

**Colossians 3:1-17**  
**September 15, 2024**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: We are going to read right off the bat, “Set your hearts on things above and then set your minds on things above – not on earthly things.” What sorts of things are “things above” and what sorts of things are “earthly things?” [Let people engage]

**Transition:** Paul is moving us into the practical application of the doctrines he has been teaching. It does little good if Christians *declare* and *defend* the truth, but fail to *demonstrate* it in their lives. There are some Christians who will defend the truth at the drop of a hat, but their personal lives deny the doctrines they profess to love. “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1:16).

Keep in mind that the pagan religions of Paul’s day said little or nothing about personal morality. A worshiper could bow before an idol, put his offering on the altar, and go back to live the same old life of sin. What a person believed had no direct relationship with how he behaved, and no one would condemn a person for his behavior.

But the Christian faith brought a whole new concept into pagan society: what we believe has a very definite connection with how we behave! After all, faith in Christ means being united to Christ; and if we share His life, we must follow His example. He cannot live in us by His Spirit and permit us to live in sin.

**BOOK:**

**Rules for Holy Living**

**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. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

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

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

As Christians, we bear the name of Christ. The word *Christian* is found only three times in the entire New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The name was given originally as a term of contempt, but gradually it became a name of honor. The name of Christ, then, means *identification*: we belong to Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, all that we say and do should be associated with the name of Jesus Christ. By our words and our works, we should glorify His name. If we permit anything into our lives that cannot be associated with the name of Jesus, then we are sinning. We must do and say everything on the authority of His name and for the honor of His name.

**Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 133-141)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

## **HEAVEN ON EARTH**

*Colossians 3:1–11*

In the final two chapters of Colossians, Paul moved into the practical application of the doctrines he had been teaching. After all, it does little good if Christians *declare* and *defend* the truth, but fail to *demonstrate* it in their lives. There are some Christians who will defend the truth at the drop of a hat, but their personal lives deny the doctrines they profess to love. “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1:16).

We must keep in mind that the pagan religions of Paul’s day said little or nothing about personal morality. A worshiper could bow before an idol, put his offering on the altar, and go back to live the same old life of sin. What a person believed had no direct relationship with how he behaved, and no one would condemn a person for his behavior.

But the Christian faith brought a whole new concept into pagan society: what we believe has a very definite connection with how we behave! After all, faith in Christ means being united to Christ; and if we share His life, we must follow His example. He cannot live in us by His Spirit and permit us to live in sin. Paul connected doctrine with duty in this section by giving his readers three instructions.

### **Seek the Heavenly (Col. 3:1–4)**

The emphasis is on the believer’s relationship with Christ.

***We died with Christ (v. 3a).*** The fullest explanation of this wonderful truth is found in Romans 6–8. Christ not only died *for* us (substitution), but we died *with* Him (identification). Christ not only died *for* sin, bearing its penalty; but He died *unto* sin, breaking its power. Because we are “in Christ” through the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), we died with Christ. This means that we can have victory over the old sin nature that wants to control us. “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:2)

***We live in Christ (v. 4a).*** Christ is our life. Eternal life is not some heavenly substance that God imparts when we, as sinners, trust the Saviour. Eternal life is Jesus Christ Himself. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12). We are dead and alive at the same time—dead to sin and alive in Christ.

Someone has said, “Life is what you are alive to.” A child may come alive when you talk about a baseball game or an ice-cream cone. A teenager may come alive when you mention cars or dates. Paul wrote, “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Christ was Paul’s life and he was alive to anything that related to Christ. So should it be with every believer.

Years ago I heard a story about two sisters who enjoyed attending dances and wild parties. Then they were converted and found new life in Christ. They received an invitation to a party and sent their RSVP in these words: “We regret that we cannot attend because we recently died.”

***We are raised with Christ (v. 1a).*** It is possible to be alive and still live in the grave. During World War II, several Jewish refugees hid in a cemetery, and a baby was actually born in one of

the graves. However, when Jesus gave us His life, He lifted us out of the grave and set us on the throne in heaven! Christ is seated at the right hand of God, and we are seated there “in Christ.”

The word *if* does not suggest that Paul’s readers might not have been “risen with Christ”; for all of us, as believers, are identified with Christ in death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. The word *since* gives the truer meaning of the word. Our exalted position in Christ is not a hypothetical thing, or a goal for which we strive. It is an accomplished fact.

***We are hidden in Christ (v. 3b).*** We no longer belong to the world, but to Christ; and the sources of life that we enjoy come only from Him. “Hidden in Christ” means security and satisfaction. The eminent Greek scholar, Dr. A.T. Robertson, comments on this: “So here we are in Christ who is in God, and no burglar, not even Satan himself, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:31–39)” (*Paul and the Intellectuals*, Broadman, p. 98).

The Christian life is a “hidden life” as far as the world is concerned, because the world does not know Christ (see 1 John 4:1–6). Our sphere of life is not this earth, but heaven; and the things that attract us and excite us belong to heaven, not to earth. This does not mean that we should ignore our earthly responsibilities. Rather it means that our motives and our strength come from heaven, not earth.

***We are glorified in Christ (v. 4b).*** Christ is now seated at the Father’s right hand, but one day He will come to take His people home (1 Thes. 4:13–18). When He does, we shall enter into eternal glory with Christ. When He is revealed in His glory, we shall also be revealed in glory. According to the Apostle Paul, *we have already been glorified!* (Rom. 8:30) This glory simply has not yet been revealed. Christ has already given us His glory (John 17:22), but the full revelation of the glory awaits the return of the Saviour (Rom. 8:17–25).

Now, in view of our wonderful identification with Christ, we have a great responsibility: “Seek those things which are above” (Col. 3:1). Through Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, we have been separated from the old life of this world, and we now belong to a new heavenly life.

But how do we “seek those things which are above”? The secret is found in Colossians 3:2: “Habitually set your mind—your attention—on things above, not on things on the earth” (literal translation). Our feet must be on earth, but our minds must be in heaven. This is not to suggest that (as D.L. Moody used to say) we become “so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.” It means that the practical everyday affairs of life get their direction from Christ in heaven. It means further that we look at earth from heaven’s point of view.

