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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
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Title of sermon: **Living With Focus**
Series: Against the Tide - #8

Colossians 3:1-11 NIV:

³ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your  life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Well, there's never a good thing in a sense that comes out of a civil war, because a nation hurts. Because in that civil war, people are vying for power, and they're vying for position, and over time, in those wars, people get hurt. And the energy in that war we focus on not creative energy and thriving, but rather on conflict. We give way from unity to embittered grudges. It's true in the business world, as it is in the political world. I'm not talking about competition -- I'm talking about civil war. I'm talking about people who are not trying to compete well, I'm talking about people who are trying to rule and overcome. I'm talking about people who are trying to suppress others. It's true in the sports world where you've seen teams that just get disintegrated because they don't know how to be a team. They simply are vying who's going to lead, whether it be the star athlete or the coach. And you've seen it in businesses, whether or not the president is going to lead, or maybe the board of directors is going to lead. Whenever you have that kind of civil war in a business or a sports team or anywhere, you're going to have disaster. In some ways, uniquely, that gets set up in people's lives in a way that they describe their own personal life. It goes like this. I've heard it said a thousand times if not ten thousand, that a Christian has two natures -- the old nature and the new nature, and those two natures are at war with each other. The good nature longs to serve God, and the good nature is at war with the old nature. And I've even heard these wonderful little metaphors that it's like two dogs inside of a person, and whatever dog is fed, that's the dog that wins. And so, this civil war that exists inside of a person is like a person that has two natures that battle inside, whether or not you're going to win the victory and not sin or cave into the temptation and sin, because you have a civil war inside of you. And I want to suggest to you, nothing from my perspective could be further from the truth, and that is as unbiblical as anything you've ever heard.

It's unimaginable to me that God has made you a schizophrenic. It just is! It's unimaginable to me that God has intentionally created within you a civil war and has actually created within you two dualistic dueling natures. I want to take you to a text, and the reason is that because I think for a lot of you, you've actually been taught wrong, and because of that, you've had battles in your life that you don't need to have. And you've had victories that you haven't won that you could have. Because you have actually thought that you really do have a wretched old nature that still exists.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Colossians, chapter 3. The Bible is true, that a house divided against itself cannot stand. And so, when the Scripture speaks of that, is it really talking about a person? Is it talking that you have these dualistic natures, this old nature and this new nature, these two dogs of which you have to decide which one you want to feed? Paul, when he's writing to this church, he says to them, in chapter 3, verses 1 through 11: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

And I want you to set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature."

Oh, well Pastor, there it is! That's that earthly nature. That's the teaching. There it is, it's still in you. We'll come back to that. "Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil.... Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways." This used to define you. This used to be your way of life. "But now, rid yourselves of all of these things.... Don't lie to each other, since you've taken off your old self with its practices and you've put on your new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here, in this new world, in this new life -- there's neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, Christ is all, and is in all."

What is the Christian life like? Is it really two natures? Is it really a battle between these two dogs inside of you, of which you must learn how to feed? Does that really describe who you are as a follower of Christ? I want to suggest to you, I don't think so. And I think the implications are huge. Paul says, and he leads with this and actually finishes with this: "Set your focus on your life in Christ." Why? Because you died with Christ. All the way through the Bible -- all the way through the Bible, number of places, "I have been crucified with Christ," Gal. chapter 2. In Romans chapter 6, "I have died with Christ." Why is that important? Why does Paul begin there? Because it's incredibly important that you understand that when you came to Christ, it is His death which we just celebrated that is critical for you to identify with and to understand the power of it. What did this death of Christ do in you, that Paul says, "You died with Him"? What happened? What happened when Christ died? Pastor Jeff dealt with it. He talked about it. What happened when Jesus died? The sins of the world, He bore them, He took the sins of the world. Did He take yours? Go ahead and nod, it's okay. Uh huh. Did He take all of them? Uh huh. Every last one of them? Yes. Stay with me. Confessed and unconfessed? Yes. I said that last week. Yes. Don't fudge on me! Don't hold out on me! Don't tell me for a second, "Well, he only takes my confessed ones!" Huh uh! ALL of my sins.

