

**It's Good to Be a Christian**  
**Three Reasons to Be Really Thankful**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

I suppose like a coach and a team of athletes, what goes on in this room normally is a preparation for you to tackle the obstacles of the Christian life. Much of what we do here is designed, that comes from this platform, is to get you ready to be able to encounter the kinds of problems, temptations, struggles that there are in being a follower of Christ in this world. That's the job of what happens here from week after week because that is, after all, my job description from Ephesians Chapter 4, which says my job is to equip you. That's what the Bible says, to prepare you, to train you, to get you ready to do the work of the Christian life. That's what we do from week to week. But as your coach, I would like to take a little pause from our weekly training just to step back and to remember how good it is to be on the team. I suppose it's good for any coach to step back and remind players, listen, there is a privilege in wearing the jersey, there is a great honor in being able to don the letterman's jacket. There is something to be said for being a part of the organization and it's good for us to stop and remember what a privilege that is. And so that's what I would like to do today, even though the Christian life is, as we we're regularly reminded, a challenge. It is difficult, it is costly but it is good to be a Christian. It is filled with sacrifice and self-denial but it is good to be a child of God. It is often exacerbating my relationship with a hostile world but it's really good to be a follower of Christ. There are many responsibilities that you have that non-Christians don't have, I understand that, but it is really good to be a Christian. And the three best reasons, I think, anywhere in all of the Bible are found in Colossians Chapter 1. So let me encourage you this morning if, in fact, you are a Christian, by having you look at three reasons we should be profoundly thankful that we are a part of God's team. Take a look at it with me, Colossians Chapter 1 verses 12, 13 and 14. Three of the most fundamental basic and most encouraging reasons for us as Christians to step back from all the rigors of the Christian life, from all the training, from all the work, from all the responsibilities and just say, man, I'm sure glad I'm on the team. Colossians Chapter 1 verses 12 through 14. If you glance at the context you'll see in verse number 9, Paul has been praying for these Colossians Christians in this particular paragraph about many of the responsibilities of the Christian life, in verse 9, about our call to grow in the knowledge of his will and in verse 10, to walk in a manner pleasing of a Lord. In verse 11 it ends with talking about our endurance and acquiring patience and we preach on those things all of the time. But in verse number 12, if you would notice it, he stops praying for things to be developed in the Christian life of these Colossians. He now stops to just thank God for what's already there, for what they already have. He reminds them of what they fully possess. He leads them to rejoice in this prayer in why it is so good to be a Christian and I'd like to do the same in your life. Let's read these three verses together, I'll be reading for you from the English Standard Version beginning in verse 12. "Giving thanks to the Father," as we jump into the middle of this prayer he says, "who has qualified you," so the Father has qualified us for something, "to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

Verse 13. Another reason, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son." When he mentions the son, he can't help but say something that should be so central to our understanding of gratitude as it relates to our Christianity, "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Look at those three things. "Giving thanks to the Father who has," number one, "qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." Number two, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son." And then thirdly, "in that son



we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." If you just had those three things it wouldn't matter what your health is like, what your relationships are like, what your business is like. It doesn't matter anything going on in the transience of your life in this world and all those short term things that seem to matter so much to us this week, if we just step back and say, look how good it is to be a Christian. If these things are true of you, I mean, nothing could be better than to revel in that position before God.

Let's start with this first one in verse 12 and we should certainly "give thanks to the Father for this who has," it says, here's the key word, bracket it, highlight it, underline it, "qualifies" such an important word, "qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." "Qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints." So inheritance, we keep looking forward to this thing, we preach about it a lot here in the Gospel of Luke. This future coming kingdom, the reality of it, and we get excited about it and it's great and a fancy way to say it is "the inheritance of the saints in light." Here's this picture of the dominion of light, this rule of God's greatness and perfection and we're headed there and it's great. But here's the key word that should get you very excited and very grateful that you are qualified for it, if you are a Christian. Qualified.

Let's take the ending of this verse and just wrap it up with this one word, heaven, and let's just put it down that way. Number one, you ought to be really glad to be a Christian. You ought to sit back and say, I'm so thankful to be a Christian, number one, because "you are fully qualified for Heaven" and that's a mouthful that most people in this world don't understand, even people going to church across the country. They don't get this. That you sit here today, understanding the Scripture, understanding the promises of God and saying, "I am 100%, right now, fully qualified for Heaven." That's a big, big deal. Qualification, for the team.

If you were to take a road trip, take it now in your mind, all the way across the country, head to the deep south, go through the deep south, find your way into Georgia, find your way to the city of Augusta, Georgia, turn off on Washington Road, see a nice green hedge there to your right. And as you're driving down Washington Road you find a driveway there and you say, "You know what, this looks like a golf course. You know what? This afternoon, I'd love to squeeze in nine holes before dinner. I'm going to stop in and play a little golf." So you turn into the driveway of this golf course tucked away in Augusta, Georgia and you get up to the gate, and you say, "Hey, I just happen to have my golf clubs in the trunk of my car. I want to play a little golf." And the dignified gatekeeper smiles and says, "Well, sir, this is for members only." And you say, "Hey, I got a huge bonus at work last year. I've got money in the bank. I didn't even know what I was going to do with it. I'd like to join your club and play a little golf this afternoon."