While attending a convention in Washington, D.C., I watched a Senate committee hearing over television. I believe they were considering a new ambassador to the United Nations. The late Senator Hubert Humphrey was making a comment as I turned on the television set: “You must remember that in politics, how you stand depends on where you sit.” He was referring, of course, to the political party seating arrangement in the Senate, but I immediately applied it to my position in Christ. How I stand—and walk—depends on where I sit; *and I am seated with Christ in the heavenlies!*

When the nation of Israel came to the border of the Promised Land, they refused to enter; and, because of their stubborn unbelief, they had to wander in the wilderness for forty years (see Num. 13–14). That whole generation, starting with the twenty-year-olds, died in the wilderness, except for Caleb and Joshua, the only two spies who believed God. How were Caleb and Joshua able to “get the victory” during those forty difficult years in the wilderness? *Their minds and hearts were in Canaan!* They knew they had an inheritance coming, and they lived in the light of that inheritance.

The Queen of England exercises certain powers and privileges because she sits on the throne. The President of the United States has privileges and powers because he sits behind the desk in the oval office of the White House. The believer is seated on the throne with Christ. We must constantly keep our affection and our attention fixed on the things of heaven, through the Word and prayer, as well as through worship and service. We can enjoy “days of heaven upon the earth” (Deut. 11:21) if we will keep our hearts and minds in the heavenlies.

### **Slay the Earthly (Col. 3:5–9)**

We turn now from the positive to the negative. There are some people who do not like the negative. “Give us positive doctrines!” they say. “Forget about negative warnings and admonitions!” But the negative warnings and commands grow out of the positive truths of Christian doctrine. This is why Paul wrote, “Mortify *therefore*.”

No amount of positive talk about health will cure a ruptured appendix. The doctor will have to “get negative” and take out the appendix. No amount of lecturing on beauty will produce a garden. The gardener has to pull weeds! The positive and the negative go together, and one without the other leads to imbalance.

The word *mortify* means “put to death.” Because we have died with Christ (Col. 3:3), we have the spiritual power to slay the earthly, fleshly desires that want to control us. Paul called this “reckoning” ourselves to be dead to sin but alive in Christ (Rom. 6:11). Our Lord used the same idea when He said, “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out” (Matt. 5:29–30).

Obviously, neither Paul nor Jesus was talking about *literal* surgery. Sin does not come from the eye, hand, or foot; it comes from the heart, the evil desires within. Centuries ago in England, if a pickpocket was convicted, his right hand was cut off. If he was convicted a second time, his left hand was amputated. One pickpocket lost both hands and continued his “trade” by using his teeth! Physical surgery can never change the heart.

Not only was Paul negative in this paragraph, but he also *named sins*; and some people do not like that. These sins belong to the old life and have no place in our new life in Christ. Furthermore, God’s judgment falls on those who practice these sins; and God is no respecter of persons. God’s wrath fell on the Gentile world because of these sins (Rom. 1:18ff), and His wrath will fall again. “Because of these, the wrath of God is coming,” Paul warned (Col. 3:6, NIV).

*Fornication* refers to sexual immorality in general. *Uncleanness* means “lustful impurity that is connected with luxury and loose living.” *Inordinate affection* describes a state of mind that excites sexual impurity. The person who cultivates this kind of appetite can always find opportunity to satisfy it. *Evil concupiscence* means “base, evil desires.” It is clear that desires lead to deeds, appetites lead to actions. If we would purify our actions, then we must first purify our minds and hearts.

What we desire usually determines what we do. If I create in my children an appetite for candy, then I must satisfy that appetite. If they become overweight and unhealthy, then I must change their appetites, and I must teach them how to enjoy foods other than sweets. “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Ps. 51:10) should be our prayer; for it is out of the heart that these evil desires come (Mark 7:21–23).

After he had named these sensual sins, Paul added, “and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5b). *Covetousness* is the sin of always wanting more, whether it be more things or more pleasures. The covetous person is never satisfied with what he has, and he is usually envious of what other people have. This is idolatry, for covetousness puts things in the place of God. “Thou

shalt not covet” is the last of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:17). Yet this sin can make us break all of the other nine! A covetous person will dishonor God, take God’s name in vain, lie, steal, and commit every other sin in order to satisfy his sinful desires.

Do believers in local churches commit such sins? Unfortunately, they sometimes do. Each of the New Testament epistles sent to local churches makes mention of these sins and warns against them. I am reminded of a pastor who preached a series of sermons against the sins of the saints. A member of his congregation challenged him one day and said that it would be better if the pastor preached those messages to the lost. “After all,” said the church member, “sin in the life of a Christian is different from sin in the lives of other people.”

“Yes” replied the pastor, “*it’s worse!*”

After warning us against the sensual sins, Paul then pointed out the dangers of the social sins (Col. 3:8–9). Dr. G. Campbell Morgan called these “the sins in good standing.” We are so accustomed to anger, critical attitudes, lying, and coarse humor among believers that we are no longer upset or convicted about these sins. We would be shocked to see a church member commit some sensual sin, but we will watch him lose his temper in a business meeting and call it “righteous indignation.”

The picture here is that of a person changing clothes: “Put off ... put on” (Col. 3:9–10). This relates to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:1); for when He arose from the dead, Jesus Christ left the graveclothes behind (John 20:1–10). He had entered into a glorious resurrection life and had no need for the graveclothes. Likewise, when Lazarus was raised from the dead, Jesus instructed the people to “loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44).

The graveclothes represent the old life with its sinful deeds. Now that we have new life in Christ, we must walk “in newness of life” by putting off the old deeds and desires (Rom. 6:4). We do this by practicing our position in Christ, by reckoning ourselves to be dead to the old and alive to the new.

Paul began with *anger, wrath, and malice*—sins of bad attitude toward others. The word *anger* is the same as the word *wrath* (Col. 3:6), referring there to the wrath of God. This word describes habitual attitudes, while *wrath* refers to the sudden outburst of anger. God has a right to be angry at sin and to judge it, because He is holy and just. In fact, there is a righteous anger against sin that ought to characterize the saints (Eph. 4:26). But none of us have the right to “play God” and pass final judgment on others by our attitudes. *Malice* is an attitude of ill will toward a person. If we have malice toward a person, we are sad when he is successful, and we rejoice when he has trouble. This is sinful.

