

Goal #1 Be Mindful of Who You Are in Christ

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Preacher: Fred Stone

[0 : 00] Well, did you make any New Year's resolutions before 2020 began last week? Or maybe you didn't make what you call resolutions, maybe you set some goals for the new year.

What's the difference between a resolution and a goal? Well, here's one. A resolution can be defined as a firm decision to do or not do something.

You may have made a resolution to get in better shape this year, and you're planning to walk three days a week, every week. You're going to lose 20 pounds.

You've resolved to do that. A goal could be defined as the result toward which effort is directed. You may have not even thought in terms of a resolution, but you have set a goal of getting in better shape this year.

And your goal is to walk or run every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 6 a.m. at the Y on a treadmill. And you're going to lose 20 pounds by June the 1st.

[1 : 12] Now, the way I am using these words, goals are more precise. They're more result-oriented than resolutions.

On this first Sunday of the new year, I want us to think God has some goals for us. But God's goals are not just for this new year.

God's goals are for this hour, this day, this month, this year, and on and on.

You see, God will never stop working to accomplish His goals in our lives as His children.

He's going to work throughout our lives to the very, very end until He calls us home in heaven.

Probably the best one-sentence description of God's ultimate goal for everyone who belongs to Him is this.

[2 : 19] Look at it from Romans 8. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

That's really God's ultimate goal for every Christian. He is conforming us. He's working in every aspect of our lives. He's working with people you live with, even the difficult people you live with, people you work with.

He's working in everything, through every kind of thing imaginable, to shape and mold our character, to develop Christ-likeness in us.

But I want us to look at a more detailed description of God's goal as found in Colossians chapter 3. If you would turn in your Bible to Colossians chapter 3, and we're going to begin today what I plan to be a three-part message.

We're looking at God's goals for you this hour, this day, this year, and on and on. We're going to look at Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 17, today, next Sunday, and the following Sunday.

[3 : 37] Today I want us to look at what I'm calling the first of the three goals that God has for us.

Goal number one, be mindful of who you are in Christ. Be aware, have an understanding of who you are right now as God looks at you, as God thinks of you, by virtue of the fact that you are united to Jesus by faith.

Let's read it. Colossians 1, verses 1 through 4. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. What we're going to look at this morning, the first of the three parts, three goals, is the most difficult part.

But it's also the most important. What Paul is doing here is describing who we are as Christians in spiritual terms, from God's perspective, and everything else, beginning in verse 5 and following, flows from what we're going to look at this morning.

[5 : 15] We'll see, beginning in verse 5, there are some things that shouldn't be in our lives as Christians that we need to sort of take off like a dirty coat.

We'll read on in Colossians. There are some things that God wants us to develop, to put on like a clean coat in terms of character qualities.

But here's what I want us to understand. You don't become a Christian by doing this and stop doing that. You don't make yourself acceptable to God.

You don't put off and put on, put off bad character, put on good character as the way to make God love you more or accept you. We're going to look at this morning who we are in Christ, united to Christ.

Who we are, how God accepts us. And it's all through our faith and trust in Jesus and what He's done for us. And then we're going to look after this week.

[6 : 26] Based on who we are right now before God, we need to grow in our development of Christ's character by doing certain things.

You follow me. You're with me. What we're going to look at today may be hard, but it is foundational. Every Christian in this room, and by the way, this is a message for believers.

We're talking about people who are truly united to Christ in faith. You have turned from your sin.

You trust Jesus. You've committed your life to Him. This is a message for you.

The first thing I want us to see is God calls us to understand who we are in Christ. Throughout his letters, Paul repeatedly describes Christians in terms of how God sees us.

We are united to Christ in faith. I want you to look at how Jerry Bridges points this out, that it was Paul's consistent way of describing Christians.

[7 : 39] He says the term in Christ is the Apostle Paul's shorthand expression for being united to Christ. It is one of Paul's favorite expressions, and including similar expressions such as in Him or in the Lord.

Paul uses it more than 160 times in his letters. Clearly, this is an important concept in Paul's theology, and it should be an important concept for us because all the remaining answers to the question, who am I as a Christian?

Who am I in Christ? Are based upon the fact that we are in Christ, or we are united to Christ. Now, look at where we are in Colossians 3.

Paul describes how we are united to Christ in three little bit different ways. Note in verse 1, you have been raised with Christ.

