

## Mid Week • Colossians 3

### INTRODUCTION

Colossians is an important letter to study because it deals with so many of the false teachings and ideas the early Church had to deal with in the second and third century but which are resurfacing in our time.

Ancient Gnosticism, which was the heretical movement that was threatening the church at Colosse and Laodicea, was a mish-mash of eastern mystery religions, Greek philosophy, and Jewish and Christian terminology.

Largely because of what both Paul and the Apostle John say in their writings, the Church was equipped with the truth they needed to effectively combat the errors of Gnosticism and eventually it fell into disuse.

Unfortunately, as Western culture has become increasingly ignorant of its own history and foundations, and at the same time, more biblically illiterate, Gnosticism has experienced a rebirth in what is known as the New Age Movement.

No single book of the NT better refutes Gnosticism and its aberrant teaching than Colossians.

So far, in chapters 1 & 2, we've seen Paul make a masterful case for the supremacy and pre-eminence of Jesus Christ.

He is no lower functionary on the long ladder of spiritual enlightenment that leads to heaven, as the Gnostics said.

He is God incarnate – the very Creator of the Universe and the One by whom all things are held together.

He is not some lower angel – He is the Creator of the Angels and their Lord.

After revealing Christ as Supreme and Pre-eminent, he goes on to show how believers are complete in Him – they don't need deeper enlightenment.

There are no higher mysteries to be revealed as they prove themselves worthy through observing complex rules and follow exacting practices.

No – faith in Christ means identification WITH Christ in all He has done.

In chapter 2, Paul argues powerfully for them to maintain the liberty they have in Christ and not to become entangled in a religion of works, self-effort, and false wisdom that is nothing more than the convoluted thinking of fallen man.

Now in Chapter 3, Paul is going to tell the Colossians how their identification with Christ is to be lived out in their daily lives.

While the Gnostics strutted around, smug in their imagined superiority, the Christians were to demonstrate the life of Christ in the excellence of their regular, everyday lives.

### CHAPTER 3

**1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.**

Paul isn't speaking *conditionally* here.

When he writes, "If you were raised . . ." as though they might not be.

He is asserting their union with Christ.

Really, it would be better to translate this as, "Since you were raised with Christ . . ."

All of this flows from v. 20 of chapter 2 where Paul begins . . .

**20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations?**

The Gnostics wanted to put people under bondage to strict religious regulations that governed food and rest, and other appetites of the body.

Paul says, hey, if your faith in Christ means your identification with Him in His death on the cross, then all these regulations that cover things like food aren't bidding on you any more.

They aren't binding on you anymore because you no longer live a body-dominated, or flesh dominated life.

V. 1 of Chapter 3 gives the flip side.

If we don't live a flesh-dominated life anymore, where do we live?

What is our center now?

**1 If [since] then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.**

Rather than being pre-occupied with diet and concentrating on rules that merely effect stuff that is ultimately going to perish, we are to center our lives on the things of the Kingdom of God.

We are to seek those priorities and things which are above, eternal, spiritual in nature and content.

When Paul says, "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" he is not saying that we are to spend all our days day-dreaming about heaven.

He is referring to the spiritual realm which exists, not up there {point up}, high above the clouds.

It exists all around us. It is here now. Though unseen, it is every bit as real as this physical universe. And in fact, it is even *more* real in that it will remain when the physical universe is no longer needed and is allowed to dissolve in a massive nuclear meltdown that Peter describes in 2 Peter 3:10.

Our faith in Christ places us IN Him so that when He died on the Cross, we died and when He rose from the dead, we did too.

Paul describes it this way in Romans and 1 Corinthians 15:

In Adam, we all sinned, and since death is the inescapable consequence of sin, death passed to all of Adam's descendants.