*Blasphemy* describes speech that slanders others and tears them down. Often among Christians this kind of malicious gossip masquerades as a spiritual concern: “I would never tell you what I know about her, except that I know you’ll want to pray about it.” Evil speaking is caused by malice (1 Peter 2:1). If you have deep-seated ill will toward a person, you will use every opportunity to say something bad about him.

*Filthy communication* is just that: foul speech, coarse humor, obscene language. For some reason, some Christians think it is manly or contemporary to use this kind of speech. Low humor sometimes creeps into conversations. If someone says, “Now, take this with a grain of salt!” you can remind him of Colossians 4:6: “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt.” Salt is a symbol of purity, and grace and purity go together.

The final sin Paul named was *lying* (Col. 3:9). He wrote this same warning to the believers in Ephesus (Eph. 4:25). Satan is the liar (John 8:44), while the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth

(John 14:17; 15:26). When a Christian lies, he is cooperating with Satan; when he speaks the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), he is cooperating with the Spirit of God.

A lie is any misrepresentation of the truth, *even if the words are accurate*. The tone of voice, the look on the face, or a gesture of the hand can alter the meaning of a sentence. So can the motive of the heart. If my watch is wrong and I give a friend the wrong time, that is not a lie. Lying involves the intent to deceive for the purpose of personal gain. An old proverb says, “Half a fact is a whole lie.”

Bishop Warren A. Candler was preaching about the lies of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and asked the congregation, “If God still struck people dead for lying, where would I be?” The congregation snickered a bit, but the smiles disappeared when the Bishop shouted, “I’d be right here—*preaching to an empty church!*”

### **Strengthen the Christly (Col. 3:10–11)**

Because we are alive in Christ, we must seek the things that are above. And, because we died with Christ, we must put off the things that belong to the earthly life of past sin. The result is that we can become like Jesus Christ! God wants to renew us and make us into the image of His Son!

The Greek verbs translated *put off* and *put on* (Col. 3:9–10) indicate a once-for-all action. When we trust Christ, we put off the old life and put on the new. The old man has been buried, and the new man is now in control. But the verb translated “renewed” is a present participle—“who is constantly being renewed.” The *crisis* of salvation leads to the *process* of sanctification, becoming more like Jesus Christ.

The Greeks had two different words for *new*. The word *neos* meant “new in time.” We use this word as an English prefix in such words as “neorthodoxy” and “neoclassicism.” The word *kainos* meant “new in quality, fresh.” Sometimes the two words were used interchangeably in the New Testament, but there is still a fundamental difference.

The believer has once and for all put on the “new man” (*neos*), and, as a consequence, he is being renewed (*kainos*). There is a change in quality, for he is becoming like Jesus Christ. The “new Man” is Jesus Christ, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), the Head of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

How does this renewal come about? Through knowledge. The word *knowledge* was one of the key terms in the vocabulary of the gnostics. But their so-called spiritual knowledge could never change a person’s life to make him like Christ. The better he gets to know Christ, the more he becomes like Him (Phil. 3:10).

Man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). This involves man’s personality (intellect, emotion, will) and man’s spirituality (he is more than a body). When man sinned, this image of God was marred and ruined. Adam’s children were born in the image of their father (Gen. 5:1, 3). In spite of the ravages of sin, man still bears the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9).

We were *formed* in God’s image, and *deformed* from God’s image by sin. But through Jesus Christ, we can be *transformed* into God’s image! We must be renewed in the spirit of our minds (Eph. 4:23). As we grow in knowledge of the Word of God, we will be transformed by the Spirit of God to share in the glorious image of God (2 Cor. 3:18). God transforms us by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2), and this involves the study of God’s Word. It is the truth that sets us free from the old life (John 8:31–32).

God’s purpose for us is that we be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). This refers to character, the spiritual quality of the inner man. When we see Jesus Christ, we shall be

like Him and have glorified bodies (1 John 3:1–3); but while we are waiting for Him to return, we can become like Him and share His holy image. This is a process of constant renewing as the Spirit of God uses the Word of God.

Human distinctions and differences should be no barrier to holy living in the church. In Jesus Christ, all human distinctions disappear (Col. 3:11). In Christ, there are no nationalities (“neither Greek nor Jew”). There is no recognition of former religious differences (“circumcision nor uncircumcision”). The gnostics taught that circumcision was important to the spiritual life (Col. 2:11ff). But Paul made it clear that this traditional act of physical surgery gave no advantages in the spiritual life.

There are also no cultural differences in Christ (“barbarian, Scythian”). The Greeks considered all non-Greeks to be barbarians; and the Scythians were the lowest barbarians of all! Yet, in Jesus Christ, a person’s cultural status is no advantage or disadvantage. Nor is his economic or political status (“bond or free”). Paul made it clear that a slave should try to get his freedom (1 Cor. 7:20–23), but he should not think he is handicapped *spiritually* because of his social position.

All of these human distinctions belong to the “old man” and not the “new man.” In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul added, “There is neither male nor female,” and thus erased even differences between the sexes. “Christ is all, and in all”, was Paul’s conclusion. “For ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

It is wrong to build the fellowship of the church on anything other than Jesus Christ, His person and His work. Ministries that are built on human distinctions, such as race, color, or social standing, are not biblical. One of the evidences of spiritual growth and the renewing of the mind is this willingness to receive and love all who sincerely know Christ and seek to glorify Him. The gnostic “super saints” were trying to isolate the Colossian believers from the rest of the church, and this was wrong. Even though *physically* we do not lose our national heritage when we become Christians, we do not use that heritage as a test of what is spiritual.

“Christ is all and in all” is the emphasis in this letter. “That in all things He might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18). Because we are complete in Christ, we can look beyond the earthly differences that separate people and enjoy a spiritual unity in the Lord. The gnostic false teachers, like the false teachers today, tried to rob God’s people of the richness of their oneness in Christ. Beware!

We are alive in Christ; therefore, we should seek the heavenly. We are dead in Christ; therefore, we should slay the earthly. We can become like Christ; therefore, we must strengthen the Christly and permit the Spirit to renew our minds, making us more into the image of God.

