

THREE BIG "IF's" FROM COLOSSIANS

I am assuming that most all of you have been reading the book of Colossians this past week. I am deeply thankful that the elders have been very supportive and encouraging of the New Testament Studies that we are engaged in this year. I have heard so many good things from a number of you who have gotten involved, and I know in so many ways this is turning out to be a great blessing to us.

This week, we have been reading and considering the message that is found in the book of Colossians, and I'm wondering if you have any questions? Colossians is one of those books that are kind of hard to read and feel like you understand it immediately. Like most everything else the apostle Paul wrote, as Peter said, there are some things that hard to understand (see 2 Peter 3:16).

Well, I don't have any hope of explaining all of the difficult things in Colossians this morning, but instead, I want to spend some time looking at what I'm calling, "Three Big If's." The word "if" is a little word, but as most of us know, it can say some pretty big things. The grammar books tell us that this word "if," is used to introduce or set a condition or supposition. To put that another way is to say that the word "if" introduces something conditional. Groucho Marx is quoted as saying, "*If we had some ham, we could have some ham and eggs, if we had some eggs.*" (There are some of you who know who Groucho Marx was; the rest of you just have to lament that you were born too late!)

"If!" It's a big word, and have you noticed that you spell the word LIFE with the word IF right there in the middle of the word. We know that it is true that there are a lot of things in life that are conditional. "If we had just left a little sooner." "If we had just stayed in school." "If I had just been a little more understanding." "Things might have been a whole lot different, if only...!"

Well, Paul uses the word IF several times in the book of Colossians, and some places where they really say a whole lot to us. I want to look at three of those places in building our lesson together this morning.

The first big IF I want us to notice is found in **chapter 3:13**, but let me **read from verse 12**:

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13) bearing with one another and, **if anyone has a complaint against another**, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

Of course, in the context of this passage where Paul uses the word IF, he was basically discussing how Christians are to live their lives. This is a very practical section of scripture. In **verses 5-11**, Paul talks about some things that Christians are to avoid, or put away. He calls it, putting it "to death." Things like sexual immorality. We don't have time to discuss everything that might include, but suffice it to say, it includes all sexual intimacies outside the marriage bond, and as Jesus himself taught, it isn't just the act; even the thought can be sinful. Paul also discusses covetousness, anger, malice, wrath, obscene talk, and lying. Things like that must not be practiced by Christians, and if they are, we must quickly repent of such things and confess them to God.

In **verses 12-17**, Paul gives the other side of the matter; things that Christians ought to be doing. Things like, compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness. Paul also talks about being thankful, and says, "*Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*"

And it is in the context of these positive things that Christians should "*put on,*" that Paul says, "*...and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*"

"*If anyone has a complaint against another.*" That's an IF most all of us can relate to, isn't it? Haven't there been times when you have been pretty upset with someone else? Maybe it was something they said, or did; or perhaps it was something they didn't say, or do. Sometimes we get treated wrong, or at least it seems to us it was wrong. Sometimes we have personality clashes, and sometimes we have serious disagreements over ideas, or even matters of faith. Regardless of how or why they happen, the reality is that these things happen a lot in life. We get hurt, or offended and then we are left with the challenge of how to get over it or past it.

Jesus had something to say about that, didn't he? In that context found in **Matthew 5:21-26**, where he speaks of being angry with your brother, and calling people names, Jesus said, *"So if [there's that word again] you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift."* Wow! That makes our human relationships a pretty high priority doesn't it?

And then again over in **Matthew 18, beginning in verse 15 through verse 20**, Jesus talked about what to do *"If your brother sins against you."* There's that word IF again. "If your brother sins against you," and it happens, probably more than we realize. But Jesus also went on to tell us what to do when that happens, and what He didn't say was "get mad," "cut them off," "stop having anything to do with them," "write them up on Facebook." And people, if you are one of those who use facebook as a place to "vent your spleen," and tell the world about all the dirt you know about a person, you need to give some serious thought to the damage you are doing, not only to other people, but to your own image as a Christian!

