

“Colossians”

Summer Series 1

Lesson 5

“Colossians 3:1-25”

Objective: To understand the message that Paul meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21st century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context in light of the message it contains. We will place special emphasis on application.

Materials: I will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Colossians, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, and any other sources along with the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. I will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding for our contextual situation.

Procedures

- 1.** We will begin by translating the text from Greek into English. I do not here give you that full translation here, though there are excerpts.
- 2.** We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural and social settings in order to understand the message Paul intended and that God still intends for us.
- 3.** From here, we will seek to find out how to best apply the calling that Paul has for the early disciples to our modern contextual framework in order to do our very best to live as disciples of Christ in our modern era.
- 4.** We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

Text

3:1 Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God's right side. 2 Think about the things above and not things on earth. 3 You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

3:5 So put to death the parts of your life that belong to the earth, such as sexual immorality, moral corruption, lust, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 The wrath of God is coming upon disobedient people because of these things. 7 You used to live this way, when you were alive to these things. 8 But now set aside these things, such as anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene language. 9 Don't lie to each other. Take off the old human nature with its practices 10 and put on the new nature, which is renewed in knowledge by conforming to the image of the one who created it. 11 In this image there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all things and in all people.

3:12 Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. 14 And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. 16 The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him. 3:18 Wives, submit to your husbands in a way that is appropriate in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and don't be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, because this pleases the Lord. 21 Parents, don't provoke your children in a way that ends up discouraging them.

3:22 Slaves, obey your masters on earth in everything. Don't just obey like people pleasers when they are watching.

Instead, obey with the single motivation of fearing the Lord.

23 Whatever you do, do it from the heart for the Lord and not

for people. 24 You know that you will receive an inheritance

as a reward. You serve the Lord Christ. 25 But evildoers will

receive their reward for their evil actions. There is no

discrimination. CEB.

Lesson

Paul begins this section with a logical inferential conjunction (*οὐν - oun*), which indicates that he intends to build on what he has said previously. It is in this section that Paul begins to answer the implicit question of chapter 2: How do we come to be genuinely holy? How do we become a useful instrument in service of the Kingdom of God for healing/saving creation? Paul begins answering this question by exploring the practical implications of the resurrection of Christ.¹ He calls upon the Colossians to focus upon things that are not earthly and he will later list specifically some of the things he condemns as earthly (verse 5).

Verse 1-2 – Many scholars contend that Paul shifts from the theoretical to the practical or perhaps that Paul has left off thinking about the False Teachers here. After the conjunctive in our English translations there is a conditional conjunctive (if) that turns this sentence into a question, but there is no doubt that the answer to the question is known. Paul asked about them being

¹ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series (Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), pp. 133-135.

raised with Christ, and the implication of what is said here is that they have indeed been raised up with Christ to be a part of the new creation. In a sense one could translate this as “since” you have been raised with Christ (NIV, TNIV). It is important to note the passive use of the verb “you have been raised” (*συνηγέρθητε - sunegerthete*) with Christ. They are in some sense passive in what God is doing, but just as Christ had been raised so also they were raised by the action of God.² This is not something that they could do for themselves, it was beyond their power and ability. The consequence of raising is then the expectation that when a person has been raised up in this way they would have a different focal point, different desires, goals and aim, than they did before. They should now “seek” (*ζητέω - zeteo*) the things that are above, those that are the things important from a Kingdom of God perspective.

Some have seen Paul as adopting a Hellenistic mystical, or Gnostic perspective, but this ignores the fact that “the things above” (*τὰ ἄνω - ta ano*) can be a denotation of an apocalyptic perspective. This apocalyptic perspective seems to be much more in line with the tenor of Colossians than does a Hellenistic or

² David W. Pao, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2012), pp. 204-210.

Gnostic perspective (Note the apocalyptic text attached below from 2 Baruch which demonstrates very well the Jewish Apocalyptic perspective which likely was available to Paul and his audience). It may be worth reading through this as this type of literature is not something that we commonly see in our time.