## **ALL DRESSED UP AND SOMEPLACE TO GO**

### *Colossians 3:12–17*

This section completes Paul’s exhortation to the Christian to live a holy life. It continues the illustration of *garments*: “Put off . . . put on” (Col. 3:8–10). He exhorted his readers to put off the graveclothes of sin and the old life, and to put on the “grace clothes” of holiness and the new life in Christ.

The emphasis in this section is on *motives*. Why should we put off the old deeds and put on the qualities of the new life? Paul explained four motives that ought to encourage us to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).



## The Grace of Christ (Col. 3:12–14)

Grace is God's favor to undeserving sinners. Paul reminded the Colossians of what God's grace had done for them.

**God chose them (v. 12a).** The word *elect* means "chosen of God." God's words to Israel through Moses help us to understand the meaning of salvation by grace: "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the Lord loved you ... hath the Lord brought you out [of Egypt] with a mighty hand" (Deut. 7:7–8).

This miracle of divine election did not depend on anything that we are or that we have done; for God chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). If God saved a sinner on the basis of merit or works, nobody would be saved. It is all done through God's grace that it might all bring glory to God.

Of course, *election* is a "sacred secret" that belongs to God's children. It is not a doctrine that we believers explain to the unsaved. "The Lord knows them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19), so we must leave the working out of His eternal purposes with Him. Our task is to share the Good News of the Gospel with a lost world.

**God set them apart (v. 12).** That is the meaning of the word holy. Because we have trusted Christ, we have been set apart from the world unto the Lord. We are not our own; we belong completely to Him (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Just as the marriage ceremony sets apart a man and a woman for each other exclusively, so salvation sets the believer apart exclusively for Jesus Christ. Would it not be a horrible thing, at the end of a wedding, to see the groom run off with the maid of honor? It is just as horrible to contemplate the Christian living for the world and the flesh.

**God loves them (v. 12).** When an unbeliever sins, he is a creature breaking the laws of the holy Creator and Judge. But when a Christian sins, he is a child of God breaking the loving heart of his Father. Love is the strongest motivating power in the world. As the believer grows in his love for God, he will grow in his desire to obey Him and walk in the newness of life that he has in Christ.

**God has forgiven them (vv. 13–14).** "Having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2:13). God's forgiveness is complete and final; it is not conditional or partial. How is the holy God able to forgive us guilty sinners? Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. God has forgiven us "for Christ's sake" (Eph. 4:32), and not for our own sake.

Chosen by God, set apart for God, loved by God, and forgiven by God. They all add up to GRACE! Now, because of these gracious blessings, the Christian has some solemn responsibilities before God. He must put on the beautiful graces of the Christian life. Paul named eight graces.

1. Put on ... tender mercies (Col. 3:12). The Greek uses the term *bowels of compassion* because the Greek people located the deeper emotions in the intestinal area, while we locate them in the heart. As believers, we need to display tender feelings of compassion toward one another (see Phil. 2:1ff). This is not something that we turn on and off, like the TV set. It is a constant attitude of heart that makes us easy to live with.

2. Put on ... kindness (Col. 3:12). We have been saved because of God's kindness toward us through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:7; Titus 3:4). We, in turn, ought to show kindness toward others. "Be ye kind one to another" (Eph. 4:32) is God's command.

One of the most beautiful pictures of kindness in the Bible is King David's treatment of the crippled prince, Mephibosheth (see 2 Samuel 9). David's desire was to show "the kindness of

God” to King Saul’s family because of his own love for Saul’s son, Jonathan. The young man chosen was Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, a poor cripple. If David had acted according to justice, he would have condemned Mephibosheth, for the man belonged to a condemned family. But David acted on the basis of love and grace.

David sought Mephibosheth and assured him not to be afraid. He invited Mephibosheth to live in the palace as a member of his family, and to eat at the king’s bountiful table. This is the kindness of God! You and I have experienced an even greater kindness, for as Christians, we are God’s children and shall live with Him in heaven forever!

3. Put on ... humbleness of mind (Col. 3:12). The pagan world of Paul’s day did not admire humility. Instead, they admired pride and domination. Jesus Christ is the greatest example of humbleness of mind (Phil. 2:1ff). Humility is not thinking poorly of oneself. Rather, it is having the proper estimate of oneself in the will of God (Rom. 12:3). The person with humbleness of mind thinks of others first and not of himself.

4. Put on ... meekness (Col. 3:12). Meekness is not weakness; it is power under control. This word was used to describe a soothing wind, a healing medicine, and a colt that had been broken. In each instance, there is *power*: a wind can become a storm; too much medicine can kill; a horse can break loose. But this power is under control. The meek person does not have to fly off the handle because he has everything under control.

5. Put on ... long-suffering (Col. 3:12). This word is literally “long-temper.” The short-tempered person speaks and acts impulsively and lacks self-control. When a person is long-suffering, he can put up with provoking people or circumstances without retaliating. It is good to be able to get angry, for this is a sign of holy character. But it is wrong to get angry quickly at the wrong things and for the wrong reasons.

6. Put on ... forbearance (Col. 3:13). This word literally means “to hold up” or “to hold back.” God is forbearing toward sinners in that He holds back His judgment (Rom. 2:4; 3:25). Meekness, long-suffering, and forbearance go together.

7. Put on ... forgiveness (Col. 3:13). This is the logical result of all that Paul has written so far in this section. It is not enough that the Christian must endure grief and provocation, and refuse to retaliate; he must also forgive the troublemaker. If he does not, then feelings of malice will develop in the heart; and these can lead to greater sins.

It is Christlike to forgive (Eph. 4:32), and forgiveness opens the heart to the fullness of the love of God. The very instant we have a complaint against another person, we should forgive him in our hearts. (“Family forgiveness” is another matter. We should go to the offender and seek to help him in love. See Matt. 18:15–35.)

8. Put on ... love (Col. 3:14). This is the most important of the Christian virtues, and it acts like a “girdle” that ties all the other virtues together. All of the spiritual qualities Paul has named are aspects of true Christian love, as a reading of 1 Corinthians 13 will reveal. Love is the first of the fruit of the Spirit and the other virtues follow—joy (Col. 3:16), peace (Col. 3:15), long-suffering, gentleness, kindness, and meekness (Col. 3:12).

When love rules in our lives, it unites all these spiritual virtues so that there is beauty and harmony, indicating spiritual maturity. This harmony and maturity keep the life balanced and growing. The gnostic system could never do this.

