



# SANCTIFICATION: THE BELIEVER'S TRANSFORMATION PART 2

*"1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."*  
- Colossians 3:1-2

*"12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; 16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. 17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me."*

- Philippians 2:12-18

# Sanctification: The Believer's Transformation

## Part 2

Let's open to Colossians chapter 3, and I want to set the context for this because I have the feeling that this document might get sort of spread around, and I want a full context for the particular emphasis. So, we are going to read the opening fifteen verses of Colossians 3 just to set it in your mind, and then make a few comments before we get to the heart of the Word of God for us today.

Colossians chapter 3, "Therefore since you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him – a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful."

This is a chapter that directs our attention to sanctification. That is the doctrine in which we live our Christian lives. From justification to glorification, we are the progress of sanctification, being made increasingly holy, increasingly like the Holy One, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I've been telling you that there's a foundational indicative in this text, that is the foundational premise, and it's in verse 1, "Since you have been raised up with Christ." That is to say, "Since you died," – as verse 3 says – "since you died to the old life and have been raised up with Christ, since you died in Christ, we're raised in Christ, since you now have your life" – verse 3 – "hidden with Christ in God, since Christ" – verse 4 – "is your life, therefore there are some imperatives that you need to follow."

So, you have this powerful indicative statement of fact, "Since you have been raised up with Christ, you have died with Christ." This is reiterated in verses 9 and 10 again. Verse 9, "You laid aside the old self with its evil practices and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." That's a fact. You died with Christ, you rose with Christ, and in so doing, you laid aside the old self and you now are a new person.

There's another statement about this in terms of an indicative and that's in verse 12: "You have been chosen by God, holy and beloved." You have been chosen by God to be holy and beloved. We are the elect of God. We were chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be in Christ when He died, in Christ when He rose; then we live a new life. That new life lays aside the remnants of the old life and embraces the particular righteous elements of the new life.

This is laid out in Romans chapter 6 in more familiar terms. Let me remind you of a few verses in Romans 6, verse 8 – good place to start: "Now since we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." That is so important. We are in

Christ, Christ is in us, of course. We are in Christ. In Him we died, in Him we rose; that's the very basic foundational indicative of sanctification. We are new people.

Down in verse 16 he continues: "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one who you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." As a result of that, verse 19, he says, "You've presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness in the past, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification." Down in verse 22, "Now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit," – what is it? – "resulting in sanctification, and the final outcome, glorification, or eternal life."

These are statements of fact about believers. We have been raised with Christ because we died with Christ. As such, we have laid aside the old self and put on the new self. We are the ones chosen by God for holiness as His beloved.

Now that leads to a lot of imperatives here: consider, put aside, put on, put off, let peace rule, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. There's a lot of imperatives. Every command here is based on the fact that we are new creatures. This is the reality of sanctification. We have been justified before God, we have been born into God's family, regenerated, and now we live in the progress of becoming more holy.

Let me sum it up. God by sovereign grace chose you to be in Christ, so that when Christ died you were spiritually in Christ in the purposes of God. You died in His death, you rose in His resurrection, you are now alive in Christ as a new creation in union with the Son of God. You are empowered to put off the remnants of the old life and put on the elements of the new and righteous life, and this is the process of sanctification. It is putting off and putting on. It is progressively the work of the Word and the power of the Spirit conforming you more to the image of Christ.

Now Scripture is clear that this is a command for us to be sanctified, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, you ought to mark that down: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." Plain and

simple: “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” God’s will is that you be sanctified. This is God’s plan; this is God’s purpose; this is God’s design.

Now that means that anybody in ministry has that as an objective. If you’re shepherding the flock of God, if you’re feeding the flock of God, if you’re pastoring God’s people, if you’re a preacher, this is what you are called to do, to aid God’s people in that sanctifying process. The Word and the Spirit does the work, but you are the one who has the responsibility to distribute the Word so the Spirit can use the Word for the sanctification of God’s people. That’s what faithful pastors do.

