

Christ Is All: Christian Consistency

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christian consistency and the need to mortify our earthly nature, including our sinful tendencies and desires, in order to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Duration: 55:27

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:13, Galatians 5:24, Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:8-11

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker warns the audience that the message will be uncomfortable and challenging. The main focus is on the need to rid oneself of sinful behaviors and attitudes. The speaker identifies five sins mentioned in chapter five and explains that they describe both individual qualities and relational issues. The sermon emphasizes the importance of personal application of biblical principles and the transformative power of being in union with Jesus Christ.

Transcript

We trust that as we wait together upon the Lord, he will not only illumine the sacred page to us, but at the same time kindle an inspiration within our hearts to be obedient to what his word tells us. As I closed my book before coming down to the service tonight, I found that I was having to ask myself the question whether I was prepared to obey the very challenging passage that comes before us tonight in the epistle to the Colossians. And I'm quite sure that you too will feel something of the keen edge of challenge that comes here.

We can only avoid the challenge of scripture by avoiding scripture itself, or by just skimming the surface of things and not allowing the truth to challenge us in a frontal, wholehearted way. May the Lord save us from that tonight. Now I would like to read again verses 5 to 11 in chapter 3. We are proceeding from where we were this morning.

I hope none of you who were with us in the morning hour will feel that this is too much of a diet from the epistle to the Colossians. In one way, perhaps it's a good thing to follow the theme through morning and evening. Well, that is what is on my heart this evening, and I want to share it with you.

Now let us come then to verse 5, and I'm reading from the New International Version. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming upon the children of disobedience, it

says at the bottom of the page.

You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived, but now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these. These, of course, only being examples. Anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy communication or filthy language from your lips.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator. Here there is no Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all. May the Lord help us to see the thrust of this very challenging passage of his word.

Now, with these words, we pass from the exposition of the general principles that we were enunciating this morning to the matter of their very personal and intimate application to our individual lives. Scripture does this without announcing it and does it regularly. There are certain passages of scripture, certain passages in these epistles, and they're actually dealing with large, big principles.

There's very little immediate application. But you move on, follow the argument through, and before you go very far you will find that the apostles, by the Spirit of God, will then come to a point where they turn the whole thing upon you as the reader or upon those who listen to the exposition of such a word. And that's what we have tonight.

And therefore, I have to forewarn you, this is not a very easy sort of service. If you and I have consciences that are in any way in tune, if you and I have a functioning conscience tonight, we are going to be uncomfortable as we look at this. And if you're not prepared for that, it might be even best for you to go out and have a good walk in the fresh air.

It would be far better than sit under the word of God and not be prepared to walk in the light of it. Now, in order to try to bring out the essence of what we have in these verses, I think we confine ourselves to two main things. And I would divide them in this way.

First of all, we have here certain categorical imperatives, commands of God through his apostle by his word and by the Spirit. Categorical imperatives. And then we have, as it were, standing in the background and in the forefront, both alike, the Christian incentives the incentives that are given us to obey the commands as required of us in these words.

Now, these then are the two things. And whether I'm speaking of the one, the other must be very much in our minds, or whether we speak of the second, the first must be in our minds. We shall first look at the Christian imperatives that we have here.

There are two all-important commands issued here to every person in Christ yesterday, today, and at any time in the future until Christ returns. Any man, any woman in Christ is addressed here. So if you're a Christian, you are addressed here, I am addressed here.

It's a word for me, it's a word for you, it's a word for all men and women in Christ. Two commands. Let's look at them in turn.

Now, verse 5, in chapter 3. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Put to death. Those of you who are reading the King James Version, and perhaps it is the best at this point.

Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth. And the Revised Standard Version puts it like this. Put to death, therefore, whatever is earthly in you.

Now, let's look at the solemn action that is envisaged here. Now, we're not playing here. This is not a nice talk.

This is not a nice piece of scripture. This is not the kind of scripture that you choose when you're in a fun atmosphere. This is serious Christianity.

Here we see reflected the sobriety of a man who wants to see Christians living consistently with their calling. Who wants to see the followers of Christ living in a manner that is consistent with the one they follow. Who wants to see our our condition in life approximating our calling in Christ.

The solemn action envisaged, then, is coming before us, whatever version we may have, in these words. Mortify. Put to death.

Put to death. And that's not a very appealing language. However you think of it, there is something here that's going to hurt everybody.

You can't put anything to death without hurt. Without feeling it. The strong Greek verb used here, translated put to death or mortify, refers to what can hardly be described as less than painful.

