

# Colossians Study 4: Chapter 3

## **Introduction**

Paul spends the entire chapter (and into the next) dealing with the implications of the new birth, and some practical things that come from it.

## **Body of the Study**

**New Life in Christ**

**What we need to do**

**How we ought to behave**

**Instructions for relationships**

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

Read chapter 4 in preparation for next week.

Read the notes as a review of the study

- *Why should heavenly things become more important to us than earthly things? How do we maintain a balance between them?*
- *Read Ephesians 5:15 - 6:9 What additional information do we get from this passage? How does this relate to what Paul has said in the Colossian letter?*

## Notes for study 4: Chapter 3

### Introduction

Paul spends the entire chapter (and into the next) dealing with the implications of the new birth, and some practical things that come from it.

### Body of the Study

#### ***New Life in Christ***

Paul connects the opening verse of chapter 3 from the last verse of chapter 2 (*Therefore*) – “...if then...you were raised with Christ...”. The things of the world – the commandments and doctrines of men – are of no value compared to true religion. We need to make a choice. We cannot continue in our lives embracing human and worldly doctrines, and at the same time claim to be serving God as His new creatures. Our actions display where our heart really are “...If...you are raised with Christ, seek those things which are above...” (3:1 NKJV).

The verse draws out the connection with the spiritual realm. The Colossians were exhibiting a spiritual mindedness by acknowledging angels (even although they were going too far by worshipping them). The spiritual realm is “...where Christ is...”. Their minds were tuned towards spiritual things, but in the wrong place. Paul has previously shown Christ’s pre-eminent position, and now emphasises it again “...Christ is sitting at the right hand of God...” (3:1 NKJV). The right hand symbolises power and delegation. A company chief executive will introduce someone by saying ‘This is my right hand man’. He means that he is the one who is his main helper – one he relies upon to get things done, and who has delegated power and authority. Jesus is the one in that position. He has the power and authority of God the Father.

We need to set our minds on spiritual things. Where our minds are determines where we put our attention and efforts, and we will naturally gravitate towards those things. If we are to serve God, then we need to put our minds towards serving Him “...Set your minds on things above, not on things of the earth...” (3:2 NKJV)

There is a contrast between verses 1 and 2 “...seek those things which are above...(3:1)...set your mind on things above...(3:2)...” The first verse addresses our action, whilst the second addresses our motivation.

Our motivation (and the reason behind it) is (and ought to be) clear “...For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God...” (3:3 NKJV). When we became Christians, we died to the world and the worldly life, and started our spiritual life with Christ. “...We are not our own, we were bought with a price...” (1 Cor 6:19-20). The transformation is represented by new birth. If we have begun our new life in Christ, then how can we continue to live the old one?

As Christians, Christ is the centre of our life and the essential purpose behind everything we do, and we live for Him “...When Christ who is our life appears...” (3:4) He is who we are! Paul describes Christ’s second coming “...When He ...appears...” then we will also receive our reward “...then you also will appear with Him in glory...” (3:4). Our reward is just as certain as Christ’s reappearance. Jesus promised that He will return, and He always keeps His promises, so we can be assured of the certainty of our reward.

#### ***What we need to do***

Because of our new birth and the assurance, we need to exhibit Christ’s characteristics in our lives. “...Therefore put to death your earthly ways...” (my paraphrase of 3:5). The earthly-

minded person practices earthly and worldly things (as Paul has just reminded us in the first two verses). As christians, we cannot continue to live this way if we have *put to death the old man*. He gives us a “list of sins” (or rather behaviours) that we ought not to engage in. The descriptions of these can sometimes be confusing, so the following table is a comparative list between translations which may help to clarify some of them.

Greek	NKJV	KJV	NIV	NASB	ICB
<i>porneia</i>	Fornication	Fornication	Sexual Immorality	Immorality	Sexual sinning
<i>Akatharsia</i>	Uncleanness	Uncleanness	Impurity	Impurity	Doing evil
<i>pathos</i>	Passion	Inordinate affection	Lust	Passion	Letting evil thoughts control you
<i>kakos epithumia</i>	Evil desire	Evil concupiscence	Evil desires	Evil desire	Wanting evil things
<i>pleonexia</i>	Covetousness	Covetousness	Greed	Greed	Selfishly wanting things
<i>eidololatria</i>	Idolatry	Idolatry	Idolatry	Idolatry	Serve a false God

These things should not *characterise us* as christians, and we ought to have put them to death as a part of *the new birth*. If we continue to practice these things, then God regards us as disobedient, and we **will** receive the punishment that we *deserve* “...because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience...” (3:6 NKJV).

Engaging in the practice of these behaviours is to go back to our former lives before we became christians “...*You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived...*” (3:7 NIV). As christians, if we *have our mind set on things above*, then the things we practice should not be these *works of the flesh*.

The (above) first group of sins regard the *practice* of the body, and the second group are *sins of the mind and speech*. We must not just stop participating in *bodily sins*, but also in *mind sins!* “...now you must also put off all these:...”

Greek	NKJV	KJV	NIV	NASB	ICB
<i>orge</i>	Anger	Anger	Anger	Anger	Anger
<i>thumos</i>	Wrath	Wrath	Rage	Wrath	Bad temper
<i>kakia</i>	Malice	Malice	Malice	Malice	
<i>blasphemia</i>	Blasphemy	Blasphemy	Slander	Slander	Doing or saying things to hurt others
<i>aischrologia</i> <i>ek su stoma</i>	Filthy language out of your mouth	Filthy communication out of your mouth	Filthy language from your lips	Abusive speech from your mouth	Using evil words when you talk
<i>Pseudomai eis allelon</i>	Do not lie to one another	Lie not to one another	Do not lie to each other	Do not lie to one another	Do not lie to each other

We should not do these things “...because we have put away the old man with his deeds...” (3:9), and have replaced the old man by “...putting on the new man...” (3:10).