Well, the Augusta National Golf Club, they would probably laugh at you, in a very dignified way, and escort you off the property. You're not going to get in to play at Augusta National this afternoon.

Only 300 people who are members at Augusta National and it's very hard to get in, and money's not the issue. Money is not the issue. No one is richer than Bill Gates. Bill Gates, it's reported in the news, wanted to join Augusta National and simply because he made that known publicly, that was apparently an undignified thing to do, and the Augusta National people said, "We're not going to let you be a member here if you're going to go around telling people you want to be a member here." So they put them off for several years. Now, I'm happy to report, Bill Gates is now a member of Augusta National and that's good. But it wasn't about money. He had all the money in the world, even though it cost anywhere from \$100,000, I've read in the paper, up to \$250,000, just to get started with your membership. Then of course, \$10,000 a year, which seems pretty small for a club

like that. But nevertheless, it isn't about the money. They're not interested in the money. They really are interested in being very choosy about who they let into their golf club. Right? You have Warren Buffett, you've got Jack Nicklaus, you got a lot of fancy people in there as a part of that club, but if you want to stop in just because you have your clubs in the back and play a little golf before dinner, you ain't gettin' in. You're not going to get in. You've got to have the green jacket. You have to be on a list that's very exclusive. The board has to say it's OK. You're not going to get in as a normal guy like me or you. It's a very exclusive club. And yet, to get into this club we're talking about, to have a share in the inheritance of the saints in light, to compare the admittance into the club that we're talking about, makes getting into Augusta National be like being qualified to walk through the doors of a 7-11. There's really no comparison here.

You and I are talking about an exclusive club that is so exclusive, as I put on the back of the worksheet, I turned you to and I hope you go to your small groups and if you don't have a meeting this week, at least study those questions on the back and spend a little time letting Psalm 5 sink in. All these encouraging psalms and right in the middle of the psalter, here you have this psalm reminding us of this. It says, "You are not a God," as he worships God, "who delights in wickedness," and I'm with you so far because I'm thinking of all those wicked people I know, all the people on the news, all the people I read about on these web sites, all the stuff I watch on the crime shows. Those are the wicked people. And then it's, "Evil may not dwell with you." And I'm thinking, absolutely, we don't want the riffraff in Heaven.

But then it defines what that evil is all about that God can't dwell with and can't tolerate. It lists two sins here in verses 5 and 6. Verse 5, it says, "those who are boastful." Those who have said things to aggrandize themselves. People that have prop themselves up. And then in verse 6, it says, "those who speak lies." I wonder if there are any people that have boasted in this room ever? Anybody who's lied? I can try and track down your mom and ask about that. I'll bet you're all guilty of those two sins.

I mean, those seem pretty minor. And here it is saying, God can't handle it. God, it says, he cannot delight in any of that, he cannot dwell with that. And that's why some of you, if you're visiting or you're new to this, you're non-Christians, you've walked in off the street, you think, "That's what I don't like about this Christianity thing."

I mean, if really God is that uptight about sin, he's going to be that exclusive, I don't know if I want to be a part of that. It seems like it's just such a snooty club to be a part of. I don't want to be there.

But listen, it's not that God is mean or snooty, I hope you realize, any more than if I said at the door, I don't want you putting dirt and sand in my eyeballs. I think you'd go, "Oh, OK, I wasn't planning on it." "Well, just in case you're thinking of it, don't put any sand or dirt in my eyeballs." I don't think any of you would go, "Oh, how arrogant, how exclusive his eyeballs must be." You're going to say, "Well, OK, I don't want to put any sand and dirt in mine either." Well, why are you not stumbled by that? Why does that not offend you that I don't want the sand or dirt in my eyeballs? Well, because you understand, you have a set of eyeballs and they're pretty exclusive about what they want in them. They don't want sand or dirt or grime in your eyeballs. Your eyeballs are very sensitive. That is the nature of your eyeballs to function without sand and dirt and grit and grime. We don't want any of that in there. And you do not tolerate it.

If I've got a little baby and I drop him off at your house and I say, "Watch my baby." And I say, "Oh, and by the way, keep the dirt and grime and all the dirt out of his eyes. Don't put any sand in his eyeballs." You're not going to say, "Ahh, I love sand. Sand is great. Why didn't he let me put

sand..." You're going to know right away, "Well, I understand that."

See, God cannot tolerate evil. And he starts to define that with some very simple things to which we all qualify, those who promote themselves and those who bend the truth, twist the truth, tell only part of the truth, deceive, mislead people, all of that. God can't handle any of that. That sounds pretty snooty. You can only be a part of Augusta National if you hit every shot perfectly straight, exactly where you want it to go. On every par 3, you've got to get a hole-in-one every time, that's the way you have to be. Now, you understand that you would think with guys like Jack Nicklaus and these other great golfers who have gotten into this exclusive club, I mean we'd like to have good golfers there who aren't going to hack up the course, but to expect everyone on a par 3, every time to take one shot, and every putt, one putt on every green, I mean, this is like an impossible standard and you're right. But you see when we laterally compare with each other and we say, "Well, no one's perfect." No, I understand that. No one is perfect. But God is perfect and God says, "I've got a place that is perfect and it's flawless. And I'd like you to come and enjoy it, but here's the thing, you cannot enjoy it as you are. You're sinful. You're fallen. All the way down to the self-promotion and the bending of the truth, I just can't tolerate that." But the good news of this verse is, you lack all the qualifications in being there but somehow, according to this verse, without any explanation of how he did it, at least in verse 12, he says you're fully qualified. You have all the credentials. You meet all the requirements, all the stipulations, everything that could possibly be needed, every single requirement is met, you now are a card-carrying member of this place that demands perfection. You're fully qualified.