*42 And I answered and said: 'O Adam,
what hast thou done to all those who are
born from thee? And what will be said to
the first Eve who hearkened to the serpent?
43 For all this multitude are going to
corruption, Nor is there any numbering of
those whom the fire devours. 44 But again
I will speak in Thy presence. 45 Thou, O
Lord, my Lord, knowest what is in Thy
creature. 46 For Thou didst of old
command the dust to produce Adam, and
Thou knowest the number of those who are
born from him, and how far they have
sinned before Thee, who have existed and
not confessed Thee as their Creator. 47 And*

as regards all these their end shall convict them, and Thy law which they have transgressed shall requite them on Thy day.'

48:48–50. Fragment of an Address of Baruch to the People.

48 [‘But now let us dismiss the wicked and inquire about the righteous. 49 And I will recount their blessedness And not be silent in celebrating their glory, which is reserved for them. 50 For assuredly as in a little time in this transitory world in which ye live, ye have endured much labour, So in that world to which there is no end, ye shall receive great light.‘]

49–52. The Nature of the Resurrection

Body: the final Destinies of the Righteous and the Wicked.

49:1 ‘Nevertheless, I will again ask from Thee, O Mighty One, yea, I will ask

mercy from Him who made all things. 2 “In what shape will those live who live in Thy day? Or how will the splendour of those who (are) after that time continue? 3 Will they then resume this form of the present, And put on these entrammelling members, Which are now involved in evils, And in which evils are consummated, Or wilt Thou perchance change these things which have been in the world As also the world?” 5:01 And He answered and said unto me: ‘Hear, Baruch, this word, And write in the remembrance of thy heart all that thou shalt learn. 2 For the earth shall then assuredly restore the dead, [Which it now receives, in order to preserve them]. It shall make no change in their form, But as it has received, so shall it restore them, And as I delivered them unto it, so also shall it raise them.

3 For then it will be necessary to show to the living that the dead have come to life again, and that those who had departed have returned (again). 4 And it shall come to pass, when they have severally recognized those whom they now know, then judgement shall grow strong, and those things which before were spoken of shall come.

5:11 'And it shall come to pass, when that appointed day has gone by, that then shall the aspect of those who are condemned be afterwards changed, and the glory of those who are justified. 2 For the aspect of those who now act wickedly shall become worse than it is, as they shall suffer torment. 3 Also (as for) the glory of those who have now been justified in My law, who have had understanding in their life, and who have planted in their heart the root of wisdom,

then their splendour shall be glorified in changes, and the form of their face shall be turned into the light of their beauty, that they may be able to acquire and receive the world which does not die, which is then promised to them. 4 For over this above all shall those who come then lament, that they rejected My law, and stopped their ears that they might not hear wisdom or receive understanding. 5 When therefore they see those, over whom they are now exalted, (but) who shall then be exalted and glorified more than they, they shall respectively be transformed, the latter into the splendour of angels, and the former shall yet more waste away in wonder at the visions and in the beholding of the forms. 6 For they shall first behold and afterwards depart to be tormented. 7 But those who have been saved by their works, And to

whom the law has been now a hope, And understanding an expectation, And wisdom a confidence, Shall wonders appear in their time. 8 For they shall behold the world which is now invisible to them, And they shall behold the time which is now hidden from them: 9 And time shall no longer age them. 10 For in the heights of that world shall they dwell, And they shall be made like unto the angels, And be made equal to the stars, And they shall be changed into every form they desire, From beauty into loveliness, And from light into the splendour of glory. 11 For there shall be spread before them the extents of Paradise, and there shall be shown to them the beauty of the majesty of the living creatures which are beneath the throne, and all the armies of the angels, who [are now held fast by My word, lest they should