But when Christ died on the Cross, because He was the One man to ever live upon whom death really had no claim because He was without sin, His death is reckoned by God as a sufficient substitute for all who will repent of

their sin and put their trust in Christ.  
 Theologians call this the *Federal Headship* of Adam and Jesus Christ.  
 Just as the federal government *represents & governs* the entire nation, so the federal headship of Adam and Christ refers to all of the human race being represented and governed by one of two heads – Either Adam or Jesus  
 In Adam, we all sinned and so are destined to death.  
 Human birth automatically places us under the federal headship of Adam, just like being born in the US makes you a US citizen.  
 But those who are citizens of the kingdom of this world, dominated as it is by sin, can chose to switch their citizenship to the Kingdom of Christ.  
 By choosing Him, their lives move out from under Adam and are placed positionally under Christ who becomes their new federal head.  
 For Adam and all of us who were genetically in him back in the garden – it was the choice of the tree – the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.  
 Adam ate – and all of us tasted the bitter fruit of sin and death.  
 Now in Christ it's the choice of another tree – the tree of Calvary – the Cross.  
 If we choose Christ, then we enjoy the fruit of that tree – forgiveness and transferal from a flesh-dominated and world-centered existence to a spirit-dominated and Christ-centered existence.

In v. 1, Paul is saying, since you are now in Christ, don't get roped into focusing on things that no longer mark you life.

You are now living the Life of the Spirit – so seek the things of the Spirit.

**2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.**

**3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

He is adding greater clarification to what it means to be identified with Christ.

The old you – the flesh-dominated you, the you that used to be a hell-bent little sinner, is dead and gone!

You are a new you!

So BE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! the new you!

V. 2 is powerful and present a challenge to every one of us.

Every day we face the challenge of looking at things from merely the temporal viewpoint, or from an eternal perspective.

When we go to the store and buy our groceries or we are flipping through the channels on the tube, do we filter our choices through the filter of eternity and what befits a citizen of the Kingdom of God, or do we make such choices based purely on a worldly set of guidelines?

Here is a dollar. Do I buy a bunch of celery or a lottery ticket?

Here is a ½ hour. Do I spend it watching *Baywatch Hawaii* or watching *Veggie Tales* with my 8 year old daughter that I haven't spent any time with in two weeks because I've been so busy?

**2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.**

Paul goes on . . .

**4 When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.**

Brother, sister – never forget your destiny in Christ.

One day, Jesus will rend the skies and come back to get us.

A mighty trumpet will sound, the heavens and the earth will shake, the Heavenly Bridegroom will arrive, call out our name, and we will rise to meet Him.

This world, which exerts such a pull on us now, will lose its grip and we will ascend to meet our King, our Lord, Our Savior, our wonderful Friend.

And that life that we now possess, though don't really see it, will be made evident for all to see.

Remember the story of the Transfiguration?

Jesus took Peter, James, and John on a hike, away from the other disciples.

They climbed a mountain, and there, away from any other eyes, Jesus allowed them to see just a portion of His real glory.

The light was so bright and the glory so heavy, that the three fell on their faces in worship.

It wasn't that the glory was *added* to Jesus in that moment.

It was always His – the veil that was over Peter, James and John's eyes was removed for a moment so they could see *into* the spiritual realm.

You and I, because of our union with Christ through faith in Him, are right now, seated with Christ in the spiritual realm, as it says in Ephesians.

That means that right now – we possess a measure of glory we do not see.

But when Christ comes, and these bodies are transformed, then we will get new eyes, and they will see things as they really are.

\*\*\* The essence of Christian growth is to progressively *realize* who and what we really are as believers in Christ.

It's as we learn and realize who we are in Christ that we see the real changes that make us more like Jesus.

Working from this place of realization of who and what we are in Christ, Paul goes on to say . . .

**5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.**

**6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,**

**7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.**

When the Colossians realize that they aren't mere mortals anymore and that they are new creatures in Christ, then they will begin to act like the new people they are.

And that means that they need to reckon certain things they used to be and do as totally incompatible with their new life.

If they had died with Christ, then are certain things they needed to reckon dead; like fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

All these things are base sins that are manifestations of the person who lacks self-control.

*Fornication* is any and all sex outside the marriage bond.

*Uncleanness* means “lustful impurity that is connected with luxury and loose living.”

This sin is attached to those who have too much leisure time and access to those things that aim at stirring up lust and impure desires.

We have this sin in spades in our culture and age.

*Passion* might be better translated as *inordinate affection*.

It describes a state of mind that seeks out sexual impurity for no other satisfaction than the appetite of the mind itself.

Men especially know what it means to have hungry eyes.

They may have no thought of committing adultery and might in fact be very devoted to their wives.

But they find a certain kind of satisfaction and pleasure just in *looking* at images, whether real or imagined, that inflame unholy passions.

That is what is meant here.

*Evil desire* means just that.

It's any appetite or longing that when sought would result in sin.