It aims at the paralysis of our earthly nature in such a way that we we can hardly expect it to gain its fullness of strength again. When once we've obeyed this injunction, we would expect the earthly nature, to use the language of the of the NIV, we would expect it to have lost its power. Or it's still there.

You don't lose it. You don't get rid of it. But somehow or other, its backbone is broken.

The verb used here does not have quite the same meaning as one which you find in a somewhat similar context in Romans. In Romans 6.11, Paul bids the Romans, count yourselves or reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin. Now it's the same theme, it's the theme of sanctification, of dying to sin and of being alive and responsive to God.

It's the same general subject that is dealt with, but the words are different. Now there in Romans, the word is *logizomai*, from which we have our English word *logistics*, and many other words that are related to it. And it is it is really an attitude of mind to reckon upon something.

If you reckon that you have a thousand, shall I say ten thousand dollars in your checking account, will you draw up to ten thousand dollars? If you reckon you have them there. But if you don't reckon you've got the money there and you're wise, you wouldn't do that kind of thing. You reckon yourself to be dead.

It's something largely in the mind and in the will. But the word that we have here is a different one. The word here, the verb here in Colossians 3.5, used in the active mood, does not so much refer to a mental attitude but to a moral action that requires a strong and a steady heart and a determined will.

Put to death as Abram took his son Isaac with the intention on Moriah, if God should will it, of slaying his dearly beloved son. So must you and I be prepared to take that which is carnal and fleshly and condemned of God. We must be prepared to take it anywhere God requires of us and put it to death.

This is not comfortable Christianity. Now the action called for, of course, is complementary to what was earlier said to be true of every believer. And I'd like you to notice this, especially young Christians here who want to be clear about the doctrine of sanctification.

You see, some people have said Paul is really going off at a tangent here. God does all this because earlier on it says, if you're in Christ, you have died in Christ. So if you've died in Christ, period.

There's nothing more for you to do. Well that's not how the apostle reasons. If you're in Christ, when Christ died, you died.

Now because you died in Christ, die in actual experience. Because of your oneness with Christ in his death. Because of your fellowship with the one who was able to lay down his life on the cross.

Because of his life in you and your union with him. Now do this to your old nature. You have the same thought really, the same principle.

In another part of scripture, in Philippians, where Paul says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who is at work within you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. You do it because God is active within you, urging you to do it and enabling you to do it, creating the desire and giving the enabling. So sanctification becomes a matter of working with God.

In justification, a sinner does nothing to be saved. Not the labors of my hand can fulfill thy law's demands. Not even the tears that we can cry and pour into a bottle, as it were.

They count nothing. We can do nothing. The epistle to the Romans is as clear as that.

We are justified doing nothing. There is nothing we can do to make ourselves right with God. It is all of grace.

It is all his gift. It is all by faith, not of works, lest any man should boast. But in sanctification, we are workers together with God.

He works in us, creating the desire and giving us the capacity. And because he does that and commends us in scripture, we, obeying scripture and the inward impulse of the spirit, work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. But now, what are the objects of this act? Well, here again, we've got something which is very difficult to take in and to apply honestly.

The King James Version brings this out very clearly when it translates, mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth. And then it gives us a list. Clearly the apostle is not literally asking us to lop off our feet or our hands or our ears or our arms for that matter.

That would be simply to incapacitate us for anything in this world and to make us dependent upon other people. Paul didn't do that. Jesus didn't do that.

He didn't cut off his arms. None of the early Christians were told to do anything of that kind, so you mustn't take this too literally. As if it meant, look, become completely amputated so that there is nothing but a torso.

You may wonder why I'm saying this. There are people who have sincerely believed that that's what was meant here, but I'm not going after them tonight. No, Paul proceeds to explain what he had in mind when

he identifies the members with the peculiar sins to which they are prone.

Earlier on, the word that he uses is strictly put to death, mortify your members, and that might refer to the hand, the arm, the leg, the ear, or whatever. But then when he comes to explain what they really are, he relates them very intimately with certain sins, and these are the sins. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

What he commands is a mortification of our members so that they no longer produce the kind of sins they once did. F. F. Bruce is a very good and very relevant point at this stage. In his commentary on Colossians, he says this.

In Romans 7, 23, Paul speaks of the law of sin and death in my members. Romans 7, 23. Here in Colossians 3, 5, he goes further, and he practically identifies the reader's members, hands, arms, etc., with the sins which they were formerly the instruments.