There was a great "moral golfer" in the Bible named Saul of Tarsus. He looked back on his golfing and said, "You know what, I was better than anybody I ever met. Everyone said I was great. Everyone said I had a flawless golf swing." Take a look at it with me in Philippians Chapter 3. If you haven't looked at this passage lately, please turn there now, call this up on your device, turn in your Bibles, look at this beginning in verse 4, as he speaks about the fact that when it comes to a flawless golf swing, "Man, I had one."

But you know what everyone who says, "That guy has a flawless golf swing," it's not flawless or the ball would always go exactly where they want, every single time and they would get a hole-in-one on every par 3 if they had a flawless golf swing. No one has a flawless golf swing. Well, people say that because it's better than mine and it's better than anybody's I've seen. But in reality, there is no flawless one except for God. And yet when Paul said, "If you want to talk about people who had a good golf swing, morally speaking, it was me." Verse 4, "Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh," if you want to talk about my performance, man, I was doing pretty good, "if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have far more."

Even started before I was making decisions about it, my parents set me up for perfection. I was put in lessons from the very beginning before I even knew what golf was. I was all lined up to meet all the requirements of the Law, "circumcised," verse 5, "on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, I was from the great tribe," the zealous, fighting tribe, the tenacious tribe of Benjamin. I was a Hebrew of Hebrews." I was always a standout. "And as to the law..." You want to talk about the details of the Torah and all the requirements of the Levitical law? Man, they labeled me "a Pharisee." I was climbing the ranks to the top level of those who fastidiously, carefully, meticulously keep the law, I was all about that. "As to zeal," you want to know how defensive I was of Judaism? When I saw this thing called the church popping up, man, I went after it, persecuted it, I was killing Christians. "I was persecuting the church; as to righteousness under the Law," you want to talk about keeping the Law, man, I was "blameless."

As I said, that's a relative term. It's like someone saying, "That guy's got a flawless golf swing." I guess against the backdrop of God's perfection no one is blameless. But in terms of comparing each other's swings, I saw a lot of hackers in my class and, man, I was living the life pretty well. If anyone had confidence in their golf swing, it was me. "But whatever I had gained" in terms of my accomplishment, however low my index and handicap was, how great I was doing on the course in relative comparison to my contemporaries, "I counted it all as loss for the sake of Christ."

It wasn't my golfing abilities that got me into this club. It was someone donning, to put it in terms of Augusta National, the green jacket on my body. I was wrapped in something, in this particular context, that made me perfect and flawless for this club. I was, just to kind of get cute with a metaphor here, I was clothed in the gold jacket of Christ, the perfection of God. That's not my analogy, really, when it comes down to it, being clothed in Christ is Paul's, he says that to the Galatians churches, we are clothed in Christ. God clothes us, he encompasses us, he envelops us in the righteousness of Christ, so that when I stand before the guard gate and say, "What about me getting in here?" I'm flawless, perfect, fully qualified. "Indeed," verse 8 says, "I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." If I didn't have the gold jacket on, it wouldn't matter. God's standard is too high, no matter how good I was in relative comparison to everyone else, I wasn't gonna measure up. And it is for that gold jacket's sake, for Christ himself who encompasses my unrighteous life, "For his sake I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as," here's a real strong Greek word, "skubalon" translated in the English Standard Version as "rubbish." The word for excrement, something stinky and gross. I just said, you know what, whatever my resume was, I traded it in for the gold jacket of Christ. "I needed to gain Christ and be found in Christ." I want to be donned in Christ, clothed in Christ, "not having a righteousness" or a golf score or talking about how good I am at morals "of my own that comes from keeping the moral law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God," personified in Christ, "that depends on faith."

Paul was a great, meticulous, moral living kind of person. He didn't cheat, he didn't steal. He did his careful and diligent best to live according to the rules of the Bible, even though he knows he falls short just like everyone else. He wrote that, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But even though I was better than most people I knew, if not everyone I knew, I had to trade in my resume to be donned and clothed in the perfection of Christ. And that made me, right then, fully, as it's put in our passage, "qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." Look at that verse 9 again, middle of the verse. "Not having a righteousness of my own, ... but that which comes through faith." I wonder if there is anybody in this room right now who has faith in Christ. If you have faith in Christ, the kind of faith defined in Scripture, we teach about it all the time, a kind of faith that transfers my trust to the merits and the qualifications of Christ. As D. James Kennedy put it so well in that Evangelism Explosion, remember that old evangelistic outreach program a lot of churches did, that had a great diagnostic question. When you'd sit there and talk to people about Christ you'd ask them the question, if you were to die today and stand before God and at the gates of Heaven, he were to say to you, "Why should I let you into my Heaven?" What would you say? That's a great diagnostic question because most people said, "Well, I'm a good person. I had a hole-in-one once when I was 27." If you're depending on your performance, you don't get in. But the right question, as D. James Kennedy rightly points out in that evangelistic training manual, is for us to recognize the only qualifications we have, as this passage speaks to qualifications, the only sufficiency, the only way I meet all the requirements, is being in Christ.