*appear, and] are held fast by a command,
that they may stand in their places till their
advent comes. 12 Moreover, there shall
then be excellency in the righteous
surpassing that in the angels. 13 For the
first shall receive the last, those whom they
were expecting, and the last those of whom
they used to hear that they had passed
away. 14 For they have been delivered
from this world of tribulation, And laid
down the burthen of anguish. 15 For what
then have men lost their life, And for what
have those who were on the earth
exchanged their soul? 16 For then they
chose <not> for themselves this time, Which,
beyond the reach of anguish, could not pass
away: But they chose for themselves that
time, Whose issues are full of lamentations
and evils, And they denied the world which
ages not those who come to it, And they*

rejected the time of glory, So that they shall not come to the honour of which I told thee before.’ 5:21 And I answered and said: ‘How can we forget those for whom woe is then reserved? 2 And why therefore do we again mourn for those who die? Or why do we weep for those who depart to Sheol? 3 Let lamentations be reserved for the beginning of that coming torment, And let tears be laid up for the advent of the destruction of that time. 4 [But even in the face of these things will I speak. 5 And as for the righteous, what will they do now? 6 Rejoice ye in the suffering which ye now suffer: For why do ye look for the decline of your enemies? 7 Make ready your soul for that which is reserved for you, And prepare your souls for the reward which is laid up for you.]’³

³ 2 Baruch 48:42-52:7. Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament. 2004 (R. H. Charles, Ed.) (2 Bar 48:42-52:7). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

This Jewish text reveals things that are taking place and things that will take place in the time to come. Apocalyptic literature pulls back the shadow of uncertainty and reveals what is really taking place and where all of this is leading. The focus is on the seat of real power, heaven. In Colossians, as in 2 Baruch, the “things above” (Colossians 3:2) are very similar to the “life hidden” (Colossians 3:3-4).⁴ The point of all this being that there is no need to go outside of a Jewish context, or invent something that would not have been available to Paul and his audience here. Colossians fits very easily within a Jewish context that would have been readily available and accessible to Paul’s audience in Colossae. Paul is trying to get the Christians there to have a perspective that sees beyond this physical, fleshly, world into the world into which they have become a part through Jesus Christ, the heavenly world, the Kingdom of God.

The focus needs to be such that Paul’s audience concentrates on that which is where Christ is, on the “single-mindedness” of Christ. Paul takes this opportunity to remind his

⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, in *The New International Greek Commentary series* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 201-202.

audience of the position of Christ who is at the right hand of God, right in the “presence” of God. The high-Christology of Paul continues here as he continues to emphasize the high position of Christ in the Kingdom. Verse 2 reemphasizes what is said in verse 1, challenging the Colossians to put their attentions toward the things above, rather than on those things, which are earthly, and only of a temporary/transient nature.

Verses 3-4 – The commands to set your minds upon Christ are more powerfully reinforced in these next two verses. Here there is, in brief, a description of the Christian’s true status, and not something that just appears to be the case. This is “revealed” by Paul, who has access to “heavenly” knowledge, thus an apocalyptic understanding. There is a perfect balance set here between what is already the place of the Christian with that which is still to come, and yet to be fully revealed. The new age has begun and Christians are a part of this new age, but the old age is not quite yet ended, and until the Christians either die or Christ returns the hidden or as yet not fully revealed truth is that Christians are a part of the new age even now. The life of Christians has become a part of, bound up with, the mystery of

Christ. The hope for Christians is not merely for the coming of the Lord, but also for the full revelation of what they, as a new creation, already are.⁵ All of this is intricately connected with Christ and his mystery. This is an integral part of Paul's understanding of the Gospel.

Verse 5 – The movement is then toward some very practical admonition to “**put to death**” (**Νεκρώσατε - Nekrosate**), that which is earthly in a way very similar to what Paul calls for in Romans 6:11⁶ where a similar word is used. The call here is to “mortify” the “parts” of the human being that are “earthly”. This then is identified more fully and precisely as “fornication” (**πορνεία - porneia**), the word from which we get the English word pornography; “impurity” (**ἀκαθαρσία - akatharsia**); “lustful passion” (**πάθος - pathos**); “desire” or “longing” (**ἐπιθυμία - epithumia**); “evil” (**κακός - kakos**); and “greediness” or “covetousness” (**πλεονεξία - pleonexia**). Although it is the case that the phrase “which is idolatry” modifies only “covetousness” this word reflects the motivation behind the other things in this

⁵ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, pp. 136-137.

