

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

7. What was the Colossian heresy? Make a list of its direct teachings from verses 8, 16, 18, 21, and 23.
8. Where can you find parallels to these false teachings in the world today?
9. What is the picture behind the words “Let no one disqualify you”?
10. What is “rigor of devotion” in verse 23?

Lesson 10

(3:1-17)

Seek The Things Above (3:1-4)

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

V. 1 If Then You Have Been Raised With Christ – These words parallel the words of 2:20, “if with Christ you died.” The earlier verse emphasized the negative aspects of death; this verse emphasizes the positive aspects of new life. This verse introduces a strong moral exhortation: If you have been raised to a new life, then live like it!

As most commentators note, the imagery of baptism may be seen in these verses. The penitent believer dies to the old life and is raised to the new (Rom. 6:1-7). Baptism vividly pictures this burial and resurrection.

Seek The Things That Are Above – The present tense of this command makes the action continuous: “seek and keep on seeking.” The Christian fixes his eyes on a heavenly goal (Heb. 11:10; 12:2) and presses on toward that goal (Phil. 3:14).

Where Christ Is, Seated At the Right Hand Of God – The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah

would sit at God’s right hand (Ps. 110:1), the supreme position of shared authority. This important concept was central in apostolic preaching (Acts 2:33; 5:33; 7:55, 56) and in the epistles (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; I Pet. 3:22, Rev. 3:21).

V. 2 Set Your Minds On Things That Are Above – Paul did not want the Colossian Christians to turn from the extreme of asceticism, condemned in 2:21-23, to the extreme of total permissiveness. The Christian who has been set free from the legalistic demands of the law must not think he is exempt from all moral restraints and can indulge himself at will.

Christian morality is the product of adopting a new way of thinking. The Christian has a new “mind” or attitude (as in Phil. 2:5 and 3:15) which sees things from God’s frame of reference. The more the Christian’s mind is attuned with the mind of God, the less the Christian needs external restraints. He is free to do whatever he wants because his “wants” are the “wants” of God.

Not On Things That Are On Earth – The attitudes to be avoided are specified in verses 5 to 11, the attitudes to be adopted are listed in verses 12 to 17.

V. 3 For You Have Died – Conversion from the old life, climaxed in baptism, was already a past reality for them. Therefore, Paul’s exhortation to them was this: “You have died—now live like it!”

And Your Life Is Hid With Christ In God – The Christian has died to the present world; his life belongs to God’s world. The words of a hymn by John Newton aptly comment on this line:

Rejoice, believer, in the Lord,
Who makes your cause His own;
The hope that’s founded on His word
Can ne’er be overthrown.

Though many foes beset your road,
And feeble is your arm,
Your life is hid with Christ in God,
Beyond the reach of harm.

V. 4 When Christ Who Is Our Life Appears – Christ is our life. He is the source, sustainer, and redeemer of our lives. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2:20). Henceforth, to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21). We live each day in the confident expectation that Christ will suddenly return from heaven and take us to our home in glory (Phil. 3:21; II Cor. 5:1).

Then You Also Will Appear With Him In Glory – When Christ returns, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:2). He will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body (Phil. 3:21), and we shall dwell with him in “unapproachable light,” full of glory.

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Put Off The Old Nature (3:5-11)

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you once walked, when you lived in them. 8 But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices 10 and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

V. 5 Put To Death Therefore – Since the Christian has died to the old life (v. 3), it is inappropriate that he should retain any of the old lifestyle. Step by step he must completely root out the elements of his former life. The old way of life did not immediately cease to exist when new life began. Therefore, it must be put to death.

What Is Earthly In You – Notice that the sins which make up “what is earthly in you” (v. 5-9) are sins which stem from the heart. They are not primarily external sins; most of them are not even illegal in any human court.

Immorality – Immorality, or fornication, includes the whole broad spectrum of sexual sin: adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, etc.

Impurity – Impurity, or uncleanness, is moral defilement. In the Old Testament, it made a person unfit to go before the presence of God at the temple.

Passion – This word expresses an emotion so strong it overwhelms reason. It is closely linked to the next word.

Evil Desire – Also translated “lust,” this kind of evil greed carries sexual overtones.

Covetousness – Literally, “have-more-ness.” In the Old Testament, covetousness was wanting what belonged to someone else (Ex. 20:17). In the New Testament, it is simply greed—wanting more and more and more.

Which Is Idolatry – Greed is idolatry because it becomes Number One in our lives. It is treason against heaven because it bumps God off the throne of our heart.