Let me show you some illustrations of that. Go back to Colossians 1 for a moment. And here you have at the end of chapter 1 the apostle Paul talking about his goal, his purpose with God’s people. Verse 28, “We proclaim Him,” – that is Christ who’s mentioned in verse 27 – “we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ,” – or perfect in Christ, or mature in Christ. The goal of ministry is to admonish every person, teach every person with all biblical wisdom, to present every person complete in Christ.

Verse 29 says, “For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” That was Paul’s goal. He was working to the point of sweat and exhaustion to see the people of God made mature in Christ.

He had a companion, by the way, when he wrote Colossians. He refers to him in chapter 4 – you can look at chapter 4, verse 12 – a man by the name of Epaphras who was actually a member of the church at Colossae. And so, Paul gives a brief report about Epaphras. He is a slave of Jesus Christ, as is Paul; and he says, “Epaphras, who’s one of your number, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.” Again, Epaphras and Paul have the same goal. Paul in his ministry, Epaphras in his prayers: to see the people of God come to full maturity in Christ.

In Galatians chapter 4 and verse 19, Paul expresses the same desire in very strong language: “My children, with whom” – verse 19, Galatians 4:19 – “with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.” He uses a verb that speaks of labor pains of a woman bringing forth

a child. “I suffer the agonies of labor pains until Christ is fully formed in you.” That is the faithful minister’s passion.

In Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11, we find another evidence of this: “He gave some to the church as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastor-teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” That is absolutely unmistakably clear: “Pastors, teachers, evangelists like prophets and apostles are given to the church for the equipping of the saints, for the building of the body, to bring the saints to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” That is the ministry goal: Christlikeness in the people of God.

One other portion is also reflective of Paul’s passion, Philippians 3, and he says in verse 12, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. I was laid hold of by Christ to become like him, and that’s my goal. I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” In the next verse he refers to it as a kind of perfection or maturity.

So, let it be made absolutely crystal clear: the objective of any pastor, any teacher in the kingdom of God is the sanctification of the people in his care, a responsibility to be an instrument of God by which you aid the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the saints into conformity to Christ, to Christlikeness, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Hebrews 12:2 indicates to us that the best way to do this is “fixing your eyes on Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of faith.” So, sanctification demands that our eyes be kept on Jesus who is the goal, the one we want to emulate. This is why churches exist, so that leaders can be instruments to sanctify the saints, who can then go out and live godly lives and give out the gospel in a credible way.

I have been pointing out the fact that in the kind of current pop culture Christianity there is very little interest in sanctification, very little interest in it. I heard one very, very popular pastor recently says, “Soon as you come to Christ you need to get out of this church, it’s not for you,” and he’s repeated it over and over again. He doesn’t understand what his role is, he doesn’t understand what the church is, and he doesn’t understand what the purposes of God are: the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Word.

But that’s kind of pop culture Christianity: little interest in sanctification, little interest in holiness, little interest in maturity, little interest in Christlikeness. And it shows up in much of the pop culture Christianity because it is immature, it is juvenile, it is superficial, it is shallow, it is emotional, it is entertaining, it is self-centered, it is a form of religious theater fully accepting of people’s obvious immaturity. And there’s one very glaring evidence of this, evidence of the disdain for sanctification in the church; and you might not have thought about it, but you will hear it now.

One of the evidences of the church’s disdain for sanctification is the divisive propagation of hostility in the church through the issues of social justice, critical race theory or critical theory of any kind, and intersectionality. Now I don’t know if you know what all those terms mean; it’s not important what each of them means. But essentially, what those terms do is try to deconstruct all of human life and put everybody into identity categories. You are either categorically an oppressor or you are categorically one of the oppressed; and there are myriads of groups of the oppressed and just a few groups of the oppressors.

This has created in our culture what we now call identity politics, which is destructive on every level. It’s destructive of our nation, it’s destructive of our political discourse. It’s devastating because it legitimizes this mentality of victimization, and it seeks to hold everybody responsible for things done not by them, but by people of their same identity group going back forever into history. Identity politics has found its way into Washington and all the places where politicians gather. But it has also been decided to go to church.