Why is it important that I died with Him? Because Christ bore the penalty of all our sins. But it gets better than that -- if that's not good enough. The Scripture says He died unto sin. What does that mean? It means He not only died for sin, He died unto sin, meaning He broke its power. Now, this is why this is going to be critical, because, if you understand this, then you're going to interpret verse 5 correctly. Because if you interpret this correctly, then you're going to see verse 5 correctly. What's verse 5 say? It says, "Put to death." People look at that and say, "We gotta attack sin!" No, you don't! It's already been attacked! And by the way, there's not a thing you can do. Sin's too powerful for you! It is! The only one who can take sin on is Christ! The only one who can deal with death's blow to sin is Christ! You can't take it on! You can't deal a death blow to sin! You're not strong enough. If you were strong enough, Jesus Christ wouldn't have needed to die. You don't have the ability to take it on, you don't have the ability to win over sin. And by the way, you don't need to! That's what it means to die with Christ. He died for the penalties of sin and He died unto sin. That means that the victory over sin and the penalty of sin has been won! Set your focus on your life in Christ. What has happened? What's happened is, I died with Christ. Don't take back your sin! Don't clean it up. Don't take the assignment, "I've gotta tackle it. I've gotta take it on!" Don't let shame and guilt move you back into disciplining yourself and trying to take it on. No, no no no. Do I want you to dabble with your sin? No, no no no no. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying, you do not have the responsibility to tackle sin, Christ does. He won it! He defeated it! And only Christ can defeat it. That's why Paul says, "Since then you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ." You died with Christ, and my friends, you live with Christ.

What does that mean? A number of things. Number one, it means that our life is found in Christ. It means that the reason I'm alive, it means that the reason my spirit is alive, it means the reason that I have eternal life is because Christ gave it to me, not because I've earned it, not because I've kept it, not because I got it somehow by my work -- it's because Christ gave it to me! It's nothing that I could do, it's nothing that I can earn, and that's why he says, "Set your mind on the things of Christ.

My life is found in Christ." When I was living in Denver area, on Monday night -- the Police Department called it "hell night" when the Broncos were playing. And the reason why is because, if the Broncos ever lost, domestic violence went through the roof. And we would be out until wee hours of the morning. Why? Because for a lot of people, families, in particular, men -- their life was the Broncos. They lived and breathed, they painted some of their houses orange and blue. They painted their cars. It was like their everything. Their life was the Broncos, and when the Broncos won, woo hoo! Get drunk! When the Broncos lost, woo hoo! Get drunk! It was their everything. Paul is saying, NO. That's disastrous. Set your mind on what? Your life. What does it mean to find life in Christ? It means that the reason you and I are alive is because Christ breathed His life in us. Not only that -- His power is found in us. What power? The power of resurrection. The power of victory. The power of transformation. What transformation? It's right here in this text. "Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."

Verse 7 -- "You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived." What changed them? Was it their phenomenal discipline? No. It's the power of the transformative work of Christ. Blessed are he who hunger and thirst for righteousness. You see, when Christ comes in you, He changes the very appetites of your life. He changes the things that you yearn for, He changes the very things that you long for. He changes your life. It's power. Not only that, but He changes our joy. Oh, you've probably heard the definition, the difference between happiness. Happiness happens, and it comes, and it's not bad, but happiness is fairly circumstantially driven. When you go outside and it's 75 degrees and it's a beautiful day, like today, you're happy! And unless you're a duck, when it rains, you're not happy! When you go and you buy a lottery ticket and you win, you're happy! And when you go and buy a lottery ticket and you lose, you're not happy! When you get your PGE bill or your Salem Electric bill, you're not happy. Happiness is circumstantial. Joy is what? It's internal. We're going to find out who the Christians are on Wednesday. And some other people. Because Christians, whether or not their candidate wins or loses, they're not going to go out and riot! They're going to say, "Not my will, God, but yours be done." They're going to convince themselves in their heart and mind that no matter who wins, God is King! And if God is King, then it is well with my soul. Right? No matter who wins. I'm not trying to be dismissive, and I'm not suggesting that it doesn't matter. There are huge consequences for who wins. Huge consequences, and life, and liberty, and children, and abortion. All of those things are gargantuan consequences! But -- if I'm a believer, and I set my focus on my life in Christ, I should wake up Wednesday morning no matter who wins and I should say, "It is well with my soul. Oh God, you're on the throne! Christ, you are alive! And my hope is found in you."