Barclay points out that personal greed was the real reason ancient people bowed down before images of stone. Most of the gods they worshipped were fertility gods, and the people were trying to tap the gods’ power or good luck for themselves. If they could just make it work, they would have better crops, larger flocks, and many sons.

V. 6 On Account Of These The Truth Of God Is Coming – Defiance of God’s will brings God’s wrath. Despite the fact that the wrath of God is mentioned over thirty times in the New Testament, many people refuse to admit their peril.

The phrase “upon the sons of disobedience” (as in Eph. 5:6) has been omitted in the RSV, although it is found in some of the oldest manuscripts.

V. 7 In These You Once Walked, When You Lived In Them – Their way of life was the way of death. Now, as Christians, they could better appreciate their new life by remembering the old. The words “walked” and “lived” underscore the completeness of sin in their old lives.

V. 8 But Now Put Them All Away – The Christian must “put away” and “put off” (v. 9) the old practices so that he can then “put on” (v. 12) the new.

Anger – This word for sustained anger is the same word usually used for the “wrath of God” (as in v. 6). Man cannot sustain this emotion without sin (James 1:20), but God can. (Consider Rom. 12:19.)

Wrath – This is the sudden outburst of temper. It is no better, or worse, than sustained anger. Both are incompatible with the new life (Eph. 4:31).

Malice – An evil disposition.

Slander – Literally, “blasphemy.” Slander is the verbal expression which betrays one’s contempt for either God or man.

Foul Talk From Your Mouth – Literally, “shameful speech.” This is the same as the filthiness of speech in Eph. 5:4.

V. 9 Do Not Lie To One Another – The construction of the Greek sentence implies, “Stop lying to one another.” The Christian must have total commitment to the truth.

Seeing That You Have Put Off The Old Nature – The Christian has “stripped off” the old nature just as he would a filthy garment.

V. 10 And Have Put On The New Nature – The Christian “clothes” himself with Christ (Gal. 3:27). Specific aspects of this new “clothing” are listed in verses 12-17.

Which Is Being Renewed In Knowledge After The Image Of Its Creator – Adam was created by God “in his own image” (Gen. 1:27) but fell into sin. Christ has ransomed us from sin and has given us the opportunity to be what Adam was meant to be. In the continuing process of renewal, our minds are becoming the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). (Compare Eph. 4:22-24.)

V. 11 Here There Cannot Be Greek And Jew, Circumcised And Uncircumcised – When the Christian had put on Christ, the old categories become irrelevant (Gal. 3:27-28). It no longer matters whether a person was Jew or Gentile, for circumcision no longer matters (Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

Barbarian, Scythian – Originally, a barbarian was someone so stupid he did not speak your language, a

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foreigner. A Scythian was the lowest class of barbarian, “differing little from wild beasts” (Josephus). They scalped their enemies and used the hollowed-out skull as a drinking vessel for unmixed wine. Yet even they, as Christians, became equal with the rest.

Slave, Free Man – While slaves were the same as free men in the eyes of God, it should be noted that they still had to behave as obedient slaves to their earthly masters (v. 22).

But Christ Is All, And In All – Any refusal to accept one’s brother because of the old categories is a denial of Christ’s lordship over that category. It is a denial of the Lord’s ability to transcend class distinctions and to live in certain kinds of people.

Put On The New Nature (3:12-17)

12 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, 13 forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

V. 12 Put On Then, As God’s Chosen Ones, Holy And Beloved – An in v. 10, God’s children should get dressed with the right clothing. Filthy rags are not suitable for children of a King!

What about the expression “chosen ones”? How does one get to be a part of this group? Jesus made it clear in the parable of the marriage feast (Matt. 22:1-14). While the king invited many people to his feast, only those who accepted the invitation were called “chosen” (v. 14).

Compassion – Literally, “bowels of mercies.” See the comments on Phil. 1:8.

Kindness – The excellent and gracious disposition which also stoops to help those in need.

Lowliness – This “humility of mind” should be contrasted with the kind of false humility demanded by the false teachers of Colossae (2:18).

Meekness – Meekness is not weakness; it is strength held under control. The Greeks used this word to describe a quality of gentleness found in a well-trained watch-dog or horse.

Patience – This is the ability to be “long-suffering” with difficult people (1:11).

V. 13 Forbearing One Another – Literally, “putting up with one another.” Since Christians are going to spend eternity together, they may as well learn to get along!