⁶ **In the same way, you also should consider yourselves dead (νεκροὺς - nekrouς) to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.** CEB.

list as well. Paul calls on the Colossians to reject the various sexual vices because they are manifestations of covetousness. This vice represents a general category that reflects the refusal to fully submit to the lordship of Christ. The list here does not reflect a new, randomly selected, list. Paul is calling upon the Colossians to reject their past, with its aspirations, desires, and loyalties, and he is challenging to worship the Lord, and to worship only the Lord.⁷

Paul's reference to all of these things as idolatry probably stretches our traditional understanding of idolatry: For us today, idolatry is perhaps seen as this quaint problem that primitive people in the past had, but today we consider ourselves to be too sophisticated for such things. This perspective underestimates ancient people and their sophistication, but it also fails to recognize the actual nature of idolatry. The words of Paul here are meant to indicate that what he is writing about denotes what is considered gross sin and many of these same things appear in the lists of vices in other places such as 1 Corinthians 5:10-11;⁸

⁷ David W. Pao, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, pp. 220-221.

⁸ **I wrote to you in my earlier letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. 10 But I wasn't talking about the sexually immoral people in the outside world by any means—or the greedy, or the swindlers, or people who worship false gods—otherwise, you would have to leave the world entirely!** CEB.

6:9-10;⁹ 10:7-8, 14;¹⁰ Galatians 5:19-21;¹¹ Colossians 3:5;¹²

Ephesians 5:5; 1 Peter 4:3; Revelation 21:8; 22:15. Particularly

striking is the equation of πλεονεξία (covetousness) and

είδωλολατρία (idolatry) in Colossians 3:5 and Ephesians 5:5.^{13,14}

Paul refers to these things in this list in the strongest possible

terms as “sin,” and defines them as equivalent to “worshipping” a

false god.

Verse 6 – “Because of,” or “on account of,” these things the “wrath” (ὀργή - *orge*), or “anger” of God is coming upon the “sons of disobedience”. This highlights the significance of Paul’s plea for faithful living. Giving into, and relying upon, the things in the list

⁹ Don't you know that people who are unjust won't inherit God's kingdom? Don't be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, both participants in same-sex intercourse, **10** thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won't inherit God's kingdom. CEB.

¹⁰ ⁷Don't worship false gods like some of them did, as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink and they got up to play. ⁸ Let's not practice sexual immorality, like some of them did, and twenty-three thousand died in one day. ¹⁴So then, my dear friends, run away from the worship of false gods! CEB.

¹¹ **19** The actions that are produced by selfish motives are obvious, since they include sexual immorality, moral corruption, doing whatever feels good, **20** idolatry, drug use and casting spells, hate, fighting, obsession, losing your temper, competitive opposition, conflict, selfishness, group rivalry, **21** jealousy, drunkenness, partying, and other things like that. I warn you as I have already warned you, that those who do these kinds of things won't inherit God's kingdom. CEB.

¹² So put to death the parts of your life that belong to the earth, such as sexual immorality, moral corruption, lust, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). CEB.


¹³ Because you know for sure that persons who are sexually immoral, impure, or greedy—which happens when things become gods—those persons won't inherit the kingdom of Christ and God. CEB.

¹⁴ Vol. 2: Theological dictionary of the New Testament. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (Electronic ed.) (380). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

of vices elicits a response on the part of God. Wright says that this wrath means that destruction will be the result for those who disregard the warning given here. God does not just dislike such behavior; it is against His nature, holiness, and justice of God. “Part of the horror of hell, it appears, is that those who consciously become less and less human, until all that ennobles them as creatures made in God’s image has, by their own choice, has been altogether obliterated, beyond hope or pity....Those who choose to live without God will one day find that they have forfeited their likeness to him.”¹⁵

Verse 7- Paul makes it clear, that at one time, those in his audience followed these ways; the ways that were leading to the wrath of God and ultimately to hell. The implication of this is, that this is a way of the past and now there has been a change; and of course it is not expected that the change was temporary in nature. That old life is to be put in the past as something that is not to return. There is continual temptation to revert back to the former way of life and to their former allegiances and this is why Paul so strongly and passionately warns them. The path of discipleship

¹⁵ N. T. Wright, Colossians and Philemon, p. 140.



continues as long as there is breath in the body. For most, the walk of discipleship is a marathon and not a sprint. It is a long race that requires endurance and continual vigilance.

