onesimus is a new creation in Christ.

So perhaps the Colossians and his master Philemon are wondering if they're really going to see any difference in him. You see, he puts flesh on the theology, doesn't he?

Just as you and I will when we go back to our offices in a few minutes' time. It's personal. This is real. Well, verse 22 begins by spelling out the normal, earthly attitude.

Paul calls it eye service. If you like funny Greek words, then that one is beautifully imaginative. Ophthalmadulia. You don't need to be an expert in Greek. To understand it.

If you have a computer at work and the first thing you do the moment the boss comes into the room is shut down Facebook, then already you're an expert in ophthalmadulia.

[ 22 : 58 ] It's playing the part, looking hard at work to please your boss. Now, if you've been following along in this letter, then just for a moment ask yourself who that reminds you of.

Remember those Colossian frauds? Remember all their super spiritual pretense and their hard religious graft? All of it, Paul told us, to impress their earthly masters, those elementary spirits. people and you can fall into just the same sort of fake man-pleasing without ever leaving the workplace. Slave, says Paul, obey your earthly masters in everything, not as people-pleases, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Whatever you do, work wholeheartedly from the soul. For Christ, your captain, and not for human beings. What an extraordinary thing that is to ask of a slave.

Someone forced to labor, and yet doing it wholeheartedly. Just imagine how much more Paul could ask of us, modern employees, with all our protections and rights.

[ 24 : 21 ] How on earth can a slave manage that attitude? Well, because they know that their master isn't really their master.

We may have a lousy employer, an employer who constantly overlooks us, but we have a captain in heaven who treats us far better than we deserve. He rewards us, even for work which no human being sees.

And our allegiance is with him now, remember, not with this world. What's more, verse 25, when he comes to judge, neither we nor our employers will pull the wool over his eyes.

To be a good slave, you need a good eschatology. That doctrine of Jesus' return isn't a doctrine for sophisticated scholars. It's for dishwashers and dustbin men and masters too, verse 1.

Employers need to know that they belong to a master in heaven who is fair and just and one day coming to judge. what pleases the Lord?

[ 25 : 39 ] Well, it's us mere Christians doing our mundane everyday duties from a heart that is bursting with pride because we belong to him.

I bet the frauds in Colossae could not bear to hear that. it sounds so ordinary, doesn't it? And yet, wherever you see a people truly living like this, you can be sure that it is entirely supernatural.

It's a mind set on the things above and ruled by the grace of our captain in heaven which serves him joyfully here down on earth. proud to wear his colors, proud to fit into his church, knowing that we owe our place entirely to his extraordinary grace.

Let's pray. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you.

Father God, we thank you for what we are in Christ and we thank you for what we will be when he appears in glory. Help us, Lord, in church families ruled by Christ's peace to live as your new creation people here on earth for the glory of your son, the firstborn of that new creation.

[ 27 : 22 ] Amen.