

## Colossians 3:1–17 and Christ-centered Living

### Prayer

### Introductory Questions

- What are examples of Christ-centered living (in our desires, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? Put differently, what does it look like to center our lives on Jesus?
- What obstacles interfere with you centering your life on him and his will?

### Introduction

The Bible calls us to trust, love, and obey God the Father (Mark 12:30; Rom. 4:5; 1 John 5:3). But we must also trust, love, and obey his Son, Jesus Christ, for he is fully God in his essence and worthy of our worship (Col. 2:9; Rev. 5:12–14). With that in mind, Colossians 3:1–17 is one of the most important passages in the Bible for describing *the nature of Christ-centered living*. The following comments provide context for our lesson:

1. **The apostle Paul begins the main section of Colossians with this comprehensive challenge: “6 So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, 7 being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude” (Col. 2:6–7).** The Colossians had already *received* (or welcomed by faith) Christ Jesus *as Lord* (v. 6). They recognized him as the Lord over all people and things, and they received him as their personal Lord (1:3–4, 15–20). Paul called them to continue *to walk in him*—a figure of speech for living with and in Jesus, and allowing him to shape our values, thinking, and conduct (v. 6; Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 179). Paul then elaborated: they were to live as those who were “being rooted and built up in” Christ, “and established in the faith,” just as they had been instructed, “and overflowing with gratitude” (v. 7).
2. **For the Colossian believers, one of the main threats to their Christ-centered living was false teachers (2:8–23).** In response to that threat, Paul taught the Colossians about Jesus’s deity and lordship, and about God’s saving work on their behalf (2:8–15). Paul also exposed the false teachers’ distorted character qualities and teachings (2:16–23), where he largely made his points *negatively*—what *not* to think and what *not* to do (vv. 8, 16, 18).
3. **Starting in Colossians 3:1, Paul shifts back and speaks more *positively* about Christ-centered living** (ibid., 183, 243). How should Christians think and act? To that Paul turns.

We organize Colossians 3:1–17 into three sections: (1) Pursuing Heaven’s Priorities and Practices (vv. 1–4), (2) Putting Off “the Old Man” (Adam) (vv. 5–11), and (3) Putting on “the New Man” (Christ) (vv. 12–17). We conclude this lesson by providing examples of Christ-centered living.

## 1. Pursuing Heaven’s Priorities and Practices

1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)

As Christians, *in the past* we both have *died* (v. 3) and *been raised with Christ* (v. 1). *We have died—set free* from the ruling power of this world and demonic forces, and *set free* from the ruling power of sin (Rom. 6:2, 6, 14; 8:2; Col. 2:20). *We have also been raised with Christ*, for God brought us to life with Christ (Eph. 2:4–6; Col. 2:13–14). Because of these realities, we have ethical obligations in the present. *In the present*, therefore, we should *seek* (or set our hearts on) the things above (v. 1) and *set our minds on* things above (v. 2). In both our hearts and minds, we focus on and pursue heaven’s realities (vv. 1–2), including its practices and priorities (which Paul addresses in verses 12–17 below). Heaven is the place where Christ is, where he is seated and rules at the right hand of God, and where Christ is obeyed perfectly (v. 1). By contrast, we should not set our minds on “earthly things” (v. 2)—which includes self-imposed religious practices that cannot ultimately stop our sinful indulgence (2:20–23), and the sinful priorities and practices that are bound up with this age (which Paul addresses in verses 5–11 below). Even now, our lives are “hidden”: we are eternally safe and secure with Christ in God (v. 3). *In the future*, we will appear with Jesus in glory at his return—at which time God will transform our bodies and purify us completely (v. 4; cf. Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2) (*ibid.*, 243–252).

- How would you describe the priorities and practices *of heaven* vs. those *of the earth*?
- How does considering Jesus’s return impact your thoughts, words, and actions?