But what he is really thinking of is the practices and the attitudes to which his readers' bodily activity and strength had been devoted in the old life. Christian consistency requires all of us who have died in Christ, historically and representatively in Christ, to live in a manner that expresses that attitude towards sin in our daily living. Paul puts it like this in Romans 8, 13.

It's the same truth. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

This is the way of life everlasting. It is to know the life of Christ active in our souls, enabling us to do what God in his word requires of us to do, and in obedience to our Lord, doing it. A specific sense which Paul relates to the wrongful use of our bodily parts is then given us.

I just want to say a word about these because I think it is important to be very specific. Paul gives us an example here. We can be too general in these things.

There is a danger in being specific because somebody may say, well, he doesn't mention my particular sin there, and so there's nothing there for me. Now, that's the danger of being specific, and that's the danger of the preacher in the pulpit using an illustration which may apply to somebody in the congregation, and 99 other people can say, well, that's got nothing to do with me. Nevertheless, it is necessary for us to see an illustration of the kind of thing Paul has in mind.

What are you thinking of, Paul, when you tell us to put to death, to mortify our members? Here he says, sexual immorality and impurity. The first word may have a wider connotation at times, but its main pointer is unquestionably to sexual misdeeds of any kind, pornography, from which we have our English word pornography. Together, these two words embody the exact opposite of what is meant by the word chastity.

I shall say no more about it than that. Put the two together, and they represent that which is the exact antithesis of the word chastity. You and I are to put our members to death.

Is he asking us to put our hands to death, or any other member of the body? Not quite, but what he is asking us to do is not to allow them to be the agents of sin, such as in the case of sexual immorality and impurity. In the ancient pagan world as in our day, sexual relations outside of marriage were deemed normal and proper. The Christian ethic cut right across that and challenged the ancient as it challenges

the modern world to mortify the deeds of the body, to reckon us dead, no, to slay.

There are no times when charity requires us to act at the expense of chastity. Next, he speaks of lust and evil desires. Now, it seems that Paul is thinking in pairs in these two cases, lust and evil desires.

Again, taken together, these two evils refer to that within us which always yearns for forbidden things. We're not necessarily confined to the realm of sex here. You can think of other areas of life, other areas of behavior.

Whether that applies to food, to drink, to clothing, or any other aspect of behavior, lust and evil desire will always want to rebel against the revealed will of God and want to go beyond it. Says Paul, mortify, put to death, any instrument, any aspect of your body, physical or otherwise, that would be the means of aiding and abetting such a notion and of implementing such a sin. Then he goes on to this and he brings out something here which always shocked me when I came to understand what it meant.

And greed, which is idolatry. I guess in our Western world, our Western society, we do not really acknowledge greed for the wretched thing it is. If someone comes into our congregation whom we know has been committing immorality, pormia, be it sexual sin or whatever, we have a sense of repulsion.

We sometimes welcome greedy men and women with open arms. Brothers and sisters, greed is one of the most heinous sins in scripture. Greed which is idolatry.

In the Greek word for greed, pleionexia, there are two words wedded together to convey one thought. Pleion means more and the end of it comes from the verb echain, to have. So that what the word really means is to have more.

What then is greed? This. It's the desire to have more and more and more and more and more and more and live. The Greeks used to say about the sin of greed that you can as easily satisfy it as you can fill a bucket with a hole in the bottom.

It is insatiable greed. A man wants something, he gets it. If he's got greed, he wants more of it.

He can never say stop, he can never say enough, neither can she if she's a lady. It's like a cancer of the soul. We don't know what to do with it.

It just eats us, it devours us and we cannot say I've got enough of this or I've got adequate of that. I can never say now that's sufficient, I want more. That's greed.

Now Paul adds, you notice, that such a desire is idolatry. And some of you may be asking how on earth is greed idolatry? Idolatry means idolatry means worshipping a god. What on earth has that got to do with greed? Well, it means this, the transition of thought is as simple as can be.

You see, when I want more and more and more and more and more of anything, it means that thing, whatever it is, has assumed a place in my life which only God should occupy. It's become my god. That's why some people live to eat.

Their god is their belly, says Paul. Now we don't talk as frankly as that today. And you wouldn't say a man weight more than is good for him all the time.

Your belly is your god, would you? No, no. But it can be so. There are people who just dress to show off.

There is a greed that appertains to the ego. I want to be the first to wear this dress or to, you know, don't let me enlarge. And the apostle tells us, be very careful as you walk along that route because it's the root of root of idolatry.