Verse 8 – The exhortation here is that even if not all of these things are totally in the past “you must get rid” (“take off” or “lay aside”) of them now. The imagery conveyed by the metaphor here is of taking off one’s clothes and laying them aside. The idea is to cease and desist immediately these things and then Paul moves on to a new list of vices. It is interesting that Paul lists “anger” as it were, using two different Greek words that mean virtually the same thing; with the second Greek word perhaps having the implication of more emotion attached to it as in the case of a bad temper. The third word, “malice”, means simply “badness” or “wickedness”. “Blasphemy” means “slander” or “defamation”, followed by a word that means “shameful”, “obscene” speech or “dirty talk”.¹⁶ There is definitely an emphasis here on speech. Sometimes we still fail to recognize how important our words are and how much they can either do harm or do good. What are some ways that you seek to make your words instruments of God?

¹⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, pp. 218-219.

Verse 9 – Moves onto another human vice, “lying”, which is something that is so terribly destructive in relationships. The indication here is that such a vice is no longer a part of the new person that has been revealed through the stripping off of the old self (*ἄνθρωπος - anthropos - man*) with its “practices”. Once again these are things of the old kingdom and its order and they have no place in the kingdom of God. A part of being renewed into the image of the creator is that the Christian is being transformed to be more like God, who does not lie. The character traits and actions opposed by Paul here belong to that old self and the old realm of existence.¹⁷ God chooses to begin his transformation of that old realm and the old order in the human heart, where the original destruction of the created order began. Heal the heart and the potential is for healing to spread to all of creation to counter the destruction that first sprouted there and then spread to all of creation and all of life.

Verse 10 - Here the narrative continues to maintain the imagery of clothing and the call is to clothe oneself with the “new self” (*νέος - neos*). It is important here to note that there is not

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 142.

simply a call to sit down and let God transform a person. The call here is for a very active clothing of oneself in conjunction in alignment with God's activity; not to resist or be passive. There is also the powerfully prominent aspect of God being a part of this renewal in the aspect of "being renewed in knowledge". Wright once again finds here an allusion to baptism in this putting off of the "old man" and the putting on of the new. This renewal is put into action through the prior "knowledge" that comes from God; as true knowledge of his nature is recognized. Practical Christianity is founded upon the principal of the knowing and practicing the authentic truth about God.¹⁸ The renewal of God then begins the transforming renewal of His body (the church) that follows the pattern of the creator's image (*εἰκών* - *eikon*).

In this renewal, the old barriers that have so long separated humanity from God, and from one another, are destroyed. The curse of Babel is obliterated, in Christ. The walls that separate and divide are torn down and neither economic, nor class, nor anything else, matters at all. The only thing that matters is Christ. The portrayal of this new humanity is important to Paul. This

¹⁸ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 143.

universal reconciliation is achieved by the resurrection and death of Christ (1:18-20; cf. 2:15). Behind this affirmation of the unity of the people of God stands a recognition of the diversity in the many peoples, nations, and classes of people. The idea of race is more modern concept and was not one that would have been familiar or recognizable to the ancients. Race and racism are not ancient or tribal beliefs, but instead are concepts that have developed with modernity over the past 400 years and reached their apogee in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Social science did not create these concepts, but social scientists, in the Social Darwinist tradition were complicit in the construction and the legitimatization of racial theories.¹⁹ In Christ, each group, irrespective of differences, is challenged to play a part in the Kingdom of God as they live out their life under the lordship of Christ.²⁰

Verse 12 – In this verse, there is a moving on to the positive aspects of that which is to replace the things that have been stripped off and laid aside. This list begins with a recognition and

¹⁹ Charles Hirschman, "The Origins and Demise of the Concept of Race," *Population and Development Review* (2004) 30:3, pp. 385-415.