Verse 3, you have died and your life is hidden, hidden with Christ in God. Something similar is in chapter 2, verse 20. With Christ, you died.

[8 : 54] And then in verse 4, Christ who is your life. Here's the idea. From the moment we put our faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we were united to Him.

We have been one with Him. That is how God sees us. When God looks at you, He doesn't look at you and think about the flaws, the sins, the selfishness.

When He looks at you on your good day, He doesn't see how much you read the Bible, or prayed, or how much you witnessed. When God looks at you, He sees that you are united to Christ, and it's because you are united to Christ that God accepts you.

Paul describes how we as Christians are united to Christ in His death and resurrection in these verses. Think about it. We have died with Christ to sin's penalty and power.

The penalty for your sin, the punishment that you and I deserve because of our sin, has been paid. It was paid when Jesus died on the cross.

[10 : 20] He suffered for us in our place. Therefore, we are now forgiven. I want you to understand, God no longer holds your sin against you if you are united to Christ in faith.

Don't live your life because of past sin, because you think, there's some way I've got to make up for it.

If you're a Christian, you're trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. The penalty for your sin, all of it, has been paid. It's been paid in full.

The penalty's paid. That also means we're united to Christ in His death. The power of sin over us has been broken. Do you realize that because you're united to Christ, His Spirit, the Holy Spirit lives within you, you can say no to temptation.

Whatever that temptation may be. You do not have to give in to the power of sin, however it comes to you, because there is greater power in you, the Spirit of Christ.

[11 : 39] You can say no to temptation. You can resist it all. In fact, God so works in us through His Spirit to give us not only the desire to say no to temptation, but He gives us the desire and the ability to actually obey God and live the kind of life that will please God, do God's will.

We've died with Christ. We're one with Him. And so we have actually died. The penalty for our sin no longer applies to us. The power of sin has been broken because of our union with Christ. He defeated it. So you can live a faithful Christian life. I can resist temptation. And when I don't, it's because I chose to give in to the temptation.

Don't blame somebody you live with. Don't blame your circumstances. Don't talk about how weak you are. You are weak. But if you're a Christian, you are united to Christ.

The Spirit of God lives in you. And so you can do what He calls you to do because sin does not have the power over you as a Christian.

[13 : 00] Number two, we've also been raised with Christ in new resurrected life. That means we have eternal life. And eternal life is more than just living forever.

But that is a part of what it is. Eternal life is also a quality of life. What Jesus called in John's gospel an abundant life.

I want you to think, if you're a Christian united to Christ, you have new life. You are a privileged child of God now all because of your oneness with Christ.

Paul is telling us this is how we need to look at ourselves. Paul is telling us this is now who we are by virtue of our union with Christ in faith.

In faith. Understand who you are in Christ right now. That is something that's very important for us to do. God wants us to do that.

[14 : 10] And as we'll see in the next couple of weeks, it is important that we don't try to think about what we do and don't do in terms of earning God's favor or losing God's favor.

You, if you're a Christian, trusting Christ, you have God's favor right now. And it's in spite of your sin.

And it has nothing to do with your best efforts on your best days. You're accepted by God because you are in Christ.

But God wants us to do more than just understand this. God calls us to live like who we are in Christ. Let's look at that for a few minutes. God wants us to live our lives in this world in light of who we are as His children.

When I was in high school, I played baseball. I was a first baseman. And sometimes I pitched. That tells you something about my pitching ability, doesn't it?

[15 : 17] I didn't have any scholarship offers. I didn't have any minor league contracts. I played baseball. I was a first baseman. And sometimes I pitched.

I was not in our two-man rotation. And so when I was going to pitch, the coach would tell me the day before, tomorrow you're going to pitch.

Be ready. What that meant was the coach was telling me, tomorrow your position is to pitch.

And when that day came, I walked out to the mound and I pitched. If you are a Christian, God has placed you in Christ and that is your position before God.

But God also calls you to live like a person who is united to Christ and has the power of the Holy Spirit within you.

[16 : 26] Let's look now at how Paul describes how we are to live like a person who's in Christ. He says in verse one, we must stay focused on Christ. Let's look at it. If then you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Paul is telling us to seek things, focus on things related to the Lord Jesus Christ who is right now at this moment at His exalted position of power and privilege at the right hand of God.