You are actually worshipping something and it is only God who should occupy such a place of preeminence in your life and in your thinking. The apostle affirms it then as a categorical imperative that men and women in Christ should effectively put a stop to these sins involving our bodies that belong to God. Now the second imperative is be rid of, or that we rid ourselves of such things as anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language.

That's verse eight, by the way. Now notice the movement of thought here and with it the progressive challenge to anybody with a conscience. Be rid of, apotheste, throw something away.

You've discovered, you've discovered some dirt or a viper on your clothing and you take it off and you throw it away. You don't want it back again. Now that's the idea.

Cast it from you as a deliberate, decisive act. Get rid of it. And there is passion behind that command.

Don't toy with it, don't trifle with it, but just get rid of it. Evidently the action envisaged by the word translated, rid yourselves then is closely related to the idea of mortification or of putting to death, which we were looking at in verse five. Perhaps it is meant to focus our gaze, however, more definitely upon the act of renunciation.

The act of renunciation as such, it is a graphic portrayal of an obligatory Christian duty. Cast it away. Now the objects of the action, rid yourselves, is again fivefold.

Five sins were mentioned in chapter five. Five issues are brought before us in verse eight. If you ask me, what's the difference between between them? Well, I suppose we could put it like this.

Whereas the first list in verse five had to do with qualities that describe men as they are in themselves, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, things that go on in within our own hearts. This second list in verse eight describes men more in terms of relationships. If you ask me, what's the difference between between them? Well, I suppose we could put it like this.

Whereas the first list in verse five had to do with qualities that describe men as they are in themselves, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, things that go on in within our own hearts. This second list in verse eight describes men more in terms of relationships. You listen to them.

Anger. You're angry with somebody. Rage.

Well, this is another kind of anger, as we shall see in a moment, but it always envisages somebody else. It's a matter of relationship. Malice.

Relationship. Slander. Relationship.

Filthy language. Somebody's listening. They all involve our relationships with people.

And herein, of course, is a very important lesson. Sin affects not only the condition of our souls within ourselves, but sin has spoiled our relationships. Sin severs us from other people.

Sin separates us. Sin spoils the best relationship that you may have upon earth. Allow sin to come in and the thing will turn sour.

And let's look at this list very briefly. Anger and rage. These two again seem to be spoken as a doublet coming very closely together.

The former of these two, translated anger in the NIV, refers to a settled indignation. Now, you've noticed this. There are some people, they're always angry.

Constantly angry. It's like an ever-smouldering fire. It's there in the background.

Doesn't often blaze up, but it's always there. It's an undercurrent. Perhaps consideration for what others think may keep it under.

A little bit of willpower will keep it under. It doesn't always show itself, but it's there. Now, the next word stands out by sheer contrast to that.

Thummus, the word for rage in the NIV, it points more to the kind of anger that actually breaks out in a flaming fire. You didn't expect it, but suddenly there was something said and there was a whoosh, and you could hear the flames lapping up the tinder. You can have anger lying dormant in your soul for years, just waiting the opportunity for expression.

Or you can have anger breaking out and you upset everybody and everything momentarily, and then perhaps you're able to try, by the grace of God, to put things right. There are two kinds. Paul says we've got to get rid of both of them.

They must be put off. Put right off. The same goes for malice.

Now, this has reference to a vicious frame of mind and heart. A frame of mind and heart which plans evil for other people under the very guise of friendship. It points to a kind of mental perversity that is epitomized in the J.R. Ewing.

Or am I only addressing a section of the congregation when I say that? Who can be plotting and planning something hideously tragic for someone whilst showing the smile of an angel on his face? The next word is, in Greek, blasphemia, and it's best translated here as slander. In English, the word blasphemy generally refers to defiant irreverence expressed towards God and God alone. But in Greek, it also involves a like irreverence and unholy attitude towards man, and it is largely towards man here.

God's creature. Then there is filthy language. This is obscene.

Whether it is about someone not present with us or whether it is directed to someone in the company, it matters not. It is obscene. It should never have been said.

The suggestion should never have been made. This ought not to be, says Paul. What are we to do with it? Put it off.

Put it off. It is essential to consistent Christianity to be rid of these things. All these unkindred evils were just a throw away from us as we would shake off a viper to repeat that has found its way onto the sleeve of our coat or whatever.

