

COL. 3:5 – 4:18

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VI. Living in Light of Who They Are in Christ (3:5-17)

A. Put Away the Sins of the Past (3:5-11)

1. **⁵Therefore, put to death the earthly parts: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.**

a. "Therefore" shows that the command is based on the preceding statements. The resurrection life, the life of the new order which will be fully revealed on the last day, is to shine through in the present.

b. Literally, Paul commands them to put to death "the members (or limbs) which are upon the earth." He is thinking of the practices and attitudes to which their bodily activity and strength had been devoted in their old life.

c. He is urging a death to selfishness, a shifting of the center of one's personality from self to Christ.

2. Specific sins

a. sexual immorality¹ - In this context, it probably refers to illegitimate sexual intercourse, which included sex outside of marriage. This is always emphatically forbidden (1 Thess. 4:3; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 5:10ff, 6:9ff; 2 Cor. 12:21; Eph. 5:3).

b. impurity - Occurs frequently with the first term and stresses its moral impurity or contamination. It is broader than simply the act of intercourse; it denotes any immoral sexual conduct.

¹ As D. A. Carson states in "Matthew" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 8:414:

[I]t must be admitted that the word *porneia* itself is very broad. In unambiguous contexts it can on occasion refer to a specific kind of sexual sin. Yet even then this is possible only because the specific sexual sin belongs to the larger category of sexual immorality. *Porneia* covers the entire range of such sins (cf. TDNT, 6:579-95; BAGD, s.v.; Joseph Jensen, "Does *porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina," *NovTest* 20 [1978]: 161-184) and should not be restricted unless the context requires it.

c. lust - Shameful passion that leads to sexual excesses, uncontrolled sexual urges (obsessed).

d. evil desire - Longing for what is wrong, for what is ungodly.

(1) It is important to understand that not all desire is evil. Sexual desire, for example, is a natural and proper part of being human. That desire is part of what draws men and women together in marriage, and it obviously serves in procreation.

(2) Don't punish yourself for having natural desires, but be careful not to let them give birth to sin. Be alert and wise.

e. greediness or insatiableness

(1) This could have sexual overtones, as the other terms seem to have, but normally it refers to the sin of constantly desiring to acquire material things, an insatiable desire for things of this world.

(2) which is idolatry - The object of greed is placed at the center of one's attention and devotion.

3. ⁶Because of these things the wrath of God is coming [on the sons of disobedience],

a. This is God's holy judgment of wrath against sin.

b. It serves as a solemn reminder of what would have been their lot if they continued in their former pagan ways. It indirectly, if not expressly, gives added reason for avoiding these sins.

4. ⁷among whom you also once walked, when you were living in these things – Their former lives were characterized by such vices.

5. ⁸But now you too must put away all these things: wrath, anger, malice, slander, and foul talk out of your mouth – They must put away everything rooted in the old life which was insensitive to God, including the following specifics (but also the list in 3:5):

6. Specific sins

a. wrath and anger - There is little difference between them. They refer to outbursts of temper that destroy harmony in human relationships.

b. malice - This is a deliberate intention to harm

c. slander - This is telling falsehoods about another person, defaming his character.

d. foul talk out of your mouth - This covers obscene speech or abusive language

e. **⁹Do not lie to each other** – Christians must not lie.

(1) **having taken off the old man with his practices** -The baptized have been transferred into Christ's domain and are called to live accordingly. The "old man" who was not kingdom conscious is gone.

(2) **¹⁰and having put on the new [man], who is being renewed in knowledge in accordance with [the] image of the one who created him,**

(a) In baptism a new man was born, one profoundly linked to the heavenly order. This new creation is realized (or actualized or manifested) through ongoing renewal after God's image (and thus in the pattern of Christ who is God's image absolutely).

(b) This new person, this new nature, that was put on at the new birth is continually being renewed in accordance with the Creator's image.

7. **¹¹where there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave [and] free, but Christ is all and is in all.**

a. In Christ, in the realm of the new man (in the new humanity), the barriers of division are abolished. Racial, religious, cultural, and social barriers are a breeding ground for suspicion and distrust which can so easily yield the sins of 3:8-9 (and probably were doing so).

b. Barbarians were those who did not speak Greek, and Scythians were extreme examples of barbarians, little better than savages (more like the modern sense of "barbarian").

c. The differences do not cease to exist, but they must be regarded as irrelevant to the question of love, honor, and respect to be shown. As barriers they deny the creation of humankind in the image of God.

d. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all Christians, regardless of race, class, or background.

B. Put on the Graces of Christ (3:12-17)

1. ¹²**Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with** – As God's chosen ones who have already put on the new man, they must don the graces which are characteristic of him. Shabby clothes of the old age are to be replaced by beautiful robes appropriate for their new position.