The best is always yet to come. God, you are hearing us, and you are listening, and you are going to do a great work. One of our great workers in our church, we were just praying for our team in Cambodia -- one of our workers, and I don't want to use the country that they're in -- for 20-plus years they have slaved in this country, one of the least evangelized countries in the world. Do you realize since COVID something is happening in this country? And do you know what's happening in their church? They are having a line-up, and they're having to turn away people in their churches for the first time in 20-some years! And I thought to myself, "I hate COVID." I do. I don't like masks. I don't like every day, how many people. I don't like all of the narrative of everything, it drives me crazy! And I said, "Dear God, if this is what happens in this country, I'll take another three years of it! Because God, if this is what you want to do, Lord, if this is what it means that you are listening to our prayers, then, oh God, our hope is in you. I'll take three more -- I'll take ten more years of this, Lord." To get an email from a dear friend who has labored for over 20-some years, with little fruit, and to have them turning away people because so many folks want to come and hear the gospel in this Muslim country.

My friends, when your life is in Christ, your priorities change. They do. I remember the sweet story of Mike Holmgren. He used to be the coach of the Packers, and when he was playing for the Jets, he got cut -- behind Joe Namath. And he was just so discouraged, and he went home after he was cut, and he pulled out his Bible. And Mike remembers when he had made a commitment to Christ at the age of 11, and he said after that, got into high school, college, and into the NFL, and he'd walked away. He'd allowed his relationship -- which is not an uncommon thing, maybe you'd done

that -- and he let his relationship with Christ grow cold, and in that moment where his life was just turned upside-down, and he hadn't set his focus on Christ, he went and he opened his Bible, and he opened it to a very familiar passage - Proverbs 3:5 and 6. Do you know what? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." And Mike from that day said, "God, I'm sorry, but I haven't made you a priority." And from that day forward, Mike says, "I need to set my priorities. God, you need to be first, my family needs to be second, and football needs to be a distant third." You see, when you set your focus on Christ, you set it on the power of what Christ has done, and on your life in Christ. And Paul says, then -- what happens? You lay aside that which is dead. What do you mean? You put to death that which is dead. It's really, that's what he states. "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature." Put to death that which is worldly, or that which is dead. He's already told us that it's DEAD. It DIED. Right? So, he's really saying, "Put to death that which is dead." What do you do? Acknowledge it. It's DEAD.

Do you remember when you got married? If you didn't do this, you should've. For those of you who are older, you didn't do this, but those of you who are younger, you did this. When you got married there were some things you did to your phone. And if you didn't do this, go home and do it tonight. You went and you took all of your girlfriends, ex-girlfriends, and you took them out of your texts, and you got rid of them. Didn't you? You don't regularly text your ex-girlfriends, do you? If you do, come and have a talk with me afterwards. Because we're gonna do some business. You see, when I made a commitment to my wife, what did I say? "Forsaking all others." I've been married long enough I can't even remember any names, to be quite honest with you. They're -- if you will, they're DEAD! They're dead to me. Why? Forsaking them! I am focusing on that which is alive to me. That's Paul's point. Focus on that which is alive to you. This is your former way of life. You're dead to that. Well, you say, "Pastor, it doesn't seem very dead." Oh, I understand. Galatians 2:20 is your text -- "The life I now live in the flesh." Yes, it is unredeemed. But that's not who you truly are. Who you truly are is what? Put on the new self. That's who you are. And that's the work that Christ has done, and He's made you alive, and He has power, and He's put something new inside of you. And it's so new and so defining that he says, "Neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, matters." Is Paul saying that Greek and Jew are gone? No. Of course not. There are still Jews and Greeks. What he's saying is this -- the most defining thing in your life is what? The renewal that Christ has done in your life, and it's so significant that it's more defining than whether or not you're a slave or you're a free man. And by the way, when you walk into the body of Christ, it should be more defining to you, and to everyone else, than the position you have out on the street.