### **The Peace of Christ (Col. 3:15)**

In this verse Paul turned from character to conduct. How can a Christian know when he is doing God's will? One answer is: the peace of Christ in the heart and in the church. When the believer loses his inner peace, he knows that he has in some way disobeyed God.

The word translated "rule" is an athletic term. It means "to preside at the games and distribute the prizes." Paul used a variation of this word in his Letter to the Colossians: "Let no one declare you unworthy of a prize" (literal translation, Col. 2:18). In the Greek games, there were judges (we would call them *umpires*) who rejected the contestants who were not qualified, and who disqualified those who broke the rules.

The peace of God is the "Umpire" in our believing hearts and our churches. When we obey the will of God, we have His peace within; but when we step out of His will (even unintentionally), we lose His peace.

We must beware, however, of a false peace in the heart. Jonah deliberately disobeyed God, yet he was able to go to sleep in the hold of a ship *in a storm!* "I had peace about it!" is not sufficient evidence that we are in the will of God. We must pray, surrender to His will, and seek His guidance in the Scriptures. The peace of heart *alone* is not always the peace of God.

Something else is involved: if we have peace in our hearts, we will be at peace with others in the church. We are called to one body, and our relationship in that body must be one of harmony and peace. If we are out of the will of God, we are certain to bring discord and disharmony to the church. Jonah thought he was at peace, when actually his sins created a storm!

When a Christian loses the peace of God, he begins to go off in directions that are out of the will of God. He turns to the things of the world and the flesh to compensate for his lack of peace within. He tries to escape, but he cannot escape *himself!* It is only when he confesses his sin, claims God's forgiveness, and does God's will that he experiences God's peace within.

When there is peace in the heart, there will be praise on the lips: "And be ye thankful" (Col. 3:15). The Christian out of God's will is never found giving sincere praise to God. When David covered up his sins, he lost his peace and his praise (Pss. 32; 51). When he confessed his sins, then his song returned.

### **The Word of Christ (Col. 3:16)**

This means, of course, the Word of God. The false teachers came to Colossae with man-made traditions, religious rules, and human philosophies. They tried to harmonize God's Word with their teachings, but they could not succeed. God's Word always magnifies Jesus Christ.

It was not the word of false teachers that brought salvation to the Colossians; it was the Word of the truth of the Gospel (Col. 1:5). This same Word gives us life and sustains and strengthens us (1 Peter 1:22–2:3).

The Word will transform our lives if we will but permit it to "dwell" in us richly. The word *dwell* means "to feel at home." If we have experienced the grace and the peace of Christ, then the Word of Christ will feel at home in our hearts. We will discover how rich the Word is with spiritual treasures that give value to our lives.

However, we must not think that Paul wrote this only to individual Christians; for he directed it to the entire church body. "Let the Word of Christ dwell among you" is a possible translation. As it dwells richly in each member of the church, it will dwell richly in the church fellowship.

There is a danger today, as there was in Paul's day, that local churches minimize the Word of God. There seems to be a lack of simple Bible teaching in Sunday School classes and pulpits. Far more interest is shown in movies, musical performances, and various entertainments than in

God's Word. Many saved people cannot honestly say that God's Word dwells in their hearts richly because they do not take time to read, study, and memorize it.

There is (according to Paul) a definite relationship between our knowledge of the Bible and our expression of worship in song. One way we teach and encourage ourselves and others is through the singing of the Word of God. But if we do not know the Bible and understand it, we cannot honestly sing it from our hearts.

Perhaps this "poverty of Scripture" in our churches is one cause of the abundance of unbiblical songs that we have today. A singer has no more right to sing a lie than a preacher has to preach a lie. The great songs of the faith were, for the most part, written by believers who knew the doctrines of the Word of God. Many so-called "Christian songs" today are written by people with little or no knowledge of the Word of God. It is a dangerous thing to separate the praise of God from the Word of God.

Psalms were, of course, the songs taken from the Old Testament. For centuries, the churches in the English-speaking world sang only metrical versions of the Psalms. I am glad to see today a return to the singing of Scripture, especially the Psalms. Hymns were songs of praise to God written by believers but not taken from the Psalms. The church today has a rich heritage of hymnody which, I fear, is being neglected. Spiritual songs were expressions of Bible truth other than in psalms and hymns. When we sing a hymn, we address the Lord; when we sing a spiritual song, we address each other.

Paul described a local church worship service (1 Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16). Note that the believer sings to *himself* as well as to the other believers and to the Lord. Our singing must be from our hearts and not just our lips. But if the Word of God is not in our hearts, we cannot sing from our hearts. This shows how important it is to know the Word of God, for it enriches our public and private worship of God.

Our singing must be with grace. This does not mean "singing in a gracious way," but singing because we have God's grace in our hearts. It takes grace to sing when we are in pain, or when circumstances seem to be against us. It certainly took grace for Paul and Silas to sing in that Philippian prison (Acts 16:22–25). Our singing must not be a display of fleshly talent; it must be a demonstration of the grace of God in our hearts.

Someone has said that a successful Christian life involves attention to three books: God's Book, the Bible; the pocketbook; and the hymn book. I agree. I often use a hymnal in my devotional time, to help express my praise to God. As a believer grows in his knowledge of the Word, he will want to grow in his expression of praise. He will learn to appreciate the great hymns of the church, the Gospel songs, and the spiritual songs that teach spiritual truths. To sing only the elementary songs of the faith is to rob himself of spiritual enrichment.

Before we leave this section, we should notice an important parallel with Ephesians 5:18–6:9. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul emphasized being filled with the Spirit; in his Letter to the Colossians, he emphasized being filled with the Word. *But the evidences of this spiritual fullness are the same!* How can we tell if a believer is filled with the Spirit? He is joyful, thankful, and submissive (Eph. 5:19–21); all of this shows up in his relationships in the home and on the job (Eph. 5:22–6:9). How can we tell if a believer is filled with the Word of God? He is joyful, thankful, and submissive (Col. 3:16–4:1).

### **The Name of Christ (Col. 3:17)**

In modern society, we pay little attention to names. But the ancient world held a man's name to be of utmost importance. Often, during Old Testament days, God changed a person's name because of some important experience or some new development.