²⁰ David W. Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 229.

acknowledgement of the new position as the “chosen ones” of God who are also “holy” (ἅγιος - *hagios*) and “beloved” (ἀγαπάω - *agapao* “one who is loved”). In this list, there is compassion that once again is in a sense doubled with the first two words in the list literally saying “bowels of compassion”. This phrase indicated a very emotional “heartfelt compassion”. To this, Paul adds “goodness”, “kindness”, or “generosity”. Then comes “humility”, which is actually a possible translation for the next two words in this list. Some translate the second of these two words as “meekness” instead of as “humility”. To these are added “patience”, or “steadfastness”. Some might see this combination to indicate a person of weakness, but to exhibit this combination of traits actually takes a great deal of strength and courage and is a group of traits not commonly seen in the marketplace.²¹ Even today, these are not often traits that are praised and encouraged. We, instead, teach our children to stand up for themselves, often in an aggressive and confrontational manner (stand up for your rights). You have to wonder how much such a stance conflicts with what Paul is calling forth here?

²¹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, pp. 228-230.

Verse 13 – The next verse continues the list of things that Paul calls upon his reader to do. The first of these is “to endure” or “to bear with one another” followed by an invective “to show favor”, or “to forgive one another”, if anyone has a legitimate complaint against another. Paul uses as the basis for this invective the fact that this is exactly what the Lord has done for them. They must do this for each other as has been done for them. It is not optional and there are no conditions given. This closely aligns with the words of Jesus in the Lord’s Prayer when he calls upon the disciples to forgive as they are forgiven. So often we are advocates for justice and the truth is justice seldom brings peace, because seldom is their agreement about what absolute justice actually is. Certainly, it is the case that justice is desirable and to be pursued, but there are times, and circumstances when forgiveness is more powerful and brings peace more effectively than justice. There are times that grace and forgiveness can actually open up the possibility of greater justice (the Bombing at Enniskillen, in Northern Ireland, Gordon Wilson).

Verse 14 – This next verse returns once to again to the imagery of clothing with a reminder of the affirmation that will

have been given at baptism of a person and the imagery of putting on Christ was prominent. Here the bond is “love” (ἀγάπη - *agape*). Love is the “bond of perfection”, or “completion”. It is what holds everything together. The love spoken of here is not merely a passion, or a feeling; it is a love that is borne out of a conscious decision. This love holds everything else together and serves as the source of unity. This type of love requires conscious effort and perseverance.

Verse 15 – The admonition continues, as there is a call to “let the peace of Christ” “rule”, or “control”, their hearts. This is a part of their calling in the “one body”. There is to be a unity that is dominated by a spirit of peace and gratitude. The word here for “to be thankful” is the word from which we get our English word “Eucharist”, a word used by many to denote the “communion”, a time that is intended to remind us to be thankful. What reminds you to count your blessings and to be thankful?

Verse 16 – This verse has been highly abused by those that have attributed it to be applicable in some way to the gathering of the church for a worship service. It is indeed associated with the body, but not restricted to some special gathering of the body. The

beginning of this verse denotes something that should be a part of the Christians life at all times and not merely for an hour or two in a week. The “word of Christ” is to dwell richly in his body the church at all times and in all places. There is to be a rich stockpile of Christian teaching present in the church. As the body of Christ the individual members are to “admonish” one another in all wisdom. The wisdom spoken of here is not worldly wisdom, but the wisdom of God.

All of this is to be done “with gratitude” in their hearts and even the breath that comes from their mouths is resound in the form of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” directed to God. This is to be a way of life; and it is not a mere directive about how to conduct a component of weekly worship service. It should also be noted that “psalms” were often accompanied by musical instrumentation in the Old Testament. The issue here is not about being instrumental or non-instrumental in worship. Such a perspective deprecates and destroys the meaning Paul intended to convey here. What Paul is calling for here is deeper, more about the heart and soul of a person than just being something that is part of a checklist or procedure.

Verse 17 – To complete this section Paul calls upon his readers to do anything and everything that they do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Nothing resides outside what is called for here. This is a call for a life totally devoted to the name of the Lord Jesus, which is more than a formula to be used at the end of a prayer. It is a call to represent Christ in every action, every word, and in every thought. All of this is to be done “giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Christ). This is about attitude that then will pour out in actions and acts of service, grace and love.