And that righteousness that I need, it comes through faith. Do you understand that a criminal hanging on a cross could transfer his trust to Christ and at that moment be so donned and

completely enveloped in the righteousness of Christ, that if he were to die right then, you could say to him at that moment, you will be with God, right today, when you die? Even though your life is full of sin in the past.

And that's what non-Christians don't get about grace. That's why most religions don't understand the gospel. Because it doesn't seem fair. It's not fair. The greatest golfers among us get into the club not because they're good golfers, but because they've been donned in the gold jacket, if you will, as silly as this illustration is, they have been donned in Christ. And how did they get that jacket? They asked for it. They have faith in Christ, they say, "I want to be accepted because Christ has lived in my place. To be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that qualifies us. It depends on faith. If you have faith, you understand right now, you're as qualified for Heaven as anyone has ever been in all of time, no matter who they are. You are as qualified for Heaven as though you were Jesus himself. Fully qualified.

For what? "For the inheritance of the saints in light." I wish I had time to expound upon this but, at least at some point, I would recommend you spend some time in Revelation Chapter 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the Bible, where it explains in detail as best as we can, from a fallen perspective, how good that's going to be. You're not going to live in a puffy, cotton ball cloud. You're going to live in a city. You going to live in a city that is perfect, so perfect that when the first time you see it, coming down out of Heaven, it will be like an eager groom at the end of an aisle watching a bride come down that aisle. That city will be like a bride adorned, dressed beautifully for her husband and God's going to say, "Here's your new home." There will be nothing evil in it. There'll be nothing sinful in it. It will be perfect. He'll wipe away every tear, everything that made you sad in this life, gone. No mourning, no crying, no pain. All of that extracted.

"Well, I'm going to mess it up when I get there." Here's a little word that takes place, as it says in First Corinthians 15, in a twinkling of an eye, you will be glorified. You will have a complete change as First John Chapter 3 says, when you see him, you're going to be like him. So anything that you see as you look in the mirror of God's Word and say, "I may be donned in Christ but I know I got a lot of problems in my life." You do. You're still sinning, I understand that. We're sinning less but we're never sinless in our sanctification.

And because of that sin, you're going to say, "I don't understand how I'm qualified for Heaven." Well right now, you're clothed in Christ, which makes you perfectly qualified. But at the moment you are either raptured or the moment you are resurrected, your body is glorified. As it's put in Philippians, with the power God has to subject everything to himself, he's going to transform your lowly body and he's going to glorify you. He's going to now, as it says in Romans 8, reveal the sons of God to himself. And all creation is waiting for that moment. And everything that was ever sinful, the cowardly, I bet you've been cowardly, the faithless, I bet you've been faithless, the immoral, the liars, all of those extracted. Now, you are not ever going to be those things, as a matter of fact, it says there, in the end of the Bible, he's going to have his name written on your forehead. You're not going anywhere. You're secure. You're there and every desire is fulfilled at the right hand of God as the psalmist said in Psalm 16, at his right hand, pleasures for evermore. I know it's hard for us to envision this place. But envision the best of this world, times ten, minus all the bad in this world that makes this world so awful. God's got that place for you, it's called the inheritance and you're going to encounter it along with the other saints. "How are people holy? I don't get it." Because they are now forensically, legally declared holy because they're encased in Christ from God's perspective. And the metaphor is light. Perfect.

More could be said. I'll leave you to do a little homework on our future inheritance but you are fully qualified for this inheritance right now at the moment of your conversion. If you're a 2-minute-old Christian or an 82-year Christian, you're fully qualified. By the way, I should say this, I suppose, as a sidebar. Can you not, in this one verse, see the rank heresy of purgatory right here? Can't you see that? Somehow you got to go through some purification to be right? Right here in this passage says I'm fully qualified right now. I am qualified, the Father himself has done it. He doesn't do a halfway job. I am now qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. "Penance when I sin? I've got to go through some act of trying to get my act together again. I got to do some work. I got to have some suffering. I got to get my self back in the good graces of God." That's not what the Bible says. He's giving thanks, not for things they need to appropriate in their Christian life, but things that have already been appropriated, things that are already there, things that are true of them.

And then he describes it this way, if you've got Colossians 1 still open, look at verse 13. "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and he's transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son." What a great, beautiful passage there. A verse with great balance, symmetry: delivered, transferred, domain of darkness, kingdom of his beloved son. There's so much we could say about all four of those descriptives there: delivered, transferred, domain, kingdom. These are great concepts but what you need to realize is that the thing that should make us most grateful that we're Christians, make us truly profoundly thankful that we're no longer who we used to be, is probably that word I'd like to call your attention to in verse 13. The word translated in the English Standard Version "domain." Underline that, "domain."