As Christians, we bear the name of Christ. The word *Christian* is found only three times in the entire New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The name was given originally as a term of contempt, but gradually it became a name of honor. The name of Christ, then, means *identification*: we belong to Jesus Christ.

But His name also means *authority*. A man's name signed to a check authorizes the withdrawal of money from the bank. The President's name signed to a bill makes it a law. In the same way, it is in the name of Jesus Christ that we have the authority to pray (John 14:13–14; 16:23–26). Because Jesus Christ is God, and He has died for us, we have authority in His name.

All that we say and do should be associated with the name of Jesus Christ. By our words and our works, we should glorify His name. If we permit anything into our lives that cannot be associated with the name of Jesus, then we are sinning. We must do and say everything on the authority of His name and for the honor of His name.

Bearing the name of Jesus is a great privilege, but it is also a tremendous responsibility. We suffer persecution because we bear His name (John 15:20–21). I have noticed in conversations that you can tell people you are a Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, or even an atheist, and there will be little response. But if you tell people you are a Christian, and bring the name of Christ into the conversation, almost immediately there is some kind of response, and it is usually negative.

Every parent tries to teach his children to honor the family name. In just a few minutes, a person can disgrace a name that it has taken his ancestors years to build. For example, the Hebrew name *Judah* is a respected name; it means "praise." The New Testament equivalent is "Judas"—and who would name his son Judas?

Note that Paul again mentioned thanksgiving in this Colossian letter. Whatever we do in the name of Christ ought to be joined with thanksgiving. If we cannot give thanks, then we had better not do it or say it! This is the fifth of six references in Colossians to thanksgiving (Col. 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 17; 4:2). When we remember that Paul was a Roman prisoner when he wrote this letter, it makes this emphasis on thanksgiving that much more wonderful.

As we review these four spiritual motivations for godly living, we are impressed with the centrality of Jesus Christ. We forgive because Christ forgave us (Col. 3:13). It is the peace of Christ that should rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15). The Word of Christ should dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16). The name of Christ should be our identification and our authority. "Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

Since we are united with Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we have all the resources we need for holy living. But we must be spiritually motivated. Because we have experienced the grace of Christ, we want to live for Him. Because we have enjoyed the peace of Christ, we want to obey Him. We have been enriched by the Word of Christ, and ennobled by the name of Christ; therefore, we want to honor and glorify Him.

Can we desire any higher motivation?

**Lightner, R. P. (1985). *Colossians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 679-683) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

### III. Spiritual: Inner Life in Christ (3:1–17)

Knowing that all wisdom is in Christ (2:1–5), Paul urged the Colossian Christians to continue in Him (2:6–7), not being deceived by vain philosophies (2:8–10). Since believers are identified with Christ, they are not to live under Jewish laws (2:11–17), for that would only rob them of their rewards (2:18–19). They have died with Christ and hence need not submit to legalistic rules (2:20–23).

Furthermore, they have also been raised with Christ. So they should set their hearts on heavenly things (3:1–4), put to death sinful worldly practices (3:5–11), and clothe themselves with Christ’s virtues (3:12–17). Stated in another way, believers are to seek spiritual values (3:1–4), put off the sins of the old life (3:5–11), and put on the virtues of the new life (3:12–17). This in turn should affect their relationships with other members of their families and society (3:18–4:1).

#### A. Seeking spiritual values (3:1–4).

3:1. **Since** believers have not only died with Christ but **have also been raised with Christ** (cf. Rom. 6:8–10; Col. 2:12–13), they should **set their hearts on things above**. That is, believers’ lives should be dominated by the pattern of heaven, bringing heavenly direction to their earthly duties. “Set” (*zēteite*) means “to seek or strive for earnestly” (cf. Rev. 9:6; 1 Cor. 7:27). Fixing their attention decisively toward “things above” involves centering their lives on the ascended (Eph. 4:10), glorified (John 17:5; Phil. 2:9) **Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God** (Ps. 110:1; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). This is His seat of divine authority because He has defeated the forces of evil and death (Heb. 2:14–15).

3:2. Also Paul wrote, **Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things**. That is, concentrate your concern on the eternal, not the temporal. “Fix [your] eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). The similarity of the two commands in Colossians 3:1–2 reinforces their impact. “Set your hearts on things above” is *ta anō zēteite*, and “Set your minds on things above” is *ta anō phroneite*. The first suggests striving; the second suggests concentrating.

Paul was not enjoining an other-world asceticism; he had just condemned that (2:20–23). He was saying that life *in this world* will be better if it is lived by a power *beyond this world*, the power of the resurrected, ascended, glorified Christ. The “earthly things” (*ta epi tēs gēs*, lit., “things upon the earth,” 3:2; the same Gr. words are used in v. 5) to be avoided are moral, not physical (cf. immorality, impurity, lust, etc., in v. 5). Paul was not encouraging a kind of Gnostic disdain for material things. Every physical thing God created, including the body and sex, is good (cf. Gen. 1:27–30; 1 Tim. 4:1–4). However, since having a physical body does give occasion for the works of the (moral) flesh (cf. Rom. 7:4–6), Paul warned against setting one’s affections in this area and perverting God’s purpose for them.

3:3–4. At the moment of his salvation, a Christian **died** to the evil of the “flesh,” the sin nature (Rom. 6:3–8; Col. 2:11), and his **life is now hidden with Christ in God**. “Hidden” implies both concealment and safety; both invisibility and security. He is not yet glorified, but he is secure and safe in **Christ**. In fact, Christ is his very **life**. Christ said He was going where “the world will not see Me anymore” (John 14:19).

But when He will appear at the Rapture (1 Thes. 4:16–18), believers **will appear with Him** and will be glorified. As John put it, “We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for

we shall see Him as He is” (i.e., believers will be glorified as He is glorified; 1 John 3:2; cf. 1 Cor. 13:12; Col. 1:27). So Paul added a new direction to the believers’ focus of attention: they should look *upward* to Christ’s reign over them in heaven and also *forward* to His return for them in the clouds.