Someone might object at this point and say, “Look, I have no control over my desires!”

That simply isn't true – you do have control over your desires.

If it seems you don't it's because you have *chosen* to let your desires rule you.

The Christian knows the classic struggle of desires.

On one hand, is the desire to please God and be holy.

On the other hand is the desire of the flesh to sin.

Which of these two desires will determine our course?

Simple – which ever one is the stronger!

Can we determine which one is stronger?

Yes we can.

An Inuit was explaining to a tourist about sled dogs and how they have a pecking order.

Sometimes there is a contest between the dogs to determine who will be the lead.

The fights can be bloody, and sometimes a dog will die.

But the fights have to go on or the sled team won't move because it doesn't know who to follow.

The Inuit pointed at two of his dogs and said, “You see those two? Every morning they fight to vie for the lead.”

The tourist asked, “Which one wins?”

The Inuit replied, “The one I feed the most.”

In your contest of competing desires – you can determine the winner by feeding one or the other.

Paul is saying here that we ought not feed evil desire.

On the contrary – kill it! Starve it!

After he had named these sensual sins, Paul added, “and covetousness, which is idolatry”

*Covetousness* is the sin of always wanting more, whether it be more things or

more pleasures.

The covetous person is never satisfied with what he has, and is usually envious of what other people have.

Paul calls such covetousness *idolatry*, because it puts *things* in the place of God.

If you center your life around anything other than God, then you have erected for yourself an idol.

Here's what Paul says we're to do with all these things – Mortify them!

Put them to death!

Let me ask you – if while we were going over that list of sins just now, anything in your life came to mind, have you done that?

If you have a problem with lust – are there magazines, books, videos, or anything else in your home or anywhere else that hasn't been banished?

Putting this stuff to death means ousting it completely from your life?

You don't keep a corpse in your house or car – you bury it.

Paul is calling us to a radical action – mortify these things. Put them to death!

Once the obvious moral failures of v. 5 are cut away, then it's time to go deeper into the fallenness that God wants to raise us from . . .

- 8 **But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.**
- 9 **Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,**
- 10 **and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,**
- 11 **where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.**

The picture presented to us in v. 8 is the kind of ill-spirited crouch who is mad at the world and profane in his speech and lifestyle.

I hear an ad on the radio recently for a heavy metal concert at the Coliseum in LA.

5 bands will be there that represent pretty much the bottom of the barrel morally.

One of these bands encourages rioting in their concerts and the lead singer spits on people, who actually rush the stage so they can be hit!

The music is angry and malicious, filled with profanity and blasphemy.

People will shell out over \$50 to go revel in this kind of debauchery.

Paul says, all this kind of stuff you are to put off.

V. 9 – if you claim to be a Christian - Stop lying!

Instead of lying, you should be more like Jesus, who is Truth!

V. 11 is interesting in that it seems misplaced.

How does the putting off the old man and putting on the new relate to the equality of all people in Christ?

Paul is again dealing with one of the errors of the Gnostics.

Because they believed in various levels of enlightenment and spirituality, their teaching, if followed would fracture the church into a multitude of different cliques.

You see, because they also required that the deeper levels of enlightenment be entered by paying a fee to the keepers of the secrets, only the wealthy could afford it.

Common tradesmen and slaves had no time to practice the demanding rituals the Gnostics required.

So if followed, the Gnostics would have broken the spiritual unity of the Church into several camps.

Paul says that in Christ we are all one!

We are neither Greek nor Jew, meaning that *nationality* has lost its divisive power.

We are neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, meaning that past *religious affiliation* does not hamper our union.

We are neither barbarian, nor Scythian, meaning that our *cultural background* matters not.

And in Christ, it doesn't matter if we are slave or free because *economic standing* does not effect who and what we are as brothers and sisters in Christ.

I find it interesting that one of the chief principles of the modern church growth movement is that you need to "target" you audience; you need to pick which community you want to reach and then tailor your outreach and programs to appeal to that group.

The gospel gets turned into a product which is packaged and sold.

We have consciously avoided that trap and refuse to target a certain socio-economic or ethnic group.

Our target is people.

To the lost we seek to lead them TO Jesus.

The saved, we seek to lead them IN Jesus.

We don't want to be a white church, a brown church, a black church, or a yellow or red church.

We want to be a church where God adds daily those who are being saved.