According to this passage, you've been delivered from the domain of darkness and you've now been transferred, taken and put into the kingdom of his beloved son. Now this is weird, and we've been studying this in Luke, but how can I be in the kingdom of his beloved son but yet I'm not, verse 12, in the inheritance of the saints in light? That's future. I'm qualified for it but I'm not there yet. I'm ready but it's not ready. That city will come down one day, it's not there yet. I'm qualified but it's not come and yet, now, I'm in the kingdom of his beloved son. What's that about? Well, I still live in a world that is fallen. But I am now transferred into the kingdom of his beloved son and out of, here's the key word, the domain of darkness.

Domain, unfortunately, in our tech world and all the Internet talk now, has become a part of that vocabulary and doesn't have the power it used to have. Now we talk about an Internet domain or domain name or whatever, it's become pretty insipid.

But the word in the past used to always speak of something important and powerful and something that has power and authority. Matter of fact, you might remember this when Jesus in was being tried by Pilot, at one point in the narrative in Luke and we'll read this, Lord willing, we'll study it when we get there in the study of Luke, he gets before Pilot and Pilot recognizes, when he finds out that Jesus is ultimately from Nazareth, he's from Galilee, he's down south in the capital of Judea in Jerusalem, so he says when he found out Jesus was from up north, a Galilean, he said, "Oh, I know Herod," Herod Antipas, "is in town and if Herod's in town, I want Jesus to go and present himself before Herod because he is under Herod's," here's the word, same Greek word, it's translated there "jurisdiction" he's under Herod's jurisdiction." And that's helpful, because it's not like us, we think of our politicians, city councilmen, mayors, governors, assemblymen, all that, no, no, back in those days, if Jesus went to Herod Antipas, humanly speaking, and Herod Antipas said, "Kill him" then he's going to be killed. If he said, "You go free" then you go free. Complete autocratic authority and the word used to describe that is this word that we find here "exousia" in Greek, it's the word domain, power, authority, jurisdiction. I even love that English word "jurisdiction" from Latin "juris," the law, "diction," to speak. Someone has the right to speak the law over your life.

And in this passage it says that I was apparently at one point in the jurisdiction of darkness. I was under the authority of darkness, which, of course, is an analogy based on the comparison to verse 12. I'm one day going to inherit the "inheritance of the saints in the light" but I used to live in a domain of darkness. But now I've been extracted from that, rescued, delivered from it and now I've been placed in the kingdom of his son. But I still live on the same fallen planet but, here's the good news, no longer under its domain, its jurisdiction. It no longer has the right to speak the rules to me. It doesn't call the shots for me. The domain of darkness.

I guess because we started with kind of crunching down that first phrase, "the inheritance of the saints of light" into the word "heaven," I suppose the antonym for that in our, at least our vernacular discussion about the reality of the evil side of things, is the word hell, so let's use that word to describe what we're talking about here, and let's stop and be thankful for this. I'm glad I'm a Christian, I'm profoundly thankful for this fact right here, number two on your outline, Hell has no, let's use this word, claim on my life. "Hell has no claim on my life."

Hell, the domain of darkness, which I speak of this system that we live in, not the eventual punishment, the Lake of Fire, because there Satan is not in charge, he will be punished there. But right now, he is in charge of this, he does have jurisdiction here. Let me prove it to you. I've quoted these passages recently in our study of Luke, but it says in Second Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 14, he is the god of this world. We've seen this in First John Chapter 3 that you're either a child of God or you are a child of the devil. That's a big statement and it's a dichotomy of humanity. And it says apparently there is some kind of leadership the enemy of God has over people that have not been transferred or rescued out of that dominion. One passage with this, look with me, if you would please, to Ephesians Chapter 2. A classic text, Ephesians Chapter 2. Call this passage up and look with me at the very beginning of this chapter to remind you of something that the Bible says is true, that you are, I hope, learning from a retrospective perspective, as you look in the rearview mirror of your life, "Oh, that used to be my life." Now you'll admit readily to some of the things in this passage and you'll say, "Yeah, that used to be my life" but it's other things in this passage describing your old life. If you're a Christian, you've got a testimony. What was your life like before you became a Christian?

According to this passage there's a lot more to it than you were just one of the crowd. Look at it with me, beginning in verse 1. We often look at this analogy in verse 1. It says, "You are dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." We're use to that analogy. We won't touch it right now, but at least we can say, alienated from God, he was dead to me, I was dead to him, I may have known about him, he may have known about me, but there was no reconciled relationship. So we had a bad relationship. Non-existent in some sense.

We lived in that, we walked in that, that's one of Paul's favorite terms for how we went about our lives. Now here's the part you might readily admit, following the course of this world... Now, if you told your testimony, I opened up the mike, I said get up here tell me your testimony, you might say, if you're an average Christian, "Hey, my non-Christian life, I just kind of did what everybody else did. I followed the course of the world. I lived like other people." Other people live by all the things we've looked at when your kid, you know, was out at revival, we look at what the world is all about, what their values are, what the priorities are and we said, this is how the world lives and most people just follow along with the course of the world, and probably you said that. Here's the part you may not have fully comprehended even as a new Christian, I hope you're comprehending it now as a growing Christian. But when you are following the course of the world, the Bible says, here's your testimony, you are "following the prince of the power of the air." You can put it the margin, if



it's not already there, Second Corinthians 4:14. Satan himself is running the show.

