

Monday

Read Colossians 3:1-17

Let's take a moment to picture in our minds' eyes the lovely towns of Dayton and Bridgewater, just down the road from us. The town limits are not even a mile away from each other. They are both historic towns with the things small towns tend to have. One is a bit more populous than the other, but the casual traveler might not even realize this fact.

Now imagine one of them, I won't instruct you which one, embodies all the sinful behaviors that we heard about in Colossians last week: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying. Imagine everyone in that town behaved in those ways. Now imagine the other embodies and behaves in the ways we just heard with compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving each other, and being very loving.

Which town would you rather live in? Why? What would be the positives and negatives of each?

Tuesday

Read Colossians 3-1-11

There will always be some who say they would prefer that first town. People seem more free there, somehow. People appear to be having a good time with their wild sex and wild mouths. Everyone gets to do what they want. Whereas that second town seems to be populated by a bunch of wimps. A bunch of goody-two-shoes who can't stand up for themselves, are always apologizing for everything, and signing gentle songs. This type of thinking is pretty common in our world and it isn't all that uncommon amongst Christians.

Of course, in practice, in reality, that first town rips itself apart. We don't have to go far for examples, in fact, I won't give you any as I think the state of the world speaks for itself. I'm sure you know of families, neighbors, communities, and more who have been ripped apart by unbridled sexual license and untamed angry speech. They result in the breakdown of relationships from interpersonal to national. The people who might say they prefer such an atmosphere will almost inevitably admit in rare moments of true candor that they are lost, confused, lonely, and bitter.

I don't know about you, but I see a lot of confused, lonely, bitter people in our culture today and I figure they are lost. Even if they scream Jesus' name at people and have their sleeves covered with Christian slogans, if they are filled with angry speech and bitterness, I figure they are lost and at a minimum, need to truly understand passages like our passages today.

Where do you see confusion, loneliness, and bitterness in our society today? Where do you see those things in yourself? How can thinking and praying on your new self be of help and comfort?

Wednesday

Read Psalm 104

Yet, the critique seems to remain that people who have these characteristics are a bunch of weak-willed wimps without the ability to stand up for themselves. And we often buy-in to the critique. And we often expect other Christians to be weak-willed wimps who won't stand up for themselves. Countless congregations have been seriously damaged by bullies wreaking havoc over people who believe that to be faithful is to be wimpy. But if you think about it, the people who inhabit and pursue to way of life that Paul describes for the new self are far stronger than the folks directed towards the ways of sin.

Have you ever seriously tried to forgive someone who has wronged you? It takes a lot more strength to forgive than to retaliate against the person or walk away from the whole situation.

Have you ever seriously tried to be compassionate and patient? And not only in a heated, brief situation, but over the long haul? It takes a lot more strength to be compassionate and patient than to be distant, dismissive, angry, and short-tempered.

Have you ever tried to let Christ's peace, word, and name be how you order your life? It takes a lot more strength than doing whatever you feel like in the moment. It takes prayer, effort, and support.

Living a life that embodies the practices of the new self in Christ takes more strength and it is the strength of the Holy Spirit in us and around us that gives us the power to live into the ways of God. And this way of living is not only more Christ-like but it is more human, for this is how God has designed us to live.

Thursday

Read Colossians 3:12-17

The theologian N.T. Wright puts it well: "Remember that with most of these words there are people... who will mock the very idea of behaving like this. Remind yourself that to be tender-hearted doesn't mean being sentimental. That being kind doesn't mean being a soft touch. That humility isn't the same thing as low self-esteem. That meekness is not weakness, but is what you get when a powerful wild horse has been tamed (all the same power, but now under control). That [being willing to put up with anything] doesn't mean letting everyone do what they want with you. Don't let people scoff at the central virtues that make the Christian life what it's supposed to be. Why do you think people do that? Are they, perhaps, threatened by such a dazzling and demanding way of life?" What do you think?

Friday

Each week in 2022, we are praying for the most dangerous places to be a follower of Jesus. Please spend today in prayer for Burkina Faso and the Christians in Burkina Faso. You can get more info, and this info comes from, here:

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

What is life like for Christians in Burkina Faso?

Open Doors estimates there are over 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Burkina Faso, and many are Christians. Extremist attacks have driven followers of Jesus from their homes and villages, with many being forced into refugee camps, and there are no open churches in parts of northeastern Burkina Faso. Low rainfall and the COVID-19 pandemic have worsened the situation. Christians who have converted from Islam also face significant pressure and opposition from their families and communities.

Areas for prayer:

- Pray for the Lord's provision in the lives of our displaced brothers and sisters in Burkina Faso.

- From a pastor in Burkina Faso: "Pray for Burkina Faso, so that the peace of God will reign in the country, and our people will be able to go back to their villages and continue their daily activities."

- Pray for grace for Christians to remain firm in the faith as they face increased hostility.