2. Specifics to be put on

a. **a heart of compassion** – This a deep sensitivity to the needs and sorrows of others.

b. **kindness** – As paraphrased by someone, this is "the art of being a dear."

c. **humility** – This refers to true humility as opposed to the showy humility techniques of the heretics.

d. **gentleness** – This is to be shown in one's approach to people.

e. **patience** – This is to be shown in one's reaction to people.

3. ¹³**bearing with one another** – This is mutual tolerance and "putting up with."

4. **and, if anyone may have a complaint against anyone, forgiving each other.**

a. Note that this is all inclusive. There occasionally will be cause for complaint against others and against us and forgiveness must be freely given.

b. **Just as the Lord forgave you, so also you [should do].**

(1) It is utterly inappropriate for one who knows the joy and release of being forgiven to refuse to share that blessing with another.

(2) It is presumptuous to refuse to forgive one whom Christ has already forgiven.

5. ¹⁴**And to all these things [add] love, which is a perfectly uniting bond**

a. Love is the quality that binds the differing members of the Christian community into a harmonious, functioning body.

b. Paul is concerned here with their corporate life (see, vv. 9, 11, 13). We are one body because we share the one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13), but love is a key to experiencing that reality. It serves as both glue and the grease.

6. ¹⁵**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which [peace] indeed you were called in [the] one body.**

a. Paul urges them to be governed in their inner being by the peace Christ both embodies and brings.

b. If they are subject to Christ, the peace he imparts must regulate their relations with one another. Harmony prevails among the parts of a healthy body. God called them to peace in the unity of the body of Christ.

7. **And be thankful** – Peter O'Brien notes that for Paul the ε↔χαριτω word group means not simply a grateful attitude or disposition but a gratitude that finds outward expression in thanksgiving. Paul tends to emphasize the public aspect of thanksgiving.

8. ¹⁶**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and instructing one another in all wisdom,**

a. The emphasis of "in you" is corporate; the word is to richly dwell among them as a Christian community. I think James D. G. Dunn is correct in seeing this section as focusing on elements of Christian worship they should be enjoying. He writes in *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 235-236:

One feature of the Colossian "philosophy" which seemingly was proving attractive, however, was its adherents' experience of worship, of a worship shared, it would appear, with the angels (see 2:18, 23). Not surprisingly, therefore, this sequence of parenthesis is rounded off by a description of the worship which the Colossian Christians should be enjoying and, by implication, should find sufficiently fulfilling – at least enough to reduce the attractiveness of the Jewish angel worship.

The elements of Christian worship commended are not altogether surprising: "the word of Christ," teaching and admonition, and singing and thanksgiving, elements which have been a feature of typical Christian worship from the beginning till now.

b. They are to be steeped in Jesus' teaching, Christian teaching based on him. The need for this in Colossae is clear. This rich dwelling of Christ's word is fostered by teaching and instruction about him (2:3 - "in whom is all the hidden treasures of wisdom"; 1:28 - "teaching everyone in all wisdom").

9. singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in your hearts to God with gratitude.²

a. This is another means by which the word of Christ dwells among the community. Singing helps imbed that word in the community.

b. This probably refers, in the first instance, to the singing of praise at church meetings. Pliny's report to Emperor Trajan (A.D. 111-12) says Christians in Bithynia met on a fixed day and "recited an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God" (Bruce, 158).

c. It is doubtful whether any sharp demarcation is intended between the three types, but perhaps "psalms" are from the O.T. Psalter, "hymns" are Christian compositions, and "spiritual songs" are spontaneous songs (Spirit-inspired) voicing holy aspirations.

10. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or in action, [do] all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

a. These general instructions are summed up in an exhortation of universal scope, covering every aspect of life. This is a basic principle of Christian living which may be applied to varying situations of life as they arise (see 1 Cor. 10:31). As Dunn states (p. 240): "[T]his attitude of praise, worship, and thankfulness thus commended is not a merely inward attitude or confined to what happens when Christians gather for worship. The same attitude should lie behind and come to expression in everything done by Christians, both in their speech and in their actions."

b. Our relationship to God embraces our entire lives. The question needs to be asked, "What is the Christian thing to do here? Can I do it without compromising my Christian confession? Can I do it (that is to say) 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' - whose reputation is at stake in the conduct of his known followers? And can I thank God the Father through him for the opportunity of doing this thing?" (Bruce, 160).

C. Behavior in the Christian Household (3:18 – 4:1)

1. Wives and husband (3:18-19) - Wives, be subject to [your] husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love [your] wives and do not be bitter toward them. See my online articles "Some Thoughts on the Submission of Wives" and "Some Thoughts on Husbands' Responsibilities."

² "The phrase *ejn tai*" *kardiva*" *uJmw'n* ('in your hearts') [in Col. 3:16] is often connected with *ejn th'* *cavriti*, giving the sense of 'with gratitude [or grace] in your hearts' (NIV, NRSV; cf. NASB), but it most naturally modifies the participle that immediately precedes it. Thus, the phrase should read, 'singing in your hearts.'" David F. Detwiler, "Church Music and Colossians 3:16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (July-September 2001), 364.