Eventually, bad things go to church; that’s what happened when liberalism destroyed all the denominations. Liberalism was the social gospel: “We need to reach people on a social level. Before we worry about their souls, we need to take care of their bodies.” That destroyed the Episcopalian church, the Presbyterian church, the Methodist church, Church of Christ. It is

totally destructive to the degree that I saw this week Union Theological Seminary, one of the most esteemed seminaries back in New York City, its small student body gathered in chapel to repent to plants, plants. They had a bunch of potted plants; maybe they were repenting to them for cutting them out of the ground and putting them in a pot. But they were all repenting to plants. That's where liberalism takes you into a level of religious nonsense.

Identity politics has gone to church like everything goes to church. Everything that is bad Satan will bring into the church. Identity politics has brought into the church all these efforts to identify everybody's people group – men and women, all kinds of racial issues – splitting everybody up, fragmenting everybody, calling on men to make sure that they overturn male patriarchy and elevate women in the church, a calling on certain races to confess to their sins and reverse the patterns of the past and elevate other racial groups. It's gone to church with such a force that it's destructive, as you probably have seen. Now I know that's bold talk, but this is what I see the Word of God telling us, and I want to show it to you.

So, we've already talked about the premise of sanctification: that you have died in Christ, risen in Christ, you are in Christ. We're one in Christ, one body, one people. We have one Father, we're in one family, we're brothers and sisters. We've talked about that. We've talked about the progress in sanctification, that we're to be pursuing righteous things, godly things, and we're to separate ourselves from the world. That's exactly what he says: "We're to set our thoughts on things above and not on things on the earth."

So, we talked about the premise for sanctification, the progress of sanctification; now I want to talk about the partnership in sanctification. Come to verse 11. Verse 11 in the NAS says, "a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised," – which is another way to say Greek and Jew – "barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all."

Paul addresses the issue of our partnership in sanctification, but I want you to look at this verse a little more closely. We are all new creatures. We have been born again. We have a new father and a new family and a new brother in whom we are united, new sisters and brothers. We are the church. We are all in the process, according to verse 10, of "being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." We're being renewed by the power of the Spirit and the Word into Christlikeness, into



Christlikeness. This is our objective. Our objective is to move forward in progressive sanctification to Christlikeness by embracing the full knowledge of Christ as revealed in Scripture. As we gaze at Him, we are transformed into His image, 2 Corinthians 3:18.

But I want you to look at verse 11. You'll notice there that if you have an NAS, maybe other translations, there are several words in italics which means the translators added those to make things clearer. But I think while those things are helpful to some degree, it's more helpful to go back to the original text.

Verse 11 actually doesn't use the word "renewal" or "distinction," or the word "between." Literally, if you translated it, "in which there is no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman." "There is no," this is a very interesting little Greek phrase: *ouk eni, ouk eni* – not there, not present, not in, not existing. Very strong language, very strong language. We are involved in a new self, according to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in which there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. Distinctions don't exist, they don't exist.

The same little two words in the Greek is used in 1 Corinthians 6:5 translated "not among you, not among you." It's used in James 1:17 where it says, "Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, in whom there is no change," – not change, doesn't exist in God. There's no variableness or shadow of turning. It's not there; it's not in God; it's not part of God. Very strong language.

So, go to Galatians chapter 3 and verse 28, and the same little Greek phrase *ouk eni* is used three times in one verse, verse 28. But back it up, verse 26: "You're all sons of God" – okay, we're all sons of God – "through faith in Christ Jesus. We've all been" – verse 27 – "baptized into Christ, we've clothed ourselves with Christ." And then you have verse 28, "Not there Jew and Greek, not their slave and free, not their male and female; you're all one in Christ Jesus." Three times *ouk eni*, doesn't exist, does not exist, not there.