*B. Putting off the sins of the old life (3:5–11).*

3:5–6. Paul’s imagery moved from death and life to putting clothes on and off. **Put to death ... whatever belongs to your earthly nature.** The Greek tense in this command suggests a decisive action, as if Paul said, “Mortify it! Do it now! Do it resolutely!” Of course, God has already done it, but Christians are to *know* this, *count* it to be true, and *act* accordingly (Rom. 6:5–14). In other words, they are not to go on living as though they are still alive to sin when in actuality they are not. They are to put away that old life, which springs from their earthly natures. “Whatever belongs to your earthly nature” is literally “the members that are upon the earth” (*ta melē ta epi tēs gēs*). These contrast with the “things above” (Col. 3:1; *ta epi tēs gēs* is also used in v. 2). This “earthly nature” is the “old self” (or “sinful nature” [2:13], or “old man” [KJV]; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). Some take this to mean the persons Christians were before conversion, whereas others take it (more likely) to refer to the evil tendencies in believers today (i.e., their “old natures”). Even if it means the former, the net effect is the same: they should not live as they did before, because they are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

The list of evil activities flowing from man’s earthly nature includes **immorality** (*porneia*, “fornication”), **impurity** (a wider perversion), **lust** (*pathos*, “uncontrollable passion”), **evil desires** (“illicit craving”), and **greed** (or coveting), **which is idolatry** (because it seeks satisfaction in things below and not above). Similar lists of sins appear often in Paul’s writings (Rom. 1:29–31; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:3–5). Paul added that **because of these evils the wrath of God is coming**. The words “is coming” render the present tense *erchetai* (lit., “comes”). This suggests that God’s wrath has already begun (cf. John 3:36). It will, of course, culminate in His future climactic visitation on evil (Rom. 2:5; 2 Thes. 1:7–9).

3:7–9. Though the Colossian Christians **used to walk** [live] **in these evil ways**, before they came to know Christ, Paul commanded that they do so no more. **Now you must rid yourselves of all such things**. The word “rid” (*apothesthe*) means “to put off” like a suit of clothes. In its ethical use here it means “throw it off like a dirty shirt” (cf. Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22, 25; Heb. 12:1; James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1). In the Bible, behavior is often likened to a garment (e.g., Job 29:14; Ps. 35:26; Isa. 11:5; Rom. 13:12; 1 Thes. 5:8).

Repulsive habits—**anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language**—do not fit or suit Christians. They are unbecoming to believers (cf. Eph. 4:17, 31). “Anger” (*orgēn*) is a chronic attitude of smoldering hatred, whereas “rage” (*thymon*) is an acute outburst. *Thymos* elsewhere is rendered “outbursts of anger” (2 Cor. 12:20), “fits of rage” (Gal. 5:20), and “rage” (Eph. 4:31). “Malice” (*kakian*, the vice that lies below anger and rage as their root) is forbidden, as is “slander” (*blasphēmian*, “railing or evil speaking”). “Filthy language” (*aischrologian*) is shameful or abrasive speech. Neither should Christians **lie** (cf. Eph. 4:25) for truthfulness is essential in followers of the One who is “the Truth” (John 14:6).

Lying and all other vices are inappropriate for a Christian for at salvation he discarded his **old self** (lit., “the old man,” i.e., the former sinful way of living, characteristic of the unregenerate; Col. 2:11, 13a) **with its practices** (cf. “died” in 2:20; 3:3).

3:10. A Christian is to **put on** (cf. v. 12) **the new self** (new way of life or disposition). Hence his conduct should be in accord with his new position. This “new self” needs constant renewal or

refreshing—it **is being renewed** (present tense), in order to keep it victorious over sin. Paul also expressed this idea of continual renewal in 2 Corinthians 4:16 (“Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day”); in Romans 12:2 (being “transformed by the renewing of your mind”); and in Ephesians 4:23 (“to be made new in the attitude of your minds”).

This renewal of the new self is **in knowledge** (*eis epignōsin*; cf. Col. 1:9; 2:2). It takes place as a believer comes to a personal, deep knowledge of and fellowship with Christ. And the renewal is **in** (*kat* ‘, “according to”) **the image of its Creator**; its goal is to make believers like Him, for the “new self [was] created to be like God” (Eph. 4:24). Adam was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), which included a moral and intellectual likeness to God. Though this image was not erased (but only effaced) by the Fall (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), yet it was corrupted and needs to be repaired and renewed. Christians become increasingly like the Lord as they refresh their new natures, yielding to the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work. And in the resurrection believers “shall bear the likeness of the Man [Christ] from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49). Then the task of restoring God’s image will be complete, for “we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2).

3:11. In Christ distinctions are removed. These include national distinctions (**Greek or Jew**; Jews called all those outside their nation Greeks; cf. Gal. 3:28); religious distinctions (**circumcised or uncircumcised**); cultural distinctions (anyone foreign to Greek culture was a **barbarian**, and a **Scythian** was a wild, savage nomad); and economic or social distinctions (**slave or free**). If a Greek, an uncircumcised person, a barbarian, a Scythian, or a slave became a believer, he was a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), a “new self” (Col. 3:10), just like a Jew or free person who became a Christian. For **Christ is all, and is in all**. That is, normal human distinctions are overruled and transfigured by one’s union in Christ.

All barriers are destroyed in Christ, and all believers are truly “created equal.” So it is to be expected that each believer—regardless of his nationality, former religion, culture, or economic standing—should do away with his former sinful practices and should live in accord with his “new self.”

### C. *Putting on the virtues of the new life (3:12–17)*

Because of their new lives in Christ all believers are called on to clothe themselves in virtue, letting Christ’s peace rule their hearts. His Word should dwell in them richly, and they should do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

3:12. Again Paul called on believers to take a decisive action: **Clothe yourselves** (*endysasthe*). Because they have “put on (*endysamenoi*) the new self” (v. 10), they should live accordingly, with appropriate attributes and attitudes. In verses 8–9 Paul listed six vices (anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying). Now in contrast to them, Christians—as **God’s chosen people** (cf. Rom. 8:33; Titus 1:1), **holy** (“separated to God”; cf. Col. 1:2) **and dearly loved** (cf. Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9–11, 19)—are to have several virtues. These include **compassion** (*splanchna oiktirmou*, lit., “tender sympathy of heartfelt compassion”—an unusually touching expression; in Phil. 2:1 Paul joined these two nouns with “and”), **kindness** (benevolence in action; cf. 2 Cor. 6:6), **humility** (a lowly attitude toward God; cf. Phil. 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5), **gentleness** (*prautēta*), meekness, a lowly attitude toward others, **and patience** (*makrothymian*, self-restraint, a steady response in the face of provocation; cf. Col. 1:11). The last three of these are mentioned in the Greek in the same order in Ephesians 4:2; and Galatians 5:22–23 in the Greek includes three of them: patience and gentleness, as well as kindness.