Jesus said *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."* That's what Jesus said to do, and anything else is probably the wrong thing to do and a sin. He goes on to say what to do if that doesn't work.

But Paul said, *"If anyone has a complaint against another."* That is a big IF, isn't it? And it is big, not because it rarely happens, but because it happens all of the time. So we need to know how to deal with these things in a godly, Christ like way. How is that Paul? By forgiving them. Forgiving them over and over and over. In the same way that you keep offending God each and every day, and need His forgiveness, you need to forgive others each and every day.

Well, that's one BIG IF I found there in the book of Colossians. Now turn to **chapter 1**, and read with me beginning in **verse 21 through verse 23**:

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22) he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23) if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has

been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

I love this passage! I love the hope and encouragement I get from it. Paul is describing us, isn't he, when he says, you were once "*alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.*" That's a good description of everyone who is outside of Christ, even those we might call "good people." But Paul goes on, and says, people like that Christ came to reconcile to God. He did that by offering his body upon the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and by doing that, he is going to be able to take those same people, who have been alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, and present them as "*holy and blameless and above reproach.*" Have you ever thought of yourself as "*holy, blameless and above reproach?*" Maybe not, but Paul said Christ's sacrifice makes it possible for you to be, in fact, "*holy and blameless and above reproach.*" Not based upon some ability we have to actually be sinless and holy, or blameless, or above reproach, but simply because Christ's cleansing blood makes us that way. We have been washed from our sins in his blood, Revelation 1:5.

Over in the book of **1 Corinthians, chapter 6**, Paul had this to say, beginning in **verse 9**:

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11) And such were some of you. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

So, even though at one time we may have been alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, Paul says, Christ has now made us "*holy, blameless and above reproach.*" Isn't that good news!

But then here comes the BIG IF I want you to see. Paul says, Christ is going to present us that way—as "*holy, blameless and above reproach*" IF we "*...continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel.*" We need to understand that this blessing, this hope, this encouragement is only going

to be true for us IF we continue in the faith. Only if we remain stable and steadfast, and only if we do not move away from the hope of the gospel to something else. If we become unfaithful, if we start becoming lukewarm and unstable in our devotion and commitment, if we do not keep our eyes on the hope that is to come to us when the Lord returns, then all bets are off.

There is no such thing as “once saved, always saved.” Paul says our salvation is conditional. That’s what the word IF implies. Something may or may not be true based on certain conditions. On the one hand, if we do not remain faithful, we have no promise that Christ will present us as holy, blameless and above reproach. Instead God will find us as alienated and hostile in mind and guilty of evil deeds. On the other hand, IF we remain faithful, IF we remain stable, IF we do not take our eyes off of the prize, then when Christ comes again, and presents his bride, the church, to the Father, we will be among those He proudly presents as part of his holy, blameless, and above reproach people.

That’s the second BIG IF I wanted you to see in Colossians. The third BIG IF in Colossians that I want to look at is found in **chapter 3, verse 1**.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Notice Paul says, *“If then you have been raised with Christ.* Just what Paul meant by that is made clear for us in **chapter 2, in verses 11 & 12**. Paul says,

*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12) having been buried with him in baptism, in which **you were also raised with him** through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

In **Romans 6**, there is a passage which is very similar to this one in Colossians. **Beginning in verse 3, through verse 9**, Paul writes:

3) Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4) We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5) For if we have been united with him in a death

like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6) We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7) For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8) Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9) We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

Now think about what both of these passages are telling us; the one in Colossians 2 and the one in Romans 6. Paul is saying, 1) To be raised with Christ is a natural consequence of being buried with Christ, and being buried with Christ is what happens to us when we are properly baptized into Christ's death. 2) Furthermore, both of these passages tell us that baptism is a burial; an immersion in water. That's what it is. It's a watery grave into which we are buried with Christ, and where the blood which he shed for us washes away our sins. **Revelation 1:5** tell us that we are washed or freed from our sins by the blood of Jesus, but it is when we are buried into Christ's death that we come into contact with His blood, and as Paul says, "we are buried into Christ's death when we are immersed into Him in the watery grave called baptism.