**12 Therefore, as *the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;***

**13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.***

This picture of putting off and putting on is a frequent one in Paul's letters.

It flows out of his constant exhortation to be what we really are in Christ.

We are new creatures – the old has passed and the new has come.

So be what you are.

Just like you would take off an old set of dirty, smelly, sweat-stained work-clothes, take a nice hot shower and then put on a new set of nice, clean, fresh clothes – so we are to strip off those habits and attitudes that marked

our lives BC and to put on all the traits and virtues the Holy Spirit stands beside us and holds out for us to put on.

Earlier, Paul told us some stuff to put away.

Here he tells us some stuff to put on.

*Tender mercies* – being merciful in a tender and quiet manner.

*Kindness*; being considerate, treating carefully.

*Humility* – forgetting self!

*Meekness* – holding yourself in check – not overstepping the bounds of what is right in getting others to do something.

*Longsuffering* – being able to suffer long! An absolutely essential trait in this fallen world and as a culture slides into more obvious rebellion against God.

*Bearing With One Another* – having an attitude that is not easily perturbed!

*Forgiving one another* – This will be my text for Sunday so I will leave till then.

**14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.  
[completion]**

If love fills the heart and counsels the mind, then all the rest of these things will fall in to place.

The love that Paul refers to here is *agape* – the kind of unselfish love that seeks the highest good of the one loved with no thought of what will be received in return.

Agape is not human love – it is God’s kind of love and the only way we can every have it is if the Holy Spirit indwells us.

It is not a love *we* love with – it is a love that God loves *through* us.

**15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.**

This is a call to committed spiritual unity that stands guard against anything that would disturb that unity.

Disunity is rarely caused by attacks from without – it comes from factions and conflicts within.

Peace among the brethren is safeguarded when we each watch out for our own hearts and take diligent care that the enemy or our flesh never surfaces to divide us from one another.

**16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.**

I love the picture these words paint.

What do you see when you read v. 16?

I see people who are well acquainted with the scriptures.

The evidence that they are well acquainted with them is that they are successful at living – that’s what wisdom is all about!

I see people loving one another, and in their conversation, they both listen intently and then when they speak, they use the Word of God as their base and guide.

I see them joining together in songs of praise and worship that are heart-felt and sincere.

- 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**

There's a good test for what we do – can we honestly say it was for the glory of God?

Does the name of Jesus rightly belong there?

Some of you are struggling with choices right now and you don't know what to do.

Some of you have made choices recently, and tonight you are struggling with them because you question if they were right.

Consider this – Does Jesus name fit on it?

Paul says, "*Whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

At the end of each sentence can you say, "in Jesus name"?

Now Paul is going to get real specific in how the life of the new man is lived out. He breaks that new life down into the different roles we play in life.

- 18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.**

- 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.**

I won't go in to a lot of depth here because we covered these in much depth when we were studying through Ephesians.

Regarding the role of the husband and wife, if you weren't here, I'd encourage you to get a copy of the marriage series we did a few months back.

Simply put – the Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, establishes the principle of leadership and authority in the home.

The husband leads, so the wife and children are in submission to that God-ordained headship.

Of course, his headship places on him a greater accountability before God to which he has to give answer.

His calling is to love – agape, his wife and to not allow bitterness to creep into his affection for her.

While many people today want to decry Paul's instructions here as old-fashioned and reflective of a male-dominated culture that is unenlightened and prejudicial toward women, they totally miss the point.

If Paul was merely being reflective of his times and not driven by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then he NEVER would have told husbands to love their wives and maintain a bitter free attitude toward them.

In the Roman and Greek cultures, wives were only for having a legitimate heir by – but love was reserved for the mistress or mistresses.

Bitterness was a regular feature of most pagan marriages as the wife resented her husband's philandering and he resented her bitter treatment of him.

Paul lays down a higher standard for Christian husbands and wives – love one another tenderly and make your marriage a true reflection of Jesus relation to

the Church, where the husband represents Christ and the wife represents the Church.

**20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.**

This is pretty straight-forward, but let me bring out a point here that is often missed:

Unless obedience is marked by prompt cheerfulness, it isn't real obedience.

It is mere compliance.

Obedience is an issue of the *heart*, not just the actions.

It is the duty of parents to cultivate genuine obedience in their children, not merely compliance.

A child who is taught compliance will manifest rebellion at the earliest opportunity to do so.