Verse 18 – Paul now moves into a new section providing admonition for Christian households, rather than just toward individuals. Christianity is not simply to be lived out in the marketplace it is to be lived out in one of the last bastions to fall to the dominion of the new life, the home. People can often put on a good show for their workmates, their neighbors, and for those that they attend church with, but the real challenge is to be genuine all of the time, especially at home. The call here is for wives to be “subordinate” or “subject” to their husbands. They are to do this in a manner that is “proper” or “fitting” not in the way of the world, but in the Lord. Care must be taken with how we view


this and practice this. This is certainly not a license for abusive or domineering behavior on the part of husbands. Throughout history it has been used in this manner. We must here remember the words of Paul to the Ephesians: **A husband is the head of his wife like Christ is head of the church, that is, the savior of the body.**²² Contemplate this for a while. Paul goes on in Ephesians to say: **As for husbands, love your wives just like Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.**²³ This is certainly not a license for abuse or domination.

Verse 19 – Likewise, husbands are to “love” (*ἀγαπάω - agapao*) the wives and they are not to “make bitter” their wives. This would certainly include any harshness, belittling, or anything, which might demean her, or her role. This should be something that keeps in focus the new position of the husband and the wife in relation to Christ. This specifies much of what Paul has laid out in general terms in the previous section.

Verse 20 – He now turns to the children and calls upon them to be obedient to their parents. They are to do this not because the parents deserve it, or for any other reason than the fact that

²² Ephesians 4:23, CEB.

²³ Ephesians 4:25, CEB.



this is “acceptable”, or “pleasing” in the Lord. They are called to recognize that they are under the authority and reign of the new kingdom, with its different paradigm.


Verse 21 – Fathers are called upon to avoid “provoking”, or “exacerbating” their children in order that they do not become “discouraged”, or “lose heart”. Fathers are to encourage their children, build them up and not do things that tear them down or break their spirit. Today we might call upon them to build their self-esteem, but Paul means even more than this. He is challenging fathers to recognize that they are to emulate their heavenly Father. They are to treat their children the way God treats His children and to seek to instill in them heavenly values in heavenly ways.

Verses 22-23 – For slaves, they are to continue to “obey” their masters and in reality to become better slaves than ever before. As was a common tendency among some who were slaves they are called upon to obey in everything, even when their masters are not watching them. They are to seek to please their masters and work with the whole of their heart in whatever task they are given. They are to do this not because their masters

deserve it, or even to a good example, but because they are serving as slaves not for their masters now but for the Lord. Their whole outlook is transformed. There is not here a sense that Paul is justifying slavery or its practice, but that even in this terrible and widespread practice Kingdom values are to be displayed. Slaves were not called upon to rebel and protest their unjust position, but to in the midst of injustice and powerlessness they were to display the flag, the colors of their calling in Christ. They were to be the best, the most obedient slave possible, not for their earthly master's sake but because of their heavenly calling and as a sign and a mark of the love and respect that they held for their Heavenly Master.

Verse 24 – The motivation for all of this is that they already know of this rich inheritance that is theirs. They are already translated into this new position in the universe, and they now serve the Lord. The focus of their lives, of their devotion, of their ambitions, their calling is different now. They are to live according to Kingdom Values, the values from above.

Verse 25 – To finish off this section Paul notes that anyone who does wrong, and they now know what is wrong, will be



punished (or receive back) for the wrong they have done. This will be done without partiality. Knowing what is right and not doing it will include the promise of greater punishment than for those that refuse to do what they now know to be the right thing to do.


This chapter ends without completing Paul's admonition. It will be taken up and continue in the next section with chapter 4. In this section and in the section that follows the focus will be upon values and attitudes that reflect the domain and dominion of God as are found in Jesus Christ. The challenge is to live into these values and to maintain focus upon the things from above.