He said to Jesus, bow down and I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world. He is running this thing on a leash, mind you, but he's running this thing called Earth and it is his domain of darkness. And you were following him, "following the prince of the power of the air the spirit," it gets even more intimate, that is now at work in the really bad people you hear about on the crime shows. No. "Now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived." What? The spirit, who is the domain leader, this kingdom leader, if you will, he isn't even worthy of that word, but his dominion of darkness, he was at work in you. Oh, I know we look at Judas filled with the evil one, went out and betrayed Christ. Man, we were making decisions because of the influence and the power of the leader of this world in our lives. "Among whom," this is a good phrase to underline, "we all once lived." Oh yeah, you were just fulfilling your passions and carrying out the desires of your body and your mind. You were, by nature, children of wrath. That was probably in your testimony and, you know, "I was alienated from God, I was headed to Hell." I get that.

But do you know that you lived under the domain of darkness? That the spirit of the enemy of God was at work in you. That's what the Bible says. But according to this passage, that's kind of spooky to even think about, but in this passage it says he's delivered you from that. Hell has no claim on your life.

Let's take another road trip, this time not to a golf course. This time we're going to head up the I-5, we're going to go to Marin County. This time you're not in a car with a trunk full of golf clubs but you are in a bus that's owned by the county and it's got bars on the window and you got handcuffs on and a jumpsuit and you're headed to San Quentin. And, I know this is a sad story but bear with me. We're heading up there and it's not what it is now, just a state prison, it's a debtors prison.

It's back in the day you had debtors prison. Let's just say we still had that. You'd rack up so much debt, you'd spent so much money frivolously and carelessly, you'd squandered so much, you owed everyone so much money, you were in debt to the government, you were in debt to your friends, you were in debt to your employer. You were in debt and you had so much debt they put you in prison, in the debtors prison, which they used to do. Now you just file bankruptcy or whatever. Different sermon. OK, so, you're in debtors prison and I'm your number one fan. I feel so bad you're up there. So you got dropped off there, you've been incarcerated there for years, but I come up and visit you. I try to get up there as often as I can. I baked you a cake with a file in it and try to bring it in and see if I can get you out. But it keeps setting off the metal detector. I get on the phone with you sometimes and I try to figure out how we're going to break you out of jail because I really want you out and I just hate the fact that you hate it there and you can't stand the warden and you can't stand the prison guards and it's awful and I try to talk about that on the phone, you keep reminding me, "Oh, they're listening to our phone calls, you can't talk about this.

So, everything I do and every time I come up to visit you I see the concentric circles of security and here you are in your cell and there are gates and there are bars and there's glass and there are just circles and circles of security.

From the time I get to the parking lot and walk through all the checkpoints I realize there's just no way, it's an impenetrable prison. I can't see how in the world we're going to get you out of here. Well then one day, inexplicably, some huge benefactor with a lot of money hears about your case and decides to pay off every debt you owe, to the IRS, to your boss, to all your creditors. You now are completely paid off. And he's got a lot of money so he hires a high-powered L.A. attorney who takes on your case, who does all the paperwork, he goes to a judge here in Orange County and he

writes up a writ and then says you are completely paid in full, everything is done and so now you have the judge who has signed off on it, you have a high-powered attorney, you have a benefactor and you have me, your number one fan, coming up to see you. As we drive up to deliver this news and I get a strange phone call from the judge, it is really bizarre, it's surprising, but he says, "I want to come with you. I want to make sure he gets out. I've taken a special interest in this case." So me, the judge, the high-powered attorney and the benefactor are all driving up on our road trip to get up to San Quentin. And we get there and they recognize me because I'm the guy with the file in the cake, they're a little leery about me, but I'm like, "No, no, no, I'm here with the judge and the lawyer and this really rich guy and we're coming in to get my friend out." And you're there. And as I come in I say, "We've got you out. We've signed all the paperwork. The lawyers have dotted every 'I' crossed every 'T.' Matter of fact, strangely enough, the judge himself is here to get you out." And so we walked through all the security. The warden hears, radios down to the correctional officers and everyone has to open the gates and it's just a time, it's crazy, you hug me, it's awesome. Pastor Mike, I can't believe it. You hug the benefactor. You high five the attorney, you bow to the judge, whatever, I mean it was like, wow, you're out.

And they go give you your clothes back, you turn in the jumpsuit, they give you the envelope with all the money you had your pocket, which wasn't much when you checked in. We walk through the gate, we get to the parking lot. We say, "How's that feel?" and you say, "Great. Is there an In-N-Out Burger in this town?" Let's just imagine there is, I don't know, you'll probably tell me afterwards. So we go to In-N-Out Burger for lunch. You're just euphoric, jubilant. Well, we get to In-N-Out, you're starting to eat your double-double. It took a long time to get it, crowded lines, as you know. And all of a sudden, here come the jailers, on their lunch break, to eat.

And they sit down across the way, snarling at you because you didn't have very good relations with those jailers. They hated you. You hated them. You're sitting there with me, the benefactor, the attorney, the judge. And you realize these guys for years have told you when you can get up, when you can get out, when you can go back. They controlled your life.