Don't be afraid to let go of yesterday's clothes. What are they? Execute the sensual sins that bring the wrath of God. He listed them for you. What are they? Impurity. Immorality. For the first time the church was introducing something called chastity that wasn't even a virtue in the time. Impurity. What is that? It's something that's beyond the physical immorality, things like imagination and speech, lust. The passionate lust, the shameful lust. Evil desires. Wickedness and self-serving. And then, as G. Campbell Morgan talks about, execute the sins in good standing, those things like anger, critical attitudes, coarse humor, lying, temper. Like an ex-girlfriend, Paul says -- "That's not the life you live anymore." You remove that out of your phone, you get rid of that, you remove that language. You remove that website. You get rid of those things. Why? Because that's not where you find life. Where you find life is with Christ, where you find power is with Christ, and where you find joy is with Christ.

If you want to end the civil war, you don't end it by trying to overcome your sin. That was done. You don't try and overcome the civil war by trying to feed one and not feed the other. This one was crucified. "I've been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. I was crucified with Christ." That's what Paul says. He goes on in verse 10, and he says, "Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator." So, when you wake up every morning, the enemy will want to tell you, "You're condemned." And the Spirit will tell you, "No, you're not." The enemy will want to tell you, "You have to deal with your sin." And the Spirit will tell you, "Christ already has." The enemy will tell you, "You need to discipline yourself. You need to get some spiritual disciplines to overcome the power of sin in your life," and Christ will tell you, "I already

have." The enemy will whisper in your ear, "You need to overcome the shame of the sin you did yesterday," and Christ will say, "I already have conquered it." You don't beat sin by focusing on it. Paul says your focus is on what? "Set your mind on things above." I don't enjoy my wife by going and looking at the old names of girls that I used to date. I get rid of them. They're dead. And I enjoy the glory of the wife that God has given to me, and you enjoy the beauty of the bride that you are to Christ.

Eleven years. Eleven years Mehran Karimi Nasseri was without a country. Eleven years, this Iranian -- he flew out of Iran into Paris. He had a Belgian refugee ticket. It was stolen. So he couldn't get out. He wanted to go to Belgium, but he couldn't get there, and so they flew him to England. England wouldn't take him, and so they flew him back to Paris. In 1988 they took him off of the plane in Paris and they let him stay in Terminal One for 11 years. You may have heard the story. For 11 years he never left Terminal One in Paris. What did he do? He cleaned the bathrooms. He slept in the terminal. He begged. He slept there. And finally, the Paris leaders got him the paperwork and created his freedom and ability to leave the airport. 1999 -- the French gave him a permit that he could leave. They handed him the permit, and where did Mehran go? Back to a bathroom to clean it. They said, "The door's wide open!" And they offered him the door, and they said, "Go leave!" And he said, "No. I know the bathroom." They tried to coax him out. They tried to lead him out. And he backed away, and he looked outside, and it was scary to him, and he couldn't imagine walking out there. And so, he went back, and he hid in the bathroom and he hid in the terminal. They let him out, but he didn't want to go out! And they finally coaxed him out. And he began to breathe the air, and he couldn't imagine what it was like to be free after 11 years.

My friends, some of you have lived that way in your Christian life. You've defined yourself by what you were. You've defined yourself by Jeremiah's words that your heart is wicked. Paul says, "Set your mind on things above." Walk out the door and claim the power of what Christ has done in your life. He has renewed you. He has forgiven you. He has done a beautiful work in you. And it is so powerful that it will free you to walk in holiness.

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