If One Has A Complaint Against Another, Forgiving Each Other – Human relationships inevitably produce some friction. Whenever we want to “blame” someone for something, we should first remember how much the Lord has forgiven us. Then it will be much easier to forgive others (Matt. 18:21-35).

V. 14 And Above All These Put On Love – Love is the crowning glory of the Christian graces. It sums up all God’s commandments (Gal. 5:14) and is the sum total of all the Christian virtues.

Which Binds Everything Together In Perfect Harmony – Love “ties it all together in completeness.” Love is the energizing force which makes unity operative.

V. 15 Let The Peace Of Christ Rule In Your Hearts – The word translated “rule” originally meant “act as umpire.” The Christian must accord to no man the right to disqualify him (2:18), for the umpire in his life is the peace of Christ. This peace should rule over us individually, as well as in the collective body—the church.

To Which Indeed You Were Called In The One Body – God has called us in peace (I Cor. 7:15). It is the intention that Christians should make up one body—not many—and should live in peace with one another.

And Be Thankful – All of Christian behavior is simply the response of gratitude toward God.

V. 16 Let The Word Of Christ Dwell In You Richly – In other words, let the gospel take full root in your heart. Let it live in your life and dominate your conduct.

As You Teach And Admonish One Another In All Wisdom – Paul’s ministry of admonishing and teaching every man (1:28) is also the mutual ministry which Christians exercise toward one another. It seems likely that the following words about singing should be taken as one means by which this teaching is done (Eph. 5:19).

As You Sing Psalms And Hymns And Spiritual Songs With Thankfulness In Your Hearts To God – Christians let the word of Christ dwell in them richly and teach one another when they sing praises to God. “Psalms” were no doubt songs from the O.T. book of Psalms; “hymns” were probably songs of praise composed by the Christians themselves; and “spiritual songs” were perhaps spontaneous songs inspired by the Holy spirit (I Cor. 14:15).

About 200 A.D., Tertullian described the Christian love-feast in this way: “After water for the hands and lights have been brought in, each is invited to sing to God

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in the presence of the others from what he knows of the holy scriptures or from his own heart.”

V. 17 And Whatever You Do, In Word Or Deed –

The Christian must not divide his life into “Sunday behavior” and “everyday behavior.” Since God is always with him, anything that is out of place on Sunday is always out of place.

This broad commandment made it unnecessary for Paul to list any further “Do’s” and Don’t’s.” The Christian life does not consist of outward conformity with a legal code, but inward renewal of the heart.

Do Everything In The Name Of The Lord Jesus –

This general principle is far better than an exhaustive code of laws. If a certain practice cannot be done in the name of Jesus, don’t do it!

Giving Thanks To God The Father Through Him

– Christian behavior may be summed up as the life lived in gratitude toward God (v. 15). When one is constantly aware of the debt of love he owes to God, it will be hard for him to stray very far from the paths of righteousness.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What things are included in “things that are on earth”?
2. What is the basis of Paul’s exhortation toward moral excellence in verse one?
3. What is meant by the statement “you also will appear with him in glory”?
4. How is idolatry linked with covetousness?
5. What is the difference between anger and wrath? Is the “wrath of God” a defect in God’s character?
6. What was a Scythian? Why did Paul mention them?
7. Explain “God’s chosen ones.” Who does the choosing?
8. Can you think of any virtue that is not included in the concept of love?
9. In what way does “be thankful” (v. 15) relate to the Christian’s behavior?
10. Is verse 16 describing a “church service”? How does this verse relate to verse 17?

Lesson Eleven

(3:18 - 4:1)

Instructions For The Family (3:18-21)

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

V. 18 Wives – If the new nature in a Christian really reaches into every area of his behavior (v. 17), it will affect his family and his job. Paul was not abruptly changing the subject at this point. He was showing individual Christians specific ways in which they would live the new life.

Ladies, first. . . .

Be Subject To Your Husbands – “Be subject was a military term meaning “to be arranged under the authority of someone.” God set the husband as the head of the family (Eph. 5:23) and commanded the wife to respect his leadership (Eph. 5:33). The command is expressed here as a present imperative, meaning “be subject and keep on being subject” in a continuing way.

A few points need to be made here about the Bible’s teaching on the submission of the wife to the husband (I Cor. 11:3-16; 14:34-36; Eph. 5:21-33; Titus 2:5; I Pet. 3:1-6). First, notice that the wives are told to be subject; the husbands are not told to put them in subjection. The husband’s responsibility is not to get the upper hand over