Now, whenever I read these words, you know, I'm reminded of a domestic scene. Junior is but a babe, a little toddler, old enough to have shoes on his feet. And the shoes that I can see come to my mind have a little buckle in the front and two straps buckle the shoes together in the front.

The things he delighted to do at night, but among the things he delighted to do was this. The moment the buckle was undone, it's to kick his shoes off. Now, you've never done that.

Of course, we're too sedate and too sophisticated. You don't kick your shoes off. But somehow or other, it seemed to be a stage in his development, the awareness that the thing had been unbuckled and that he could kick it off.

Now, it's not a good thing to let a child to do, perhaps because the shoe may land here, there or anywhere. But you see, it had been unbuckled and he could kick it off. A man in Christ is a man whose sin has been broken in the backbone, or to change the metaphor, the buckle has been loosed, so that Paul addresses Christian men and women, old and young, mature and immature, and he says, kick them off.

If you're in Christ, dead, risen, ascended, and you will come with him in the glories of heaven, you are a man or a woman who, by the grace of the same God and the indwelling of the living Christ, you are capable of doing this. Now, my friends, you and I stand condemned here, if this is true. There are so many things which, by the grace of God, due to our position in Christ, we are capable of doing, which we have never seriously set about to do.

I was terribly challenged not all that long ago, when, after discussing a matter of serious temptation with a young person, I was going home in the car and the question came to me, could you overcome that temptation? And then a second question, if you are not guilty of doing what that young person is doing, is it simply because you're older and your passions may not be quite what they were when you were younger? Or is it simply a matter of age that you can overcome? Or is it because you are more entrenched in God in Christ? Brothers and sisters, I think that the greatest tragedy in our churches is this, sometimes the only way people get over the power of sin is by getting old. And the only victory over temptation is the victory of the old age. They have other temptations, don't forget.

But there are some that are only overcome by age, rather than by grace. Paul says, the man in Christ, irrespective of his age, should put off, get rid of, throw away these things. Oh, we're doing well tonight.

Now, I won't keep you. Christian incentives, I'll just mention three. The first is the one that we were dwelling upon this morning, and therefore I don't need to stress it tonight.

The first is, the basic is our union with Christ. The Christian is a man in Christ, like the branches in the vine. We are so related to him that his life comes through to us.

And he could speak to the disciples in these very terms. Now, don't drive them too far and make something out of them that our Lord would, but he spoke of, I in you and you in me. I in you and you in me.

There is real communion. There is real fellowship. How can we be expected to do these things? I'll tell you, because Jesus, who died on the cross of Calvary, is alive.

He's risen from the dead, and he's alive. He's ascended. He sits at the right hand of the majesty upon high, and he's alive.

And by his spirit is in our hearts. And because he's alive, I can do all things through the Christ who strengthens me. That's the principle.

But if you're not in that vital touch with Jesus Christ, if you know nothing of this union with Christ, then all that I've been talking about is impossible. You can't ask a tombstone to dance. The cow did run over the moon in the little bitty, but you and I can't just jump over the moon spiritually unless we are in Christ.

But if you and I are in Christ, then, too, there are areas to explore. But even cast a shadow upon the great explorations in the world of nature, there are higher heights and greater glories that challenge the man of God. Things unseen, things unknown, there are vistas beyond our imagination.

If I am in union with Jesus Christ and his life is in me and I am in him, a second incentive to act in this way appears in verse six. Because of these, the list of sins given in verse five, the wrath of God is coming. In some of the older manuscripts, you also have the other words upon the children of disobedience.

Well, that's to be understood anyway. The wrath of God doesn't come upon you unless you disobey. These or these things refer back then to the fivefold expression of our old nature that we are told to put to death.

These evils are the occasion of arousing the wrath of God, and hence the second inspiration or incentive to act in the way Paul requires us to act, to put to death certain things and to get rid of them. Now, the reference to the kindling of the wrath of God will serve as an inspiration to obey God's word in one of two ways. It depends on your experience.

It depends on your Christian maturity. For example, at one level of maturity or immaturity, it may well be that when everything else has failed to get you or to get me to obey God's word, the fear of God may make me do it. I have no doubt about it.

This is true sometimes. I know that during the days of the war when certain things were happening in the bombings in the city where I was at that time, there were certain things that I promised the Lord that I would do, which I would not have promised had I not been in danger. Now, that's a sad comment upon a man's heart and upon a man's condition, but it is true.

But the fear of God, it speaks of immaturity. All right, all right. But there are some times, there are some times in our lives when it is nothing other than the fear of being judged by God, of being the object of his disfavor.