And all of a sudden, you look and here comes the warden through the doors of the In-N-Out Burger. He stands in line, he takes a seat just over the shoulder of the attorney and there's the warden, eating his burger and staring at you. Grrrr. There's nothing he can do.

See, you have been legally freed from the domain that legally had rights over your life and was going to drag you to the Lake of Fire. But right now, though you have not been extracted from the environment of Satan, you've certainly been delivered from, rescued from, the domain of Satan and darkness. To where, really, if they said, "We need you now to go mop the floors here at In-N-Out Burger," you'd go, "No, I don't." Out of conditioning you may be tempted to do that, you may still bristle at their voice when they yell at you at the In-N-Out. They may even throw ketchup packets at you as you're trying to eat but...

I mean, you could, I suppose, stick your tongue out at them and just defy them because they have no claim on your life. You've been delivered from the domain of darkness. Colossians Chapter 1 says, you've been transferred from one domain to a kingdom. I just want to remind you, you still live on the planet that Satan is, in many ways, running on a leash. But it is your responsibility to recognize you have no allegiance to them, you have no responsibility to respond to them. You are free. Look at Chapter 2, as long as you are in Colossians, look at Chapter 2 verse 14. Couldn't be said any better than this. When it comes to this concept of a forensic or legal freedom. Colossians 2:14. "By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands."



See, your debt has consigned you, not in fellowship with God, you're dead to God, but to conscription to the enemy and to darkness, at least in this life. He will have no authority in the Lake of Fire. But right now, he's got some authority. "He set this aside." I mean, that's an understated way to put it in English. "This, he set aside." All of the legal demands that said you are his, you are responsible to him, you're part of his domain, "he set it aside." How did he pay for it? "Nailing it to the cross." Greatest five words in Colossians right there. "Having nailed it to the cross." And so doing, all the demons, all the evil spirits, "he's disarmed them." Those weapons on their hip? No, they can throw ketchup packets at you but...

See, if you tried to escape a day earlier they could shoot you in the back. They could with, every right, have every right to destroy you. But now those rulers are disarmed. Those authorities, now actually they're shamed, they hate you. And you don't much like them. But there's a triumph that's taken place.

You've triumphed over them in Christ. You're wearing the gold jacket. You're fully qualified for a new kingdom. The kingdom now, that's not fully realized, will one day be the inheritance of the saints in light.

But right now, Hell's got no claim on your life. It's going to be a Christian because I'm fully qualified for Heaven. Though Hell harasses me, it has no claim on me.

When I think about that, it really is working its way backwards from the pinnacle of what really should be a relief for us. It's this last line, verse 14, the kingdom of his son, he's the hero, not only because he's the second person of the Godhead but because, "In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Do you want to get real practical about your life and what goes on in your heart? Not only are you qualified for Heaven, Heaven is secured, not only has Hell been canceled for you and it has no power over you, you have in your life, here's a key word here, redemption, the forgiveness, a releasing of you and your sins. I love the word "aphiemi" the Greek word for forgiveness, because it releases. How did it get released? Because of redemption. Redemption. Redemption is a word that we don't use much anymore except, I suppose, on our aluminum cans and plastic bottles. You'll see, at least how they have abbreviated it on our stuff today in California, CRV, California Redemption Value. There's a value placed on it and for the bottles and cans it's not much. What is it? Five cents? Here are all these cans and bottles and they're floating around the landscape but there's a price on their head. Five cents.

We're willing to pay five cents to get that bottle back, to get that can back. Bring it to the recycling center and we'll redeem it, we'll get it back. Here we are sinners. Our sins have made a separation between us and God, Isaiah 59:2. And now we're out here floating around in a world under the domain of the enemy. And the Bible says, that we've been redeemed, we've been purchased. And it wasn't five cents according to Ephesians 1. We were redeemed by the blood of Christ. To put it in terms of, I love this, First Peter 1:18, we weren't ransom, we weren't bought back, from our futile way of life, with perishable things like gold and silver. I'm thinking, "Wow, gold and silver perishes?" Well, in the big scheme of this life, it's temporal. Something far better than gold and silver. You have been purchased or ransomed or redeemed with the precious blood of Christ.

Number three. That frees us, "aphiemi" that frees us from our sin. Verse 14, "You and I have redemption and the forgiveness of sins." Let's put it this way, it's good to be a Christian, you should really be thankful, because your sins, every last one of them, have been paid in full. There is a debt and the debt has been paid back. And because of that, you're now reconciled to God because every sin you've committed has been redeemed. It's been paid in full. You've been now allowed to be



reconciled to your maker because everything that stood between you, as it says, has been nailed to the cross. The debt has been cancelled. Not because he just said, "Well, we'll just forget it." He wouldn't be just if he did that. But he is just, therefore he's got to pay for it and he paid for it by treating Christ as though he were you.

And on that cross he paid the penalty for every sin, redeemed you. There's no double jeopardy, there's no paying for sins twice. The trial has been concluded, the gavel has come down, the payment in your life for your sins has been paid, no double payment. And the Bible says, and I love this passage, I put it again for your discussion in small groups, Psalm 103:10. "He hasn't dealt with us according to our sins." Well how can that be? We're sinners, he should treat us like sinners, Well, he should, but verse 12 says, here's why, because "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." So the thing that should bring his punishment has already been taken away because the punishment has been paid on the cross. Therefore, the thing that should lead you to feel like you're condemned, the reason the Bible can say in Romans 8:1 that there is no condemnation for you, is because the thing that should condemn you is no longer there.