The new birth involves a profound change. The old man is gone, and the new man has arrived. However, this doesn't just happen – “...the new man is renewed in **knowledge**...” (3:10). We grow the new man through gaining *knowledge* of Christ, and applying that knowledge to our lives. As we grow with the knowledge, we draw closer to Christ “...according to the image of the Creator...” (3:10).

There is a hint in the latter comment to those who would encompass angel worship, since we grow into Christ, not closer to angels!

As christians, (*in Christ*) we are not separated from God (as the Judaisers would have taught), even though we are Gentiles, for “...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free...” (3:11 NKJV). Some of the comparisons are obvious, but some less so.

The various groups mentioned reflect distinctions of national privilege ("Greek or Jew"), legal or ceremonial standing ("circumcised or uncircumcised"), culture ("barbarian, Scythian"), and social caste ("slave or free"). In the realm of the new self, where the image of God is truly reflected, these distinctions have no real significance (cf. Gal 3:28). Differences, to be sure, remain in the Christian community, but not in such a way as to be barriers to fellowship. To the extent that Christians do permit them to be barriers, they are acting out of character.

"Christ is all, and is in all" suggests that Christ is the great principle of unity. In him all differences merge, all distinctions are done away. Loyalty to Christ takes precedence over all earthly ties. (NIVBC)

## How we ought to behave

Paul has discussed some negative aspects, and now turns to positive behaviours. Again, a comparison of the translation of the terms here will be useful.

Greek	NKJV	KJV	NIV	NASB	ICB
<i>oiktirmos</i>	Tender mercies	Bowels of mercies	Compassion	Heart of compassion	Mercy to others
<i>chrestotes</i>	Kindness	Kindness	Kindness	Kindness	Be kind
<i>tapeinophrosune</i>	Humbleness of mind	Humbleness of mind	Humility	Humility	Humble
<i>prautes</i>	Meekness	Meekness	Gentleness	Gentleness	Gentle
<i>makrothumia</i>	Longsuffering	Longsuffering	Patience	Patience	Patient
<i>anechomai</i>	Bearing with one another	Forbearing one another	Bear with each other	Bearing with one another	Do not be angry with each other
<i>charizomai</i>	Forgiving one another	Forgiving one another	Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another	Forgiving each other	Forgive each other

Christ is held up as the supreme example, and because we emulate Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in the new birth, then "...even as Christ forgave you, so you must also do..." (3:13 NKJV).

However just going through the motions is not enough. We can practice the behaviours, but we need to have the right attitude. "...But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection..." (3:14 NKJV)

The root of these behaviours lies in our hearts. If our hearts are tuned towards God, then our behaviours will follow. Paul tells us to "...let the peace of God rule in your hearts...and be thankful..." (3:15 NKJV). We should not forget to be thankful, since we "...were called in one body..." together in Christ.

We need to meditate on God's word, and allow it to "...dwell in us richly..." However, without a proper framework meditation alone will not help us to grow, and so we need to allow it to "...dwell in us richly in all wisdom...". That wisdom develops from "...teaching and admonishing..." however Paul notes an unusual way in which we acquire it. Whilst the most obvious way to acquire wisdom is through direct teaching and admonition, Paul notes that we can grow in wisdom by singing. "...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord..." (3:16 NKJV). We are to sing *psalms* (the traditional poetry and songs the Jews sang, as well as *hymns* – the 'traditional' songs of praise that we sing to God, and also *spiritual songs* that we sing to encourage us.

Paul discusses *singing*. He says nothing about worshipping God with musical instruments. In fact, such would be totally contrary to the theme of the Colossian letter. The Colossians had *added*

*things* that were not commanded – in the worship of angels, by trying to blend that into christianity. In exactly the same way, we must not add something to our worship that is not authorised (instrumental music) and try to blend that into christianity. Paul makes this clear for us at the end of the verse, where he says we are to “...sing with grace ***in your hearts*** unto the Lord...” (3:16). It is in our *hearts* where God wants the music to be made, not on musical instruments!

Beyond the specifics of singing and worship, everything we do needs to be done with God’s authority “...whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...giving thanks to the Father through Him...” (3:17).

### ***Instructions for relationships***

In the parallel passages in Ephesians, Paul gives more depth to the instructions than here, where he is brief:

- “...Wives submit to your own husbands...” which sounds simple (especially if you’re the husband ☺) and this is “...fitting in the Lord...” (3:18)
- “...Husbands love your wives...” which also sounds simple, and he adds “...and do not be bitter toward them...” (4:19)
- “...Children obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord...” (4:20)
- “...Fathers do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged...” (4:21) Here we see the flipside of the relationship issues. For all of our actions there are consequences and responsibilities.
- “...Servants obey your masters in all things...” Paul did not condemn slavery, but the master and slave relationship must not be abused. Even in our work relationships, we need to serve our bosses “...not just when they are watching you, to gain their favour. But serve them honestly, because you serve the Lord...” (3:20 ICB)

When we fulfil our relationships as God wants us to, then we will grow to the richness and depth that was shown in His love for us. We should reflect the Lord at work in us, in everything we do in life “...whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men...” (3:23 NKJV). The reason is clear “...from the Lord you will receive the reward of your inheritance...”. However a more fundamental reason is because we “...serve the Lord Christ...” (3:24)

There is a reverse side to this too. “...If we do wrong we will be repaid for the wrong that we have done, for there is no respect of persons with God...” (3:25). We must remember that we may be able to fool the people around us, but we cannot fool God! God is just, and does not show partiality in His judgements. He sees all, and will bring righteous judgement against us if we deserve it.