## 2. Putting Off “the Old Man” (Adam)

5 Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, God’s wrath is coming upon the disobedient, 7 and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. 8 But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices. 10 And have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. 11 In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all. (Col. 3:5–11)

Considering verses 1–4, what does it look like to seek and set our minds on the things above (and not on earthly things)? To that Paul now turns: we are to put off “the old self” (vv. 5–11) and to put on “the new self” (vv. 12–17). *In the past*, all Christians “have put off *the old self* with its practices and have put on *the new self*” (vv. 9–10; cf. v. 7). The words “the old self” are literally “the old man” (a reference to Adam), which reminds Christians that they used to stand *in Adam* and “wear his clothes,” so to speak—living in his realm, clothed in his sin, and

under God’s condemnation (1 Cor. 15:22). The words “the new self” are literally “the new man” (a reference to Christ), which reminds Christians that they now stand *in Christ* and *have put on Christ*—living in his realm, clothed in him and his righteousness, and free from God’s condemnation (Rom. 5:15–21; 1 Cor. 1:30). **In the present**, we must “put to death” (v. 5) and “put away” (v. 8) sinful character qualities and actions, given that we have already put off the old man and put on the new man. Even though sin no longer has ultimate power over us, we must put our sins to death (and put them away), which we do (again and again) until this life is over. We must put these sins to death, which belong to our earthly nature: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry” (v. 5). We must also put away “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from [our] mouth[s],” including lying (vv. 8–9)—sins that are particularly destructive to Christian community. We are being renewed into the image of *our Creator*, which may refer to the Father or to the Son (v. 10; cf. Gen. 1:26–27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 1:16; *ibid.*, 252–273). These are God’s expectations for *all* who are in Christ as we live together in community (v. 11). **In the future**, the wrath of God is coming upon those who are disobedient (v. 6)—wrath that God will pour out in full force at the end of the age (Rom. 2:5; 5:9; Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 221, 227).

There are five sins listed in verse 5 and five sins listed in verse 8. Identify one of those with which you struggle and discuss strategies that you can use “to put it to death” / “to put it away.”

### 3. Putting on “the New Man” (Christ)

12 Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. 14 Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col. 3:12–17)

All Christians are God’s “chosen ones, holy [set apart by him and for him] and dearly loved,” and each of those realities is an expression of his grace (v. 12). Because we have already put on the new man (who is Christ), we must now clothe ourselves with Christ’s character qualities and actions. Paul lists five virtues that are particularly important for living within Christian community: “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (v. 12). These qualities express themselves concretely as we bear with one another’s shortcomings and struggles, and forgive one another, just as the Lord has forgiven us (v. 13). Above all, we should put on love, which binds all these qualities together (v. 14). By faith, we are already at peace with God through Christ, and we should let the peace that comes from Christ to rule our hearts—and

therefore rule our relationships with one another (v. 15; cf. Rom. 5:1; 14:19). The word of Christ should dwell richly in our midst: “in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another *through* psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (v. 16). Singing together is one way we teach and admonish one another. Paul ends with this overall challenge—to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (v. 17) (Moo, 273–292). To God and his Son be the glory!

Of the many character qualities and actions listed in verses 12–17, identify one and discuss how you plan to put it into practice *in the context of community*.

### Sound Doctrine: Christ-centered Living

Below are seven ways the Bible calls us to center our lives on Jesus Christ:

1. **We trust in Jesus.** We trust in him as a person, in his work at the cross, and in his promises, not only when we first believed, but every moment of our lives (Gal. 2:20).
2. **We love Jesus and obey his commands.** To love Jesus involves both devotion and affection for him, and it expresses itself primarily in doing what he says (John 14:15, 21).
3. **We pray to Jesus.** While Jesus taught us to pray to the Father (Matt. 6:9), Jesus is also a worthy recipient of our prayers, such as when we cry out to him to return (Rev. 22:20).
4. **We imitate Jesus.** God’s will for us is that we become conformed to the image of his Son, and therefore we seek to imitate Jesus in our thoughts, words, and deeds (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 11:1). For example, we put on the character of Christ (Col. 3:12–17).
5. **We witness to Jesus.** We witness to Jesus by explaining to others that he died and God raised him from the dead (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 15:1–4). All who turn from their sins and trust in Jesus will live with God forever (Acts 20:21; Rom. 5:1).
6. **We worship Jesus.** Worshipping Jesus means that we desire and value him above all earthly things—experiencing and expressing his supreme worth (Matt. 28:9; Rev. 5:12).
7. **We hope in Jesus and prepare for his return.** Jesus is the King who came, the King who now reigns in heaven, and the King who will return (Matt. 2:2; Eph. 1:20–23; Rev. 19:11–21). With that in mind, we long for his return and must prepare for it—particularly as we align ourselves to his will (2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13).

- What comments and questions do you have about this lesson?
- What is one thing you can do in response to this lesson?

### Prayer