We have a new identity, and our new identity is Christ, right? Our new identity is Christ. Christ is all and in all. Christ is the universal object of our love and worship. We are in

Christ; Christ is in us. Previous identities don't exist. Did you hear that? They're not there; they don't exist.

Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 5; and it's very strongly stated by Paul this same truth, verse 14, 2 Corinthians 5:14, "Love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died." Okay, look, Christ died for all, therefore we all died in Christ. We died to the old life with all of its identities and all of its definitions. Though those things were Jew, Gentile, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free – in the previous to Christ world, those things had a place. But when Christ died, we all died in Him.

"He died" – verse 15 says – "for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." Yes, Christ is all and in all; we live for Christ. Christ is everything. We are in Christ; we are in the family of God. We have a new Father, a new family, a new brother with whom we are identified, new sisters and brothers, and it's all about Christ.

"Therefore" – look at verse 16 – "from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh." What a statement. We don't deal with people the way we used to. We don't deal with people in previous to salvation categories. They don't exist in the church, they don't exist. We don't use fleshly categories, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh.

Paul says, "Before I was converted on the Damascus Road, I knew Christ in a fleshly way, and I hated Him, and I persecuted people who believed in Him. And then I met Him, and now" – he says – "I don't know Him in this way any longer. I know Him on a spiritual plane. I once knew Him as one I hated, now I know Him as my Lord and Savior whom I love. I once knew Christians as those who I persecuted, and now I don't know them in the flesh anymore, I know them in Christ."

This is because, verse 17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things," – what do you mean "the old things"? The old identification: they're gone, they're passed away; everything has come new. Paul is so transformed that he has lost all of his original hatred for Christ and all of his very vicious prejudice against Christians. His view has changed dramatically. He loves the one he hated and loves the people who loved the one he hated.

Everything changes. As newly created children of God, created by our heavenly Father, spiritually put in His family, we don't see each other in human categories anymore. That's not how we define our people. We're all one in Christ. As Christians collectively, we put aside the old, ugly sins of social prejudice, resentment, jealousy, hatred, racism, or whatever. They don't exist. They're not in the church. I know there are a lot of people who are interested in all that ancestry stuff, but we just trace ours back to Christ, back to the new creation.

Now please understand this. This is jolting stuff. This is shocking, startling truth to the ancient world, because Jews and Gentiles were very, very separated – circumcised and uncircumcised. And barbarians and Scythians – and I'll say more about that – were very, very hostile toward each other. And slaves and freemen were categorically in complete worlds. In the ancient world it was that way, and it's always been that way, and it's still that way now.

What a world we live in; so much social hatred, ethnic hatred; separation over religion, education, economics. There are so many ways people get divided up; even fashion, music. The whole world is just fragmented with hatred, always has been, always will be. Resentment, prejudice, scorn leads to conflict, leads to violence, leads to crime, leads to destruction, leads to war. It's ubiquitous, it's going on all the time. We can't settle this world down and make them get along, can we?

Those identity distinctions have led to the worst of all human behavior: genocide. Such divisions are so common that even a small little group of teenage kids think it's noble for them to hate some other small little group of teenage kids because they don't like the way they dress. This is so profoundly etched into the fallenness of man that we can't overcome it. But the groups themselves think it's a kind of virtue to hate their enemies. Even the Jews thought it was a virtue to hate their enemies.

Salvation comes along, and now a Jew and a Gentile are in Christ and they're one. An uncircumcised and a circumcised person are one; and before, no connection. A barbarian and a Scythian are one, and a slave and freeman are one. There's no more animosity, there's no more categories, there's no more racial groups, there's no more ethnic groups; it's all irrelevant.

I mean, particularly, let's just talk about Jew and Gentile, Ephesians chapter 2. We know the Jew and Gentiles hated each other. The Jews, I suppose you could say, had a reason to hate because they were basically attacked and assaulted and killed so often in Old Testament history by Gentile nations. They, even in modern times, have been assaulted, as we know the horrible Holocaust and attempted genocide. And even now they have enemies surrounding them in the Middle East.

