

Colossians – Lesson 7

Put On the New Self – Part 1

Read Colossians 3:1-11

1. Summarize briefly Paul's *point* in Colossians 2:16-23. What is Paul's *primary* concern for the Colossians? To *what* does he want them to “hold fast?”

Paul insists that believers have “*died to the elemental spirits of the world*” (v. 20), meaning that they are no longer controlled by the opinions of men in regards to religious practices, disciplines, or asceticism. Instead of being controlled by the “ideals” of others, Christians are to recognize their connection to the Head, to hold fast to *Christ*, and to grow *in Christ* with a true spiritual growth, not one based on *religiosity*. In other words, instead of embracing the spiritualities of “Jewish shamans”, the Colossians were to understand the *liberty* that they have in Christ, and to disdain these cheap “substitutes.”

2. (a) From 3:1-2, where does the Christian *focus* his attention? What does it mean to “*set your minds on things that are above*?”

The Christian is to focus his attention on “*the things that are above*”, to focus his attention on *eternal matters* rather than temporal ones. The juxtaposition by Paul of “*above*” and “*below*” in these verses is to distinguish between those things that are eternal and permanent (as in the presence of God) and those things that are temporal and passing (as in the things of this world). To “*set your minds on things that are above*” is to *focus* and *concentrate* on such eternal things, studying *with your mind* what makes them valuable and lasting, as opposed to only thinking about things in this world that are fleeting and unreliable. For example, the Christian is to see the “wealth” of heaven and the glories of God as *far greater* than the fleeting wealth of this world, which is easily destroyed, lost, or stolen.

(b) According to 3:3-4, *why* must the Christian focus on Christ above? What is the *motivation* for him to do so?

The believer focuses on Christ *because his life is hidden with Christ* above; meaning, the believer's *true life* is not being lived in this temporal world, but in the eternal kingdom being established by Christ “*above*”. The life “*hidden*” in Christ is the *true life of the believer*: the promise of everlasting life in the presence of God, rather than the temporal and fleeting life lived here on earth. Our *motivation* as Christians to focus on this *hidden* life is simply this: it is the only life that is *guaranteed* to last, for it is *intimately* connected to Christ; when he returns to establish his kingdom, our life will “*appear with him*”, for at the Parousia, Jesus will bring the resurrected life to all who belong to him, and their eternal life will end the pursuit of temporal life.

3. (a) What does Paul mean in 3:5 that we are to “*put to death*” certain behaviors? Why does Paul use such *startling* language to describe this process?

To “*put to death*” is to execute, to destroy, to kill, to crucify; to *end* everything that is sinful (and earthly, meaning focused only on this world) within us. The call to faith in Christ is a call to join Jesus in his crucifixion (Mark 8:34), to walk the road to Calvary and to crucify everything within us that is *inconsistent* with holiness. It is the clarion call within sanctification: to be *transformed* into the very image of Christ Jesus himself, the Holy One. It is *not* enough to simply “wink” at our sin, or to “try” to put it out of ourselves. It is a *command* to *kill* such behaviors, and this is why Paul uses such language. Christians are not to “dabble” with sin; they are to *kill* it within themselves and in their active lives in order to be sanctified from it.

(b) List *and define*, from that same verse, the kinds of sin Paul considers “*earthly*.” What does he mean when he calls them “*idolatry*” at the end of the list?

Paul lists several earthly sins, sins that are a part of the *physical, human* experience: sexual immorality (or *porneia*; fornication), impurity (or *akatharsia*; uncleanness, filthiness, wallowing in that which is sinful), passion (or *pathos*; lusts of the flesh, including [but not limited to] sexual passions, gluttony), evil desire (or *epithymia kakos*; passionate longings), and covetousness (or *pleonexia*; greed, exploitation). All of these are *physical* in nature, and have a tendency to be indulged in *by the flesh*; sexual sins, uncleanness, lusts, greed, etc., all that are part of satisfying the *outward* man. They are idolatry because they are “substitutes” for the pure worship of God. They “consume” the life and time of the man, such that he “worships” such things as pleasure, contentment, happiness, over against finding such things *in God*.

(c) Why does God’s “*wrath*” come against such things (3:6)?

All of these sins are *primal* in nature: they flow out of the *original sin* of Adam and Eve into the flesh. When Adam and Eve were seduced by the fruit of the Tree, they condemned humanity to searching for happiness and fulfillment *in their physical natures*, rather than in the relationship they had with God, on a *spiritual* level. Sinful men turned to the *flesh*, for in it they believed they could achieve “god-ness”, the *false* belief that (as creatures) they were gods and able to “conjure up” whatever forms of “self-worship” they so desired. **Note:** this is why homosexuality and transgenderism are such *condemned* forms of sin in Scripture; their focus is *utterly* on satisfying the flesh (in sexuality) rather than in seeking joy and hope *above*. In other words, as creatures made *physically first*, sin “pushed” the focus of fallen men *onto their physical nature*, and away from the “breath of God” that had made them living beings. This *primal nature* of such sins is why God’s wrath comes: flesh becomes “god” and God brings his wrath to bear against *everything* that is contrary to his good law (especially in sexuality!).

(d) What are some ways that Christians can put these kinds of sins “*to death*?” What tools or aids do we have to do so?