Nothing short of it will make us do what God requires of us. But this doctrine has another application to the more mature among us, and that is this. It's the dread of seeing God displeased.

You know anything of that? The wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience, and I hate to see my father so displeased as to have to do the thing he hates to do. Chastise he will, because he loves us. But the wrath that causes it and occasions it so often is a wrath that brings displeasure and pain to his heart.

Many of you are parents, and if you are sensitive parents, as I'm sure you are, you can answer the question before I ask it. Who is most hurt when you have to administer chastisement to your child? You or the child? In the case of an all-perfect and an all-merciful deity, dare I say it reverently, I believe it hurts him more to chastise than it does us to receive it. And there is a place in the Christian life, there is a place

of maturity, where the real dread of the soul is this, oh that I cause him pain, oh that one causes him to be angry, not because that he will be cross with me, but because it displeases him.

And if the respect and love of God does not make us obey his commandments, then let the fear of him do so. The genius of the new man we have put on is its desire to please God rather than to provoke him, to evoke pleasure for him rather than pain. And lastly, a third incentive is stressed in verse 10, and you have put on the new self, which has been renewed in knowledge, in the image of its creator, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond or free, etc.

Now, I can only refer to this. To be in life union with Jesus Christ implies an ongoing work in our hearts, as we've said already, and that is a work defined here by a special word and a most descriptive word, renewal. In fact, this is a work of renewal whereby the person in Christ is being made more and more, increasingly and unceasingly, constantly being made more and more and more and more like his God, his creator, in righteousness and in knowledge.

Do you know an ongoing work of God in your soul? Is your life experiencing renewal of life as the days pass by, of life that is God-like? Is the image of God progressing in you and in me? This is what God is about in us. This is what salvation is. Therefore, because of that, don't stand in God's way, but get on with him.

Obey him. Put yourself at his disposal. Let him get out of the marble the image that he has planned.

Let him make out of the clay the vessel that he has chosen. If God is recharging and renewing you, then a progressive work is going on day by day, and the progressive steps or stages will necessarily be away from the sins mentioned here and towards the kind of life which recognizes, to summarize the last verse of the passage, which recognizes no racial or religious distinctions. Here there is no Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, which recognizes no cultural differences, no barbarian or Scythian, recognizes no social boundaries, no slave nor free.

Well, what is there here then? What are the things that matter? What are the things that count as you thus grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, as the image of God in you becomes more and more evident and more and more perfect? What are the things that count? Well, says Paul, beautifully, Christ is all and in all. Christ is all and in all. What matters? It's Christ being made and formed in you and in me, and he having his place in each one of us.

It's a blessed experience to look around from this pulpit and see people of different colors, from different backgrounds and different civilizations, and to be able to say that's Christ in that woman, Christ in that man that brings her here to worship and to sing and to hear the word of God and to go out to obey it. That's what Paul's getting at. See in your brother Christian, not the color of his skin or the kind of clothes he wears or anything like that, see Christ in him.

That speaks of maturity in you and qualifies you to begin to minister more even to an already developing saint. These sins mentioned here militate against God-likeness in me and in those that I desire to help. God is working for and towards that same image of himself in you and in me.

If we are in Christ, the appeal of this remarkable passage, this challenging passage is this, let the work of God go on. Not by passively standing and letting him do what he wants to do, there is an aspect of that to it, but by actively becoming involved with God in availing ourselves of the disciplines to which his word

calls us and trusting him to fulfill the promises that he himself has given us and going on with him through thick or thin. To his name be the glory.

Let us pray. Most gracious Father, knowing ourselves a little, we are especially grateful that you have inspired the scriptures so that they do speak to us despite our calloused consciences and our sometimes dubious capacity to understand, even positively to misrepresent. We thank you for the spirit and we thank you for the truth.

We thank you that you are our teacher and we pray that as we gathered within these walls tonight, come to you now in the closing moments of this service to thank you for speaking to us from this very challenging world. We pray that you will give us the courage to see these categorical imperatives as the imperatives, the commands they are, not try to whittle them down into something less. Not try to prostitute the truth to our own ends, but rather to come to terms with what the word says, to confess our sins and our weaknesses and then to turn with a whole heart to seek your grace to help us to obey.

Spirit of God, fall afresh upon us at the end of this earthly Sabbath day. Quench the sin within, quell the fears, quicken all the work of grace and perfect in us what you have begun. For we ask it through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/4/SID4673.mp3>

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