

# All Things New | How the Incarnation Changes Everything

## *A New Me*

Rev. T.J. Campo

12.14.14 (Advent **THREE**)

Colossians 2.20-3.11

*If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, <sup>21</sup> "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" <sup>22</sup> (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? <sup>23</sup> These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*

*<sup>3</sup> Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. <sup>5</sup> Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. <sup>6</sup> For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him-- <sup>11</sup> a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*

Today is the THIRD Sunday in Advent, the season that prepares us to celebrate the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

And this year, we're using the sermons to look at HOW the Advent of God in Jesus Christ, how the incarnation makes things NEW. We first introduced the categories of New and Old and saw how the Gospel equips us to look at time in a particular way (treasures OLD and NEW).

Last week, we saw the ancient covenant made between God and His people, unbreakable except by DEATH... the most permanent thing there IS. And we saw that Covenant fulfilled, a

New Covenant based on God satisfying His part AND ALSO (wonder of all wonders) becoming Human so He could also satisfy OUR part – a New Covenant.

Today, we look at how God becoming a Baby and a perfectly obedient Human Being in Jesus Christ, how the incarnation makes possible a NEW ME. I know it sounds like pop-psychology or self-help but we've all wished for it (when you look in the mirror or come to the end of an unusually hard day/week/year). We've all felt like we'd like to start all over again or be someone different and NEW... AND it turns out "a new SELF" wasn't invented by a 21<sup>st</sup> C self-help author but is found in the writings of the Apostles...and the Prophets (as we saw last week: "a new heart") and Jesus Christ Himself speaks of being "born again" and made NEW.

So let's look at this idea of personal transformation (next week SOCIETAL transformation): 1<sup>st</sup>: The Obvious/Common-sense Way to Go About It; 2<sup>nd</sup>: Why That Approach Finally Fails; 3<sup>rd</sup>: The New Way to a New YOU (Wow! That really sounds like a diet book!)

The obvious/common-sense approach to developing as a person and growing spiritually and maturing and emerging and changing and transforming...is outlined in Colossians Ch. 2. We read only the end of it in the first paragraph. It's the standard self-help approach and there are religious and non-religious versions of this approach to personal transformation.

And to JUMP right ahead to St. Paul's assessment of this approach is that they WORK... That is they work... APPARENTLY. They "do the trick" as we would say. Paul's words: "These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body..." He means... "THIS STUFF works...it's common-sense...it keeps people in line."

All spiritual programs or self-help platforms, all forms of moral restraint use different varieties of the same basic methods to make people BETTER. They use...for instance...peer-pressure and accountability. You allow people to scrutinize your life and behavior and you invite their criticisms. You give them some sort of power over you...for your betterment. And it works...people don't do what's EXPECTED only what's INSPECTED. It's why we employ a fitness coach or a life-coach...or an accountability group/service – someone to check up on you...SO that you will become the person you WANT to be.

In Paul's situation people were hoping to be religiously rigorous and serious (deep) so they allowed people to hold them accountable to attend certain feasts and attendance at holy days and some accountability NOT TO EAT CERTAIN foods or drinks. V. 21 - "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch."

And sometimes we call this, "positive-peer-pressure" or sometimes "accountability" but the more accurate word is fear. "Because people are watching, I eat right or I don't drink alcohol or I attend events at church – observe certain holy days."

And ...again...Paul's evaluation of this approach is that it's basic... V. 20 "elementary principles of the world" and indicates (what we know to be the case) that they generally WORK to keep people in line.

Fear of what other people think of you or will say about you is one obvious way to make women dress modestly, make men act faithfully in their marriages or singleness, make people eat or drink moderately, to force/urge/cajole/insure that people will work diligently (not be slackers or lazy).

And it's EVEN a way to make people spiritually advanced – fear or shame will not only restrain people morally, it can make them excel in spiritual accomplishments by use of competition. Paul earlier in chapter 2 spoke about this rivalry in some spiritual communities – people outdoing one another in the mystical experiences they had – seeing visions and angels.

Others were showing just how sold-out for the cause they were by being super self-disciplined, maybe eating a very restrictive diet or spending very little money or wearing some very shabby clothing or super-modest clothing "delighting in self-abasement".

But this too...really boils down to fear...It's spiritual one-upmanship...but it's meant to convince others and eve to convince one's SELF – that "I'm good enough; I'm smart enough and dog-gone-it people like me...and I'm spiritual enough and God likes me!"

Fear of being perceived as "unspiritual" or of being deemed as "not-very-serious" or "not sold-out" for the cause of religion...or a political party/cause...or weight-lifting ... or showing pure-bred champion schnauzers (I know a tragic story of a family destroyed because a breed of dog became their CAUSE...their whole source of significance – AND it wasn't the dogs...it was the applause of people or fellow breeders – it was the fear of not measuring up and the thrill of being recognized.)

And now we're getting to the problem with this method of personal renewal or transformation. It does work and it will keep people on the straight-and-narrow and will even make people more sold-out to the cause and even more apparently spiritual but in the end it's only a superficial makeover and external restraint and artificially engineered...and it doesn't touch the ROOT of the person.

Let's unpack those reasons a little bit. #1 Paul says in v. 23, while they APPEAR to do the trick (quote), "they are of NO value against fleshly indulgence" i.e. this fear/shame/rivalry/comparison method WORKS at the surface level but NOT at the deeper level.

What it GAINS in appearance – it LOSES in the HEART. And it actually fuels the very engine behind our main problem, which is fear and pride. They do nothing to kill the source of fleshly indulgence. In v.18 Paul said, “This method inflates the fleshly mind.” It makes things worse.