I want you to look at how Matt Chandler describes what Paul is saying in this verse. He says the goal, the pursuit, what we are after is Christ.

To know Him, to walk with Him, to have Him shape us, to have Him chisel away at us, to have Him create in us a joy of salvation given to us by Him.

Matt's saying that Paul is saying the way to live like a person who is united to Christ is to focus on Him, knowing Him, loving Him, serving Him, seeking to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He works in our lives to make us more like Christ, to develop Christ-like character in us.

[18 : 06] Now I want you to hear this next part real carefully. Here's what this does not mean. We do not focus on Jesus Christ in order to get something from Him.

We don't use Him to get something that we want, we need, even something good. I don't know how many people this would apply to in this room, but I've heard, I know, and sometimes I think I act maybe this way.

Sometimes some Christians have the idea that if I get serious about living a faithful Christian life, if I get serious about being a committed follower of Jesus, then He will do something like maybe restore my marriage, if that's my problem.

He'll save my rebellious child if I'll just get serious about my relationship with Him. Or He'll turn my child back. Or He'll provide me with a good job, a better job, if I just get serious about my relationship with Him.

Now, don't misunderstand what I'm saying. The Lord is able to do all those kinds of things. God wants us as His children who have a relationship with Him, He wants us to pray and ask Him to meet our needs.

[19 : 44] And if your problem is at home with your spouse, ask God to work, change you, change him or her. Ask God to work in your child's life, do whatever needs to be done.

never fail to ask God. Sometimes we don't have because we do not ask, the Scripture says. But what I'm saying is we cannot use Jesus and a relationship with Him to guarantee ourselves such things.

I know a man in another state pretty well. He went through a painful divorce just a few years ago. His wife made it a point to turn their daughter against him, her dad.

Now before they had their issues, before they separated, this man and his daughter had a very good relationship. They did all kinds of things together. together. But when the man and wife separated, the wife really made it her goal, I'm going to turn my daughter against her dad, and she was successful.

From the time this girl was about 14 to 17, she chose not to have any contact with her dad. It was her decision.

[21 : 13] Her mother tried to turn her against him, but her mother did not forbid her to go and see him, to do anything with him. The girl chose to believe her mother.

And by the way, there was no abuse, adultery, nothing like this involved. But the girl chose, I'm going to leave my dad out of my life.

Well, during her senior year in high school, it occurred to her, I want to go to college, and mama can't pay for college. And so what she did, she started making contact with her dad again.

And not long after, she wasn't real smart, not long after she started making contact with her dad. She actually texted him and said, will you pay for my college?

He saw it coming. He knew what she was doing. And so he just texted her back, no. And as far as I know, he has not heard from her since.

[22 : 31] He was not going to be used. And what I want us to understand is, our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus are not going to be used either.

We need to focus on Jesus today because of who he is. He is worthy of our love, our affection, our commitment, our obedience.

We need to think about what he chose to do for us in dying for our sins, living a perfect life on our behalf. He did that because he loves us. We need to seek to know him, develop a relationship with him, become like him because we find joy in that.

Because we want that kind of relationship with him. And in the context of having such a loving relationship with him, with our Heavenly Father, we are invited to pray and ask for things.

You know, the man in the story I was telling you, he would give anything to have a loving, close relationship with his daughter. And if he had, if it had continued, he would have gladly helped to pay to send her to college.

[24 : 03] But he was not and is not being used. We need to remember that. Paul is calling us to focus our attention where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds, that's next on the things that are above. We need to do that for the right reasons. Because we want to know him. We want to be close to him. Let's look at how we can stay focused on Christ.

I jumped the gun a little bit here. We must set our minds on the right things and not the wrong things, verse 2. Look at the verse. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

How do we set our minds on things that are above? I think the simplest way to think of it is we need to go to the source of truth about the things that are above, and that is the Bible.

God is not who you think he is, what other people think he is. Jesus is not who you have conjured up in your mind.

[25 : 18] God is who he has revealed himself to be in the pages of Scripture. Jesus is how he is revealed in the pages of Scripture.

So if we want to really know him, have a relationship with God, develop Christ-like character, we need to spend time in God's word, discovering who he is and how this can be.

And I want to say this on the first Sunday of a new year. If you have resolved or set a goal to read through the Bible this year, that is good.

That is something that all of us could profit from. But I want to also say this. We need to do more than just read through the Bible this year as if it's just another book we're going to read.