If you had a big surgery plan for Thursday. You're going in, it's the worst kind of surgery because you've got a tumor and the tumor is so bad, it's so cancerous and it's in a place tucked in your torso, they're going to have to rip open your chest and break open your sternum and lay you out on a table and dig around in the most vital parts of your life to pull this out. You've heard all kinds of things, you've read it on the Internet, it's the most horrific surgery you can have. It's going to be terrible rehab. All the anesthesia, you don't do well with anyway. It's going to be Thursday. It's going to be a nightmare. But tomorrow, you've got your pre-op appointment. And they're going to go in and get all their devices and look real carefully and know where they're going, make sure they have everything they need to go in on Thursday morning. Supposed to be there at 6:00 in the morning to get ready for your surgery. But tomorrow you got your appointment. So it's Monday and you go to your appointment. And they say, "OK we're going to put you in, we're going to do a scan, we're going to this, we're going to do that, we're going to do x-rays, we're going to get all ready.

We're going to take a good look at this tumor before we get to it on Thursday. And they look in your body and it's completely gone. It's not there. Can't find it. Let's do it again. Can't find it. Look around. Can't find it. Symptoms are gone. The tumor is gone. I guarantee you this, tomorrow afternoon, I know one thing you're going to do. You're going to make different plans for Thursday. Am I right? There's no need..., how stupid would it be for the doctors to say, "Well, it's gone, we're just going to do the surgery anyway." What are you talking about? If the tumor is gone there's no need to do the surgery.

I know that you know that you're a sinner and you feel the guilt that you're a sinner and you think because I'm a sinner I deserve God's justice, I'm going to be condemned. But I'm telling you the tumor has been extracted from you because the payment for the tumor has already been paid. Therefore, there's no need for Hell in your life because you've been redeemed. There's been a purchase for that, that has been paid 2,000 years ago, therefore, there is no need.

The tumor has been released from you. It is so far from you, it's as far as the east is from the west. You're the least likely candidate for the Lake of Fire because there is no sin on your account.

It's been removed. Your sins have been paid in full and if you know your Bible you know that phrase that I use very carefully here, "paid in full," is the word that Jesus cried out on a cross. It comes from the Greek word, the root of it, "telos" which is complete or finished. "Tetelestai" the Greek word and the way he said it, has that accounting flavor to it. The account has been paid in



full, it's done, it's completed. And at that moment, every sin you've committed was so paid for, redeemed, so purchased, the price has been paid to bring you completely back to God, that anything that was there standing between you and God, has been so far removed from you there's no reference to it in your life.

I know some of you listen to that radio, financial guru guy who teaches all these steps about financial freedom and you follow the steps and it can take you years but at some point, he'd love to get you on the radio program, so he can have you tell your story, how you follow the steps, then they are going to make you scream it out on the radio, "I'm debt free!" It's like a mattress salesman. Debt free. Some of you listen to that show.

It takes a long time to get there. Some of us listen to that sometimes and they go, "Oh man, I'm going to get debt free, it's going to take a lot time, all that stuff, a lot of work." That's what most people's religion is like. "Maybe one day I get there." The Bible says, that if you trust in Christ, at that particular moment you're clothed in Christ, you're fully qualified for Heaven, you've been transferred immediately from the domain, dominion, jurisdiction of the enemy to the kingdom of his beloved son and every sin you've ever committed has been extracted from your account, that you are debt free. One minute in your Christian life you can call a Christian program about sin and you can yell it out on the radio, "I am debt free." There's only one step in this program. Trust in Christ.

Life is going to be hard? Oh, it will be. Horatio Spafford put it well. "Though Satan should buffet." Oh and he does. "Though trial should come" and they will for good reason in God's economy. "Let this blessed assurance control." Let this assurance, let this confidence in my heart, be the anchor and the rudder of my life, that I'm not swayed, that I'm not thrown off course. "That Christ has regarded my helpless estate." The tumor so bad, I had no hope. It's awful. I'm hellbound. "That he has shed his own blood for my soul." Redemption. Payment was paid.

The next verse. I love this. "My sin, Oh the bliss of this glorious thought! My sin, not in part, but the whole was," here comes Colossians, "was nailed to the cross. And I bear it no more." No better way to end this verse of the song. "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul." I'm debt free. The payment was Christ's own blood.

God we pray. I hope with a renewed sense of encouragement and gratitude. We pray that you would be honored by the way we hang our lives on your promise. As it says in Isaiah 1, "Though our sins be as scarlet, be white as snow" and it starts that great line, "let us reason together." God, the atonement of Christ makes that reason impeccable, it makes it clear that Jesus was "the Lamb of God," as John the Baptist put it, "that takes away the sin of the world." Thank you that our sins were nailed to that cross and that we can sit here today, with Hell cancelled, Heaven secured, and our sins forgiven. We love you for that. May we revel in that this week.

In Jesus name, Amen.