#2 – The fear of people method is mechanical and NOT organic. He said (v.19) it’s NOT the growth that comes from God. All these parables Jesus Christ used that employ these agricultural metaphors: “seed... vine ... growth ...plants...fruit” – the fear/shame/rivalry method AINT that! It’s mechanical and forced. It may be tidier/faster than agriculture but its synthetic and it requires the fuel of fear and shame and pressure!

#3 – MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL - It is ... (hold on to your seats) this fear method is ANTI-Christ. The word “anti” in Greek doesn’t necessarily mean “in opposition to” – it frequently means “another”. This is putting fear in the place of Christ, using fear to generate and grow what ONLY CHRIST can grow.

It makes people and their applause, their approval, their acceptance – IT MAKES PEOPLE OUR LIFE.

And that’s why Paul puts it so dramatically “v. 20 “If you have died with Christ” and not only does that have the force of “since” (i.e. “if and you surely HAVE died with Christ”) but it forces the Christian reader to go through that mental and spiritual exercise of asking “IF? IF? IF I HAVE DIED with Christ – well...come to think of IT : YES! YES! YES I HAVE DIED WITH Christ!”

Paul uses the same device in v. 1 “Therefore IF you have been raised up with Christ”...and “YEAH!” (says the reader!) Come to think of it – I HAVE BEEN RAISED UP WITH CHRIST... and then Paul gives us the BIG KEY, the indispensable difference that makes the Gospel approach to personal development and change and growth TOTALLY unique, VERSE 4 , “when Christ WHO IS OUR LIFE is revealed”.

“Christ”, says Paul “IS OUR LIFE”. For the man who’s living for his children (his children are his life) for the woman who’s using her looks to get a man...and another man and another man (her looks are her life but at a deeper level MEN are her life)... a best-in-show blue-ribbon could be your life – that’s where these former friends of our GOT life. They got a sense of importance and value and fulfillment and joy when it was announced “and the best-in-show award goes to SO-AND-SO...” And when their names were called THEY KNEW THEY WERE ALIVE.

Put Paul is saying, “YOU – you believers in Jesus Christ, you are NOT looking to the fading approval of people to convince you that you are significant and that you matter and that you are alive – YOU...WE... we are looking for the approval of the never-fading VOICE of God...and we HAVE that approval because God took on flesh, was born a Baby...lived a beautiful life of flawless love...then TOOK the burden of our sin and DIED under the crushing weight of the justice we deserved...and was raised from the dead and took our humanity RIGHT INTO

HEAVEN... represents us in the very presence of God the Father, at the right hand of God OUR REPRESENTATIVE STANDS... acting on our behalf – and HE IS OUR LIFE!

It all depends on HIM – not a dog-show, not whether people think I'm smart or pretty or rich or cool or spiritual or good. MY LIFE doesn't come from people and my ability to impress them – it comes from Jesus Christ and His great accomplishment!

To go back to impressing people – looking for approval from people when I already HAVE the applause of heaven is ANTI-Christ.

And therefore, point THREE: The New Way to a New YOU (Wow! That really sounds like a diet book!) is all about setting my mind on the approval that Jesus Christ secured for ME, an approval from the ONLY Judge that really matters...whose opinion matters more than the opinion of the "Mean Girls" in my class...whose opinion matters more than the opinion of my sales manager...or my father-in-law...or the judges at the dog-show...and even more than the opinion I have of MYSELF when I look in the mirror.

The way I become A NEW SELF is to ask myself, "Where is my LIFE?" and then to answer "Christ IS my life! When He died I was IN Him (represented by and IN Him...as real as if I were enduring God's justice myself and as if I were being judged for my sins). It is finished!

And when He rose, when death could not hold Him, the grave could not keep Him from rising again – then I was raised and accepted into the very presence of God – my JUDGE has become my Father. He likes me. I am THERE already because Jesus Christ is there and HE REPRESENTS ME – Christ who IS my LIFE.

(I don't want to be overly dramatic but) I know the person you see before you is messed up beyond what you know and beyond what I know... but there is a NEW version of me ("T.J. 2.0") a new self... free to be all that God made me to be. There's a new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of Him who created me.

This new self is waiting at a Table...waiting for a Party to begin...waiting for me to step into his skin as it were. When Christ is revealed – at the Second Advent – this new self ("T.J. 2.0") will be revealed with Him in glory – the applause I have always craved (and often looked to YOU...to my wife...to my peers to provide) but then finally I will be glorious and significant beyond what I can imagine.

When I think about this new self (holy and perfectly loving and free) it makes me want to be faithful to my wife...The thought influences and transforms all my desires...makes me generous and weakens greed.

It's like anger dies in me and any desire to destroy the reputations of others so I feel better about myself – I can put that aside (it stops mattering how I feel about myself – MY LIFE IS NOT IN MYSELF OR IN MY SELF-ESTEEM).

In other words, when I see that I am represented in Christ – that my life is IN HIM... then, little by little, my new self begins to emerge...and it's not because I'm afraid to get caught...or because I'm looking for public recognition; not based on fear/shame/competition.

It's a NEW WAY to become the New Me... it's from within...it's organic and growing...and like agriculture it can be slow...and messy ...

Next time we'll see that this has huge ramifications not only for PERSONAL transformation but even for whole societies and IS actually THE source of hope the Church can hold out to our OWN fragmented nation and world. I hope you'll be with us.

Pray.