Now, someone might think, "Baptism doesn't save anyone!" but that is not what Peter tells us in **1 Peter 3:21**. Peter has been talking about the ark in which Noah and his family had been saved at the time of the flood, and he drew an analogy from that to baptism. He said, "*Baptism, which corresponds to this now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*" Baptism does what? It saves you. How, by getting wet? No, Peter says, it isn't the result of dirt being washed away, but rather, in that act, one's faith is making an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Christ. That is, based upon the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, when you are baptized into Christ, you are by faith entering into that death, burial and resurrection.

Now, in Colossians 3:1, Paul wasn't expressing any doubt as to whether or not these people had been raised. He wasn't implying that maybe some of them hadn't been raised. He knew these people had been raised with Christ, but he said it that way because he wanted them to understand that what he was about

to tell them was directly connected to their having been raised with Christ. We might express it more along the line of “since you have been raised.”

Even so, **Colossians 3:1**, raises a good question, does it not? *“If you have been raised with Christ.”* That’s a big if, isn’t it?

A number of years ago, I was invited to hold a gospel meeting at a country community down in Mississippi. It was the home community for two younger men who were both fairly new Christians, and after obeying the gospel, they wanted more of their friends and family to be saved as well. So they built a small building and started having services there and they had scheduled this gospel meeting as a part of their effort to reach out to the community. They had been fairly successful in reaching a number of their friends and family, but not their grandparents, whom they loved dearly. Their grandfather had been instrumental in helping to begin and keep alive another church in that community, but it was not a church that taught and practiced what the New Testament teaches in many things. So we went to the grandparents’ home, and found them to be warm, loving people, and they had great respect for their grandsons, even though they no longer belonged to the same church.

They allowed me, to the best of my ability to explain to them what the Bible says about the church, and about God’s plan of salvation. Even though they agreed that what I was showing them from the Bible was right, they remained convinced that they had been saved. They both had been sprinkled when they were just young people. I don’t recall just how it came up in the conversation, but I do remember asking them if they were Christians. Yes they were Christians. I asked them if they felt like they were saved. Yes they felt like they had been saved and were saved. I asked them if they had been baptized, and yes they had been baptized, although it was not an immersion. They had been sprinkled. And then I asked them, “have you been buried with Christ?” And the grandfather sat there for a little bit and his eyes teared up just a bit and he said, “No, I don’t think I’ve done that; no sir, I can’t say that I’ve been “buried with Christ.” I said, “Would you like to do that?” and he said, “Well, I reckon if I want to be raised with Christ, I’d better be buried with Him too!” And so he was baptized into Christ that evening and as far as I know lived the remainder of his life as a faithful member of the church.

So that's the lesson for this morning. Three BIG IF'S from the book of Colossians. "IF" one has a complaint against another. Happens all of the time. Have we been as forgiving of others as we want God to be of us?

"IF" we continue in the faith, stable and not moved away from the hope of the gospel. God rewards faithfulness but unfaithfulness and lukewarmness comes under the condemnation of God.

And finally, "IF" we have been raised with Christ. Have you? Have you been buried with Him by baptism into his death? Keep in mind, Christ calls the shots. This is not Burger King. You can't have it your way. You must die with Christ, and be buried with Christ ***if you want to be*** among those who have been raised with Christ.

That's the lesson for this morning. Three very important IF'S. And now you must make another decision. ***If you have*** and ***if you are doing*** what Paul talked about here in Colossians, you can leave here this morning, knowing that you are among those Christ has made holy, blameless and above reproach. ***If you haven't done these things***, then I can assure you, you really don't want to leave here.

IF! Which condition is true of you this morning? I leave you to ponder that question as we now stand to sing a song of encouragement. We do this to give people an opportunity to respond to the lesson. If you know you need to make some changes this morning, we invite you to come to the front while we stand and sing.