Non-Jewish enemies have made life miserable for Jewish people. This runs so deep that Jonah went out and didn't want to evangelize Gentiles because he didn't want them having the blessing that the Jewish God would give them. And when they did repent and believe, Jonah wanted to die. He said, "I can't stand this; I'd rather be dead than see Gentiles blessed by my God."

A Jew wouldn't go into a Gentile home, eat with a Gentile utensil, touch a Gentile; and he went out of Israel, when he came back in he'd shake the Gentile dirt off his clothes, so he didn't put it on the soil of Israel. And yet in Christ, there's neither Jew nor Gentile. Ephesian 2:13, "Now in Christ you who were formerly afar off, Gentiles have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups" – Jew and Gentile – "into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity" – verse 16 – "to reconcile both in one body to God through the cross, putting to death the enmity." The cross ends that. We have a new Father, a new family, a new brother who is Jesus Christ; and we are joined to Him, so that's no longer an issue.

What about barbarians and Scythians? What are they? Why; I'm glad you asked, because that is a very interesting statement, comparison. That's the only time the word "Scythian" is used in the Bible. But that does not reflect the fact that they're some obscure group of people, they are actually not obscure at all.

But let's talk about barbarians, first of all. Barbarian is an onomatopoeic word, which you remember your English class that's a word that sounds like it means. So, because it seemed to educated people that the uneducated people talked a kind of, "Bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar," they called them barbarians. It was a pejorative; it was a mockery; it was scorn. But barbarians were unintelligible people, at least to them linguistically. They spoke in a kind of inarticulate babble, a kind of stammering speech.

And there was more to that. The Jews and the Gentiles, sort of generally speaking, saw themselves as the cultured people. They lived in cities. They lived in cities. That might be the simplest way to distinguish between what the Jew and the Gentile saw as the difference between them and barbarians. Barbarians were nomadic roaming tribes who basically herded animals across the steeps of Europe. They were uncultured.

The people who built cities were seen as the cultured people. And, yeah, there's some truth to that. They built some marvelous things, even as we know from the accomplishments of the Egyptians and the building of the temple in Jerusalem and other things like that. There were certain civilizations that advanced more rapidly in metallurgy and building, and they were seen as educated people. They had reduced their language to writing, for example, and they had written many, many things. We have many things written by the more cultured ancients.

Barbarians, not so. Barbarians were these nomadic roaming people who were feared by most people because they were so different and so unknown. People saw them as subhuman educated people. Cultured people saw them as subhuman, lowlife people, and they wouldn't imagine that they would have any kind of social connection with a barbarian; it would be impossible in their minds.

But this isn't a comparison between the Greeks and the barbarians, this is between the barbarians and the Scythians. So, who in the world are the Scythians? The British museum has done a lot of work on the Scythians. You may not have heard of them, but you can Google it sometime – not now. But fascinating, fascinating people. They basically were so extensive that they ran all the way from China to Eastern Europe. Massive, massive landmass, sweeping from China through India, through Russia, even through Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, through Russia, the Balkans, all the way into the Middle East and beyond. Powerful, powerful collection of tribes. They appear to have been Iranian people by origin from the area of Iran.

They grew very powerful militarily, very uncouth, very uncultured, very dangerous, very deadly. And so, their group began to grow by collecting other tribes, so they became a collection of tribes. It was either join them or get killed by them. So, the Scythians became a

massive, massive horde of people who roamed across the steppes of Siberia and Russia, and sweeping all the way, as I said, from China to the Balkans.

They are called in some ancient writings horse lords because they had developed horses beyond, apparently, anybody in that time the breeding process, and they had turned horses into fighting machines, war machines. They also had chariots that these horses pulled. They were master breeders and trainers of these kinds of war horses. There are all across the frozen Tundra of Siberia and sweeping across the plains of Russia, there are burial mounds that basically were put there by the Scythians. Now they run from 900 BC to about 200 BC. That's a long time, a long time of growing power. In the seventh century, they conquered the Middle East. They were very, very fearful people.