3:13. Furthermore, believers are to **bear with each other** (i.e., “put up with each other”) with the attitudes just mentioned in v. 12. Also they are to **forgive whatever grievances** (complaints) they **may have against** others. How? By forgiving **as the Lord forgave** them, graciously and freely (Eph. 4:32). Grudges have no place in a Christian’s life for they may lead to the sins mentioned in Colossians 3:8–9.

3:14. But **over all these virtues** Christians are to **put on love**. As Paul wrote elsewhere, “The greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). In one’s catalog of virtues love should be the cover, because it is of supreme importance and is the perfect bond, holding **them all together in perfect unity**.

3:15. Believers are also to **let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts** because they are **called to peace as members of one body**. The closer believers are to Christ (and His likeness), the closer they are to each other. In interpersonal relationships “peace” (transcendent, God-given tranquility) should rule (*brabeuetō*, “arbitrate, decide every debate”; a word used only here in the NT; cf. *katabrabeuetō*, “decide against,” 2:18). Christ’s followers who have put on the virtues Paul listed (3:12–14), are concerned about being arbitrated in every trying circumstance by His peace, not by their wrangling. Also, Christians are to **be thankful** (cf. Phil. 4:6; Col. 1:12; 3:16–17; 4:2; 1 Thes. 5:18). An attitude of gratitude contributes to an enjoyment of spiritual tranquility, whereas grumbling makes for inner agitation.

3:16. The new life Christians must “put on” is one in which **the Word of Christ dwells richly**. Christ’s words were recorded by Spirit-guided apostles (cf. John 14:26; 16:13; 20:31). The words of the Bible, God’s written Word, are to  **dwell in** believers. That is, by study, meditation, and application of the Word, it becomes a permanent abiding part of one’s life. When the words of Christ become part of a believer’s nature, they spring forth naturally and daily in **psalms** (songs from the Book of Psalms), **hymns** (other songs of praise), **and spiritual songs** (as opposed to secular odes) **with gratitude** (*en tē chariti*; lit., “in grace”). This can mean either (a) God’s grace, (b) graciousness in Christian singing, or (c) Christian thanks. As suggested by the NIV it probably has the third meaning. Such joyful singing is not only to please oneself or others but is to be praise **to God**. Through this Spirit-filled kind of life (cf. Eph. 5:18–19), Christians can **teach** (instruct) **and admonish** (“counsel”) **one another** (Col. 3:16; cf. “admonishing and teaching” in 1:28) if it is done **with all wisdom** (*sophia*; cf. 1:9; 2:3; 4:5) and not tactlessly (cf. Gal. 6:1).

3:17. **Whatever** one does (cf. v. 23)—for there is no sacred-secular split in God’s eyes; He is Sovereign over all—**whether in word or deed** (by lip or life) should **all** be done **in the name of the Lord Jesus** (i.e., for His glory; cf. 1 Cor. 10:31) and with a thankful spirit (cf. Phil. 4:6; 1 Thes. 5:18). Three times in three verses Paul mentioned thankfulness: “be thankful” (Col. 3:15) “sing ... with gratitude” (v. 16), and give **thanks to God the Father** (v. 17).

**Dockery, D. S. (1998). *The Pauline Letters* In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 591-592). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

### **CAPTIVE TO CHRIST (2:16–3:4)**

The spiritual life has its dangers and its warnings. Paul warned the church against those who would make the Christian life just a set of rules. The basis for resisting legalism involves focusing on the believer’s relationship with Christ. Believers no longer are captive to religious tradition or human bondage. Instead, they are captive to Christ. In view of this privileged

identification with Christ, the church must realize its great responsibility: “Set your minds on things above”.

The life in Christ is a profound reality (see Gal. 2:20). It is a life that draws its existence from the very center of all reality, Jesus Christ Himself. The admonitions that follow are controlled by the thought of the full life that belongs to all who are in Christ (see Rom. 6:4–5).

### **PUT SIN TO DEATH (3:5–11)**

Paul exhorted the Colossians to put to death whatever belonged to their “earthly nature” (3:5). This suggests that they had not been living consistently with the principle of a spiritual death and resurrection in their conversion. Some think it is only coincidental that Paul listed five vices in 3:5 and five more in 3:8 and then five virtues in 3:12. More likely Paul was responding to the heretics’ list of vices and virtues. The list initially focused on sexual sins. Those who commit such sins bring the wrath of God on themselves. In their former way of life the Colossians practiced this kind of sin. Now they were commanded to differentiate themselves from such conduct.

### **PUT ON LOVE (3:12–17)**

This section completes Paul’s exhortation to the Colossians to maintain a holy lifestyle. Paul admonished them “to clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” Over all these they should “put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity”.

The heretics were obviously causing divisions in the church. The way to unity included letting the peace of Christ and the word of Christ rule in their hearts. This required obedient application. So Paul said, “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”.

***Fields, W. C. (1972). Colossians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (p. 755). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

In 3:1–4 Paul is making a transition from the earlier section on warnings against false teachings. He is about to give some practical illustrations of how the true spirit of Christ expresses itself. In the transition, however, he emphasizes the fact that the Christian life is a continual quest and that Christ is the example to follow and the goal to pursue. The new life in Christ requires a completely new mental orientation.

*Special point*—Paul makes a passing reference to the second coming of Christ (3:4). It is a part of his argument. He has been stressing the close identification of the believer with Christ. The believer shares Christ’s life here. He will share his glory when he comes again.

### **Practical Advice (Col. 3:5–4:6)**

Paul lists some examples of behavior which should be shunned and some which should be adopted. Here Colossians and Ephesians resemble each other. In both, Paul regards Christian conduct as inseparable from Christian concepts. Knowing and saying the right things are important, but this mental activity is empty without the authentication of doing the right things.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Colossians 3:1-17. Grand Rapids, MI:  
Zondervan.**

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