We need to make sure as we read the Bible that we take the time to listen to what God is saying through those pages and through his Spirit.

[26 : 28] We need to take the time as we read to let it sink in. To believe it. To obey it.

On a practical side, you may have as a goal to read through the Bible this year, will you take a certain amount of time every day to do that? But then I would encourage you to take another time to read the Bible like I'm talking about prayerfully, carefully, and listen to God with the idea you want to hear Him.

You want to discover what He's saying in His Word about what you should believe, why you should believe it, how you should live. If you don't have a time set aside on a regular basis to spend time with God like this in His Word, I want to encourage you to ask Him to help you get started this week. Establish a time and a place where you're going to do this. It may be in the morning, it may be night, it may be in the middle of the day. What works for you, it doesn't matter. Make an appointment with God.

And don't make it a chore. Don't think of it as something I gotta do. Think of it as an opportunity for you to spend with Almighty God.

[27 : 51] Think of it as a time for you to draw closer to Him. To draw closer to the Lord Jesus. To get to know Him better. To know how to please Him better.

Well, let's look also, how do we avoid setting our minds on things of the earth? Now, I want to clarify what Paul is saying here real quick. He's not saying that we should not think about things on the earth.

He's not de-emphasizing in any way the importance of your home, your family, your work, your school, or all the kind of things we need to do in life.

If you doubt that, read on in chapter three, Paul's going to start talking about how we ought to live as husbands and wives, parents and children, and other practical things like that.

It matters how we live. God cares how we live. We need to think about, be involved in this world as Christians, as distinctly Christians.

[28 : 52] what Paul is talking about here is allowing things of this world to distract us and prevent us from really focusing on Christ and developing Christ-like character.

We're going to look at some of the more obvious things, sinful things next week, but I want you to, this is something only you know. what kind of things do you find distracts you and hinders you from being focused on the Lord or even from living a faithful Christian life?

It doesn't have to be something sinful or evil. It could be something that's basically neutral. It could be certain people in your life. They just, they're a distraction. They're a stumbling block. It could be certain types of music you listen to.

I'll be honest with you. This college football season, I know too much about what's going on in college football life.

I've spent too much time on that ESPN app. ESPN's not sinful. Football's not sinful. I like football.

[30 : 08] I like to play. I like to watch it. It's an entertaining thing for me. But you can do it too much. You can think about it too much.

You can be more concerned to find out the scores of yesterday first thing in the morning. So concerned that you spend your time looking at what happened in college football that you don't even think about your relationship with the Lord.

Spending time with Him. And I'm not the only pagan who does things like that in this room. What's yours? What's your ESPN app?

Is it a person? Is it a thing? Something that could be good? Could even be your job. Certain aspects of your job you worship instead of the Lord. Identify the things of the world that what we could say hurt you spiritually and cause you to take your eyes off of Christ and following Him.

Repent of engaging in such activities. Ask God to help you to eliminate them. If you're a Christian how does it show?

[31 : 25] Do you really have a heart for the Lord and the things of God? Well prove it. Prove it to yourself. Point to evidence in your thoughts in your desires in the things you talk about in the things you do.

What are you doing to develop that kind of heart? What do you need to do? What are you doing that's hindering your relationship with the Lord?

Those are things that need to change. God wants us to know who we are in Christ. Final thoughts. You are accepted by God if you're a Christian because you are united to Jesus Christ in faith and that's it.

Let that sink in. Your acceptance is based on who Jesus is and what He has done for you.

Now by God's grace live like someone who is united to Christ. Stay focused on Him. On knowing Him.

[32 : 42] Loving Him. Serving Him. By God's grace becoming more like Him. Would you pray with me? Dear God show us what our response should be right now.

Make it clear and help us to do that. Father I pray that you'll emphasize help everyone to understand this is a message directed at people who are true Christians.

Trusting in Jesus and Him alone for their salvation. Committed to Him wholeheartedly. But if there are people in this room who are not Christians Father I pray that you'll help them to see that what they need to do is admit their need of Jesus.

Admit their sin. Humble themselves. Change their mind about the way they're living. and trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Father make it clear what we should do how we should respond to you and help us to do it right now. Let's just pray and respond to the Lord as He speaks. I would love to pray with you help you here at the front in the next few minutes if you want to come forward.

[34 : 05] thank you very much.