In those burial mounds, which have been now uncovered – about 300 years ago they started digging up some of those burial mounds – they find bows and arrows, they find axes, they find daggers, they find swords; and some of these battle axes are terrifying to see. They had war instruments because they were a warring group.

They are forefathers, according to some of the Huns, like Attila the Hun, and the Mongols; also, people who were very dangerous. Apparently, after all the discoveries that's been made we know now they have no writing. They had not reduced their language to writing, there is nothing written. They had magnificent art, particularly certain animals that they depicted, and they did it in gold. They found a lot of gold art.

They found mummies, mummies so well-preserved that they found out that most all of the men and women were tattooed all over their entire body with images of the same kind of animals that was in their art, which means that they were animists. They worshiped these animals that they depicted on themselves and in their artwork. They were then pagan as pagan gets, and godless. They terrified all the tribes around them who couldn't withstand them. They were vicious and they were deadly.

Herodotus, a Greek historian from the fifth century, has said a lot about them, and these writings are interesting. Herodotus said, and I quote the translation, "They invaded, and all the land was wasted by reason of their violence and their arrogance. They drank the blood of the first enemy killed in battle. They made napkins of scalps and drinking bowls of skulls of

the slain.” Vicious, terrifying, terrifying people. They were such powerful people and such uncouth and fearsome people that some of them became bodyguards in the Roman Empire functioning as sort of personal police.

Herodotus also said – I thought this was interesting – they had the filthiest habits of anyone and never washed with water. Hmm, that too. That might be the final straw. So, they just weren’t barbarians, they were the worst of the worst, of the worst of the worst.

But in Christ, there’s no barbarian and no Scythian. You might have been a barbarian whose tribe was decimated. You might have been a barbarian whose ancestors were decapitated, and their skulls made into drinking bowls for the Scythians. You might have been a barbarian group that were pounced upon by them, and the blood of your parents they drank. But if a Scythian and a barbarian whom a Scythian had conquered came to Christ, they don’t exist. There are no reparations, folks. There’s no distinction. In Christ it doesn’t exist. The most filthy, wicked, violent person possible would be a Scythian.

By the time Paul writes in the first century, they’re almost gone. They assimilated and they’re almost impossible to find by the second century AD; they had disappeared. But the term was still basically a symbol of the worst kind of humanity.

In the first century AD Josephus, the Jewish historian, said the Scythians delighted in murdering people and were no better than wild beasts. Even Tertullian, the early church father, couldn’t resist using them as an illustration when he was tackling Marcion the heretic. He was trying to think of the worst possible thing he could say about Marcion. The most fitting insult he could give to Marcion the heretic, and this is what he came up with: “He was filthier than a Scythian.” Might want to use that sometime.

It’s not that Scythians were actually still around; the term described the filthiest, most wicked, violent person possible. In the kingdom, don’t exist, don’t exist. Might have been a criminal who killed somebody in your family; but in Christ, there’s no difference – the brother. There are no reparations. There’s no going back and rewriting history. There’s no effort to separate people into the categories that existed before Christ.

One other distinction: slave and freeman. The Roman Empire was a slave society. They estimate the population of Rome in 1 AD, first century AD, at about a million, of which 300,000 to 350,000 were slaves. Slaves could own no property; they were considered property. They couldn't be considered persons; they had no legal status as persons. Slaves basically were subject of physical punishment, sexual exploitation, torture, and even execution. It was all kinds of things.

It wasn't racial, because Roman slaves came from a whole lot of different nations. When they conquered a nation, they took them captive. Many of their slaves were soldiers. When they conquered soldiers from another nation, they made them into slaves because they were strong. That was a problem, because as they conquered more and more nations and had more and more soldiers who were slaves, they had slave rebellions; and those slave rebellions were formidable because the people engaged were soldiers; the last of those being the famous rebellion of Spartacus.