Synopsis

Paul calls upon the Colossians to recognize that they are raised with Christ and therefore they are now different and they are to demonstrate those differences in tangible ways by the way that they live and act. Their minds are to be set on things “from above” and not on those things, which are “earthly”. They now have a new life that is hidden in Christ and the fullness of that new life will be revealed with Christ in glory.

The transformation is not yet complete, God will not overwrite, or overrule the choice of the individual and therefore conscious choices must still be made. Paul calls upon the Colossians to make those choices and to “put to death” those aspects of their old life that are not going to be a part of their new existence. These things bring the wrath of God and destroy relationship, not only between humans, but also between God and humans.

He continues to remind them of their baptism and what it represented for them in the stripping off of the old self and the clothing of the new self being put in its place. They are being



renewed in the image of God, that image is being restored which has been marred and distorted by sin. All of this is to be done under the umbrella of love which must overshadow all human activity as it does the activity of God.

The Colossians are called upon to live in harmony, forgiving each other, teaching and admonishing one another, continually moving toward fulfilling their calling to be like Christ. Their life is to be dominated by a consciousness of who they are, and where they are going. This existence is to be one dominated by joy and thankfulness, recognizing the gift of God.

This life is not one that is to be only partial, or lived out in some places, but not in others. It is to be a part of all relationships, whether it be between husbands and wives, fathers and children, or slaves and masters. Every relationship is to be seen in the reality of the new life and the new creation. If someone fails to do this they can expect to be punished just as those who do right will be rewarded.

Main Points

- Christians have been already raised from the dead with Christ.
 - In light of this, life is to be different and we are to actively put to death any remnants of the old life that still lingers.
 - Our relationships are to be dominated by the recognition of our new station in the body of Christ.
 - We are to always live out our lives in thankfulness to God.
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Questions

1. What does it mean to be raised with Christ?
2. What are the things above, as opposed to earthly things?
3. How do you go about setting your mind on things above?
4. How do you actively put to death earthly passions?
5. What do you think Paul means when he speaks of the wrath of God, that is coming?
6. Why do you think Paul calls upon the Christians at Colossae to put to death these things if they are already a part of the body of Christ? Have they not already been put to death?
7. What is the “image” of the creator?
8. Why do you think Paul places such a strong emphasis on speech in this section?
9. What are some ways that you can demonstrate compassion for others?
10. What does Paul say we are to do with complaints?
11. What does it mean to do something in the name of the Lord Jesus?
12. How should what Paul says here effect life for you everyday?
13. What are some ways that you have seen forgiveness change a situation?
14. What are some ways that not forgiving can prolong discord and increase tensions?

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15. How do you think we are to pursue justice and forgiveness at the same time?
 16. Why do you think Paul is so concerned about the actions of the people in Colossae?
 17. Does what Paul says to the people of Colossae still apply to us today?
 18. How does what Paul says here change the way you live today and the way you treat others?
 19. How would you define the “peace of Christ?”

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that the words Paul gives in this section apply to those that have already made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as the pattern for their life. He is challenging them to confirm their decision not simply with words, but in actions and attitudes that demonstrate this decision and demonstrate the influence, and the Spirit of God at work in them. Paul challenges his readers to recognize that the way of this world is not right. What are some ways that you can see that the ways of this earth are not the way of God?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words challenging His children to see with the spirit that He created them to have. He never intended for us to experience loneliness, separation from Him, or from each other. The world in which we live today has many wonderful things in it, but all have been touched by darkness. When we fail to see things as God sees them we have distorted vision that causes us to live distorted and incomplete lives. We are not at peace. God wants something greater, better, and more peaceful for us. What are some of the things that you long for, which are the “things above?”

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

All of this means that I am being challenged to follow Jesus more fully not only in my actions, but in the attitudes of my heart. Sometimes it is easy to do the right thing, but sometimes it is much harder to have the right attitude as I do the right thing. We are called to do what we do because we are becoming more like Jesus, not just as an outward action, but in our inward thoughts, dreams, and desires. What are some ways that you are seeking to be thankful to God?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to consider our position in the Kingdom and to recognize that this is much more important than our earthly position. He is calling us to seek to honor and please God rather than to focus upon self and this life. How have you seen people in your life live a life dominated by the things from above?