The child that is taught genuine obedience will know how to govern him or herself even long after the formal controls of the parental influence are removed.

Mom – Dad, when you see reluctant compliance in your child – it's time to have a talk with them.

Tell them they aren't really obeying.

Outside they may be doing what you asked but inwardly they are rebelling.

Tell them that obedience is a choice of how they will respond to what you have asked.

Tell them obedience is far more about their *attitude* than their *action*.

**21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.**

Every generation of parents faces the same challenge, and that is that we aspire for our children to do better than we have.

The downside of this is that we often push them and drive them to do things and accomplish more than we did.

We place unrealistic demands on them.

If we learned to read at 5, we want them to be reading at 4.

If we learned to ride a bike at 6, we want them riding one at 5.

If we got B's, we want them to get A's.

That's all very well and good, but when we start setting the bar so high they can't reach it, it is frustrating and causes them to get discouraged.

Specially if we then condition our love on their performance.

Now – we might never admit that we do – we say we love them anyway, even when they fail.

Great – we say that – but is that what they see?

Or do they see the disappointment on our faces – do they hear the sighs – do we turn away when they stumble and fall short of perfection?

Paul is telling dads not to set the bar too high.

**22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.**

**23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,**

**24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for**

**you serve the Lord Christ.**

These words, applied to slaves and servants, really apply to all of us because to be a Christian is to be a servant.

His point is a simple one – no matter what your occupation – don't just work for the approval of man.

Employ yourself in the service of God.

Don't seek to just please people – seek to please the Lord.

I love the story Pastor Errol Hale tells about his days as a painter and wall-paperer. [The little piece of wall paper that goes behind the toilet.]

That's the Lord's piece.

V. 23 has been a precious verse to me since the first days of my commitment to Christ.

**23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,**

If something is worth doing – then it is worth doing with all you got!

Life is for living friends – not for frittering away in meaningless, bored pursuits void of passion.

I like what Martin Luther said, "I you sin, sin boldly!"

He wasn't condoning sin – he was condemning mediocrity and that kind of laissez-faire mentality toward life that sees everything in greys and deals with life in a lazy and half-hearted manner.

Paul says, "Whatever you do, do it *heartily*, [with all your heart] as to the Lord and not to men."

Ecclesiastes 9:10 puts it this way . . .

**Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.**

Several years ago on an extremely hot day, a crew of men were working on the road bed of a railroad when they were interrupted by a slow moving train.

The train ground to a stop and a window in the last car -- a custom made air conditioned car -- was raised.

A booming, friendly voice called out, "Dave, is that you?"

Dave Anderson, the crew chief called back, "Sure is, Jim, and it's really good to see you."

With that pleasant exchange, Dave Anderson was invited to join Jim Murphy, the president of the railroad, for a visit.

For over an hour the men exchanged pleasantries and then shook hands warmly as the train pulled out.

Dave Anderson's crew immediately surrounded him and to a man expressed astonishment that he knew Jim Murphy, the president of the railroad as a personal friend.

Dave then explained that over 20 years earlier he and Jim Murphy had started to work for the railroad on the same day.

One of the men, half jokingly and half seriously asked Dave why he was still working out in the hot sun and Jim Murphy had gotten to be president.

Rather wistfully Dave explained, "twenty-three years ago I went to work for \$1.75 an hour and Jim Murphy went to work for the railroad."

Are you living for a monetary wage, or are you living for the Kingdom?

Is each day that dawns just another 24 hours to endure – or is it another day to invest in something eternal.

Is the height and breadth and depth of your life defined by your house, your car, and your job or is it the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Live Christian – Live!

**25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.**

This verse needs to be understood in it's context.

Paul is still speaking to servants.

The point is that while the Christian servant who serves the Lord with his or her whole heart will receive a great reward from God, the lazy servant who merely does enough to get by and frequently cuts corners, will get caught and be punished by their master for their shoddy workmanship.

## **CONCLUSION**

Paul paints a picture of the Christian life in this chapter that is clearly a cut above the life of the typical unbeliever.

And the picture he paints reminds us that as Christians, we ARE different from the world.

Does our lifestyle, does our living stand true to that?

I want people to look at us as say – “You’re different and I like what I see.”

The quality of our lives ought to punch wide holes in the emptiness of this hollow culture we find ourselves in.

May God, by His grace and the empowering of His Holy Spirit let us Live the Life.