Followers of Christ put these sins to death by destroying *their foundations*; by removing that which gives *rise to them* and replacing it with that which is whole and pure. Such is the very function of *sanctification*: to replace the mindset of a focus on the flesh with a mindset of focus on the things of God. The regenerate man, now possessing the new heart in conversion, possesses a *Spirit-given* desire to be like Christ, and he pursues the *execution* of his sinful tendencies by replacing them with a focus on the revelations of God. This is the very definition of *repentance*: to turn away from sin *consciously* and with *purpose* to that which is right. And, the Spirit gives the tools of the Word, the church, preachers and teachers, fellowship, the ordinances, etc. as *means* to replace our “fleshly” focus with one on Christ Jesus. This is to “*set your mind on things above*”: rather than to think about ways to satisfy the flesh, the goal of the Christian to think about the things of God, saturating his mind with the revelation given by the Spirit, and to crucify the lusts of the flesh *by giving them no attention*.

4. From 3:7, how does Paul view believers *now*, as compared to *before* their conversion? How does this verse nullify the claim that one can be “identified” with sinful behavior *and still be a Christian*?

Paul recognizes that everyone has indeed walked according to the flesh, under such lusts and greed, prior to their conversion; the reprobate man is *characterized* by these things in his rebellion against the law of God. However, Paul asserts that no Christian is to be *identified* by such sinful lusts *any longer*. While the reprobate is *clearly* identified by his sinful behaviors (which demonstrates his hatred of God’s law), the Christian is *never* to be identified by such things. Instead, the Christian is to be identified as one *killing off* such passions within himself; it should be *clear* to those around him that the believer is working to *destroy* the “hold” such sinful passions once had on him. In other words, the Christian is *no longer* a slave to sin; he has been given the power, by the Spirit, to overcome such things. Any man who “claims” to be a Christian, but also uses a sinful behavior as an “adjective” for his faith (i.e., the “gay Christian”) is not truly a believer, for he does not exercise the *holy* desire for all such sins to be removed from his existence.

5. (a) From 3:8-9, list the *additional* sins that Paul adds to those that must be “put away.” How is this list *different* from the one in 3:5?

Paul adds the following to his list of sins: anger (i.e., a quick temper or “short fuse”), wrath (i.e., fury, a general sense of hating others), malice (i.e., hateful words towards or about others), slander (i.e., lies against others), obscene talk (i.e., cursing), and lying. Unlike the previous list, which was made up of *bodily actions*, this list is (generally) of things coming out of our *mouths and hearts*. These are *inward* sins, flowing out of the nature of the man, often appearing in verbal form, in language that is unholy or unhelpful.

(b) What is the “old self” and what is the “new self” (3:9-10)? How does this concept of a “new self” relate to Paul’s view of Christ in 1:19-20, 2:6, and 2:20? How is it “renewed?”

The “self” is Paul’s metaphorical way of describing the *base nature* of a man; what a man is and (by extension) what a man does. The “old self” (or old man) is the nature of a man in his *natural* condition, prior to conversion. It represents his *reprobation* in the fullest sense: he is *totally depraved*, in that every aspect of the *Imago Dei* has been corrupted within him, thus, out of his inward nature and corrupted mind, come every imaginable form of sin (as all listed above). He is *unable* to change his nature, and he is *unable* to approach a holy God for forgiveness or for any sort of relationship (other than just the Creator-creature one inherent in the world). It is the “old” nature (according to Paul) because it is what the believer *was*, prior to conversion. The “new self” then is the new nature that we who trust in Christ *have* (past tense!) “put on”: it is the *regenerate* heart and mind within us that now possesses the power to *be holy*, to crucify the lingering effects of sin in our mortal nature and to live in accordance with the law of God, to trust in Christ, and to be sanctified. Paul connects this to the nature of Jesus *in the flesh*: just as the Son of God “robed” himself in flesh and lived amongst humans, so we have been “robed” with the righteousness of Christ and live amongst *fallen* humans. Just as Christ was *incarnate*, so we are the “incarnation” of the new heart, to live as *he did* in the world. It is “renewed” through the process of sanctification, of “*putting to death*” that which lingers.

6. Explain, from 3:11, what Paul means in suggesting that there are no more ethnic, religious, cultural, or caste differences “here.” Why is Christ “all, and in all” at the heart of the church?

In the gospel, the *means* by which *anyone* is able to put on the “new self” is through submission to Christ in repentance and faith; no one comes to the Father *differently* than others. All come to salvation and glorification *through Christ Jesus*, in humble submission to him. Therefore, *at the foot of the cross*, there are no ethnic, religious, racial, caste, or cultural differences: everyone who is saved through Christ *is saved exactly the same way*. Formerly, such barriers were the very *definition* of this world, with everyone being “divided up” into groups in order that the passions of the flesh could be satisfied. But, in Christ, all such differences (while still existing) do not *separate* believers, one from another, for all stand *completely naked* at the cross, receiving salvation and pardon for sin *only by the finished work of Christ*, and nothing else! Therefore, anyone who introduces such distinctions *back* into the church (think of the individual of 2:18!) is *violating* the very heart of the gospel, where all men are made “equal” in Christ *in those matters of eternal importance*. Therefore, Christ is “all, and in all” in the church because *the mission of the church*, its *head*, and its *vision and message* are all centered *around him*, not around us. Any such “temporal” distinctions vanish at the door of the church, for all who enter in do so with a focus on him, not on themselves.