So, they came from many nations, there wasn't a particular group. Romans could sell themselves into slavery, debt slavery, until they earned off their debt. Parents who were poor and destitute could sell their children into slavery. But while it was no real ethnic distinction in slavery, there was a social distinction. You were owned. You were a living tool. You were an instrument if you were a slave. You were a nobody; you weren't even a person.

But in Christ, those distinctions don't even exist. When Onesimus went back to Philemon, Onesimus had been his slave, Philemon the master, he went back as his brother. Why? Why are these distinctions gone? They're gone, they don't exist, they're not there. That's the Greek language: "They are not there." Three times it says it in Galatians 3:28, and it adds "male and female." Those are not distinctions we should be dealing with; they don't exist in the spiritual realm. Why? Because all that matters is Christ is all and in all. The single identity of every believer in Christ as a part of His body, His living body the church, obliterates all other identities.

Now let me be clear. All the critical race theories, social justice, intersectional victimhood is of the world and the kingdom of God has no place in the church. If you're a Christian leader, or pastor, or theologian, or teacher, you don't want to be dragging those worldly identities back into the church which the Lord rejects. You're attacking Him, His church, and the



saints; and it is a reflection of an unsanctified heart, an unsanctified heart. “By this shall all men know that you’re My disciples, that you have” – what? – “love for one another.” “We love each other because God is love,” 1 John 4.

So, what should be our attitude toward everybody? Let’s go back to the text and look at verses 12 to 15. I’m not going to explain them, it’s enough to read them, because here you have – we’ve looked at the premise of sanctification, the progress, the partnership. And here’s the personality. What do sanctified people look like? What’s the complex that makes up their person?

Verse 12: “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved,” since you are so loved to have been chosen, how marvelous is that? Why should you not be so happy to love everybody else when you have been undeservedly loved by God?

“So, as those who’ve been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on compassion, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance; and forgive each other whoever has a complaint against anyone.” Look, the Lord isn’t saying you don’t have a complaint. The Lord is saying whatever complaint you have, do what? Forgive.

“Just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” If you can’t forgive, then Matthew 18 says you’re like the man who was forgiven a debt he couldn’t pay, and then went out and strangled somebody for a minor debt; and the Lord sent the punishers to punish him. To be able to receive forgiveness from God and not give it is wicked, wicked.

So, beyond that, verse 14, “Put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” Then verse 15, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.” Keeps going back to that, doesn’t he? Why? Why would you reinvent these identities when you’re one body? They don’t exist, and they won’t be an issue to you if you are defined by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness.

And I can show you Bible verses that point every one of those virtues as a characteristic of Christ Himself. Was He not compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, forbearing, and forgiving? Yes. Each one of those is a virtue of Christ. Be like Christ.

And then, “Wrap yourself up,” – verse 14 – “wrap yourself up in love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Wrap yourself up in love. And then, verse 15, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.” The capstone: be a peacemaker and just live in thankfulness, right? Just be thankful.

Ingratitude is ungodly. Ingratitude is pagan. Any kind of ethnic division is sinful. But in the church, to try to legitimize it is to attack the church; it’s an unsanctified act. It is not the wisdom that comes down from above. The wisdom that comes down from above is James 3:17 – pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy; and it makes peace. The demonic wisdom is jealousy, selfish ambition; and where that is, there is disorder and every evil thing. The church should be marked by the wisdom that is from above.

You know, we’ve been so blessed here at Grace Church. I love to come to a new members list on a Sunday night, and I look at all these names and I can’t pronounce half of them, and I always say, “Thank You, Lord, this is the church, this is the church.” They’re in Christ, Christ is in them. I don’t really care what your ethnic background is, what your social story is; doesn’t matter to the Lord, it doesn’t matter to me. It doesn’t matter to us what your economics are, what your education is. It doesn’t matter what crimes you may have committed in the past, doesn’t matter, because you’re new in Christ, right? This is God’s family, and those distinctions do not exist. To artificially create them is an unsanctified act of attacking the work of Christ in His church.