2. Children and parents (3:20-21) - **Children, obey [your] parents in everything for this is pleasing in [the] Lord. Fathers, do not antagonize your children, lest they lose heart.** O'Brien remarks:

Christian children are enjoined to obey their parents in all things. Such obedience is all of a piece with their submission to Christ as the following words show: "*for this is pleasing to the Lord.*" At the same time parents, especially fathers, are not to irritate or provoke their children lest the latter become discouraged or think that it is useless trying to please the former within the life of the home. There should be firm guidance, not servitude (cf. Eph. 6:4).

3. Slaves and masters (3:22 – 4:1)

a. **²²Slaves, obey [your] masters according to the flesh in everything, not as men-pleasers who obey for show when being watched, but in sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever task you perform, work from [the] soul, as working for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; you are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the one who does wrong will be repaid [for] what wrong he did, and there is no favoritism.** Christian slaves are not to obey their earthly masters only when being watched but are to be conscientious servants; they are to work as working for the Lord. It is the Lord from whom they will receive an inheritance, and it is the Lord who will impartially repay them for whatever wrong they do. (For further comments on the issue of slavery, see my online study on Philemon.)

b. **Masters, give to [your] slaves what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.** Masters are commanded to treat their slaves justly and fairly. O'Brien states: "The motivation for this is basically the same as the slave's motive for obeying his master: both alike have a greater Master in heaven. Both owe obedience to that heavenly Lord. And thus their own relationships with each other are to be understood in the light of this."

VII. Concluding exhortation and request (4:2-6)

A. **²Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving** – "Being watchful" may refer to watching for the Lord's return, watching for answers to prayer, or more likely, being alert for spiritual assaults that demand the power and protection of prayer.

B. **³also praying at the same time about us, that God may open to us a door for the word, [a door] to speak the mystery of Christ, on account of which I also have been chained, ⁴so that I may reveal it as it is proper for me to speak.** Paul requests prayers for his missionary work, specifically that God will grant him an opening for preaching and that he will use that opportunity effectively. If Paul needed such prayers, who of us dare go without them?

C. ⁵Conduct yourselves wisely toward those outside, making the most of the opportunity. ⁶Let your speech always be with grace, having been seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

VIII. Closing (4:7-18)

A. Tychichus and Onesimus (4:7-9)

1. ⁷Tychichus, the beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow-slave in the Lord, will make known to you everything about me. ⁸I sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know the things about us and [that] he may strengthen your hearts. Tychichus is a living letter, one who will tell them more about Paul and his work than would be practical to put in a written letter.

2. ⁹[He is coming] with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is [one] of you. They will make known to you all the things here. Onesimus, of course, is the subject of the letter to Philemon.

B. Greetings from Paul's companions (4:10-14)

1. ¹⁰Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner greets you, and [so does] Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him) ¹¹and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only ones of the circumcision who are fellow workers in the kingdom of God, who became a comfort to me. They are the only Jewish Christians in Paul's immediate circle of co-workers. Mark no doubt refers to John Mark (see Acts 12:12, 25, 13:13, 15:36-41).

2. ¹²Epaphras, who is one of you [and] a slave of Christ [Jesus], greets you. [He is] always struggling in [his] prayers on your behalf, in order that you may stand mature, having been filled with all the will of God. ¹³For I testify for him that he has great toil for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Wright comments: "Epaphras is praying (like Paul) that the young church will understand what it is that God is doing and order their lives accordingly, growing into well-grounded Christian (and human) maturity."

3. ¹⁴Luke, the beloved doctor, greets you, and Demas [does also]. Demas was later to desert Paul because he loved the world (2 Tim. 4:10).

C. Request to greet others and instruction about letters (4:15-16)

1. ¹⁵Greet the brothers in Laodicea and Nympha and the church in her house. There is an issue as to whether Nympha is a male or female. It seems Paul asks that all the Christians in Laodicea be greeted and then mentions Nympha by name because he has some acquaintance with her. She apparently hosts a house church in Laodicea.

2. ¹⁶**When this letter has been read among you, see to it that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you also read the letter from Laodicea.** "Paul intends his letters to be read out in the assembled church and thus to function as authoritative" (Wright, 159). "[T]he letter from Laodicea" probably is a letter Paul wrote to the Laodiceans which the Colossians were to receive from them for reading in the church in Colossae. It was either lost (possibly destroyed in the earthquake in A.D. 60-61) or has been preserved under another name (the most likely candidate being Ephesians). It is not possible to reach any solid conclusion on the matter.

D. Instruction to Archippus (4:17) - ¹⁷**Tell Archippus, "See that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord."** Archippus is urged to complete the specifically Christian task he had been given. The particulars of that task are unknown.

E. Final, personal greeting (4:18) - ¹⁸**The greeting [is] by my hand, Paul's. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.** In calling them to "remember [his] chains," Paul solicits their prayers as well as their interest and concern.