

with God. The fourth harmful teaching is the practice of abstaining from things to earn merit with God (asceticism). Some examples are: fasting to force God's hand, living in isolation to avoid temptation, and self-mutilation to mortify the flesh.

"Any system of religion which is unwilling to accept Jesus Christ as the only and all-sufficient Savior is an indulgence of the flesh, a giving in to man's sinful conceit, as if he, by his own contrivances, were able to perfect Christ's [(supposed)] imperfect work. It makes matters worse instead of better."¹

"When we make Jesus Christ and the Christian revelation only *part* of a total religious system or philosophy, we cease to give Him the preeminence. When we strive for 'spiritual perfection' or 'spiritual fullness' by means of formulas, disciplines, or rituals, we go backward instead of forward. Christian believers must beware of mixing their Christian faith with such alluring things as yoga, transcendental meditation, Oriental mysticism, and the like. We must also beware of 'deeper life' teachers who offer a system for victory and fullness that bypasses devotion to Jesus Christ. In all things, He must have the preeminence!"²

Reformed theology has historically taught that a true Christian will never renounce his or her faith in Christ. The fact that Paul wrote this epistle to Christians—who were in danger of doing precisely that—should prove that this teaching is wrong. Nowhere in the epistle did he make a distinction between professing Christians, who were supposedly the objects of his warnings, and true Christians. Rather, he appealed to the Colossians, *as genuine Christians*, to watch out for this real danger. Genuine Christians can be deceived by false teaching, even teaching concerning Christ.

IV. EXHORTATIONS TO PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING 3:1—4:6

Paul moved from doctrine to practice, from the truth to its application in daily living. He proceeded to explain "true asceticism."

¹Hendriksen, p. 133.

²Wiersbe, 2:104.

"Now he proceeds to delineate the true Christian life which results from the true doctrine; and he shows that this is the opposite of the life the Judaizers try to live in accord with their doctrine. ... It would be a misunderstanding of Paul's purpose to regard this part as a general sketch of Christian ethics."¹

Paul began this next major section of the epistle by setting forth a basic principle. Then he explained the proper method of living. This led him to discuss the Christian's fundamental relationships. He concluded this section by summarizing the essential practice.

A. THE BASIC PRINCIPLE 3:1-4

To encourage his readers to turn away from their false teachers, Paul reminded them of their union with Christ. He also urged them to continue living in keeping with their position in Christ.

3:1-2 Again we could translate "If" as "Since" (first class condition). It introduces another "in Christ" position that Paul assumed to be true for the sake of his argument (cf. 2:20). Paul returned to his thought about the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (2:9-15). Another view is that Paul was referring to the believer being raised up with Christ at the believer's conversion and or baptism (cf. Eph. 2:6).² Two present imperatives identify the Christian's responsibilities: "seek" (v. 1) and "set your affection on" (v. 2). Since God raised us with Christ, and we are already as good as seated with Him in heaven, we should "keep seeking" heavenly things. Keep looking up (cf. Heb. 12:12:1-2)

"The horizon of spiritual attainment grows broader as the believer advances higher and further into the will of God."³

"Heaven and earth are contrary one to the other, and the prevalence of our affection to one will

¹Lenski, p. 148.

²Peake, 3:36.

³Gromacki, p. 127.

proportionably [*sic*] weaken our affection to the other."¹

"The pilgrim is not to despise the comforts which he may meet with by the way, but he is not to tarry among them, or leave them with regret."²

"This preoccupation with 'things which are above' is not born of wistfulness, as though one can find relief from the pressures of the world only by looking to a better world. It is not an effort to detach oneself, to find escape. Rather, it is the attitude found in Christ during the days of His flesh, who lived in the bosom of the Father even as He continued His strenuous labors among the children of men."³

"The description of Christ as 'seated at the right hand of God' is another implied rejoinder to those who were seeking to diminish Christ's role as mediator, inasmuch as the right hand of God is a metaphor for the place of supreme privilege and divine authority."⁴

Second, we should continually "set" our minds on the "things above" (of heaven; i.e., our spiritual blessings and hope, our Savior's desires, etc.), rather than on the things that are only physical and temporal. They should occupy a large place in our thought lives.

"You must not only *seek* heaven; you must also *think* heaven."⁵

"... from now on the Christian will see everything in the light and against the background of eternity. He will no longer live as if this world was

¹Henry, p. 1873.

²Eadie, p. 215.

³Harrison, p. 75.

⁴Vaughan, p. 209.

⁵Lightfoot, p. 207.

all that mattered; he will see this world against the background of the larger world of eternity. ...

"He will, for instance, set giving above getting, serving above ruling, forgiving above avenging. The Christian will see things, not as they appear to men, but as they appear to God."¹

"The Christian has to keep his feet upon the earth, but his head in the heavens. He must be heavenly-minded here on earth and so help to make earth like heaven."²

This is the legitimate mysticism of Paul.³ The two commands differ, in that the first emphasizes the more practical pursuits of life, whereas the second stresses the whole bent of the life. The first is outward and the second inward.

Intellectual brilliance, advanced education, or unusual physical strength are not required for a Christian to become great in God's estimation. What He requires is faithful perseverance in the basics of the Christian life. Any Christian can do this, since we all have the help of the Lord Himself.

I remember listening to sports commentator John Madden's analysis of the success of the Boston Celtics' basketball team several years ago. He said that the reason they had been so successful was that they constantly practiced the basics of good basketball, such as getting down the court fast, keeping their hands up, and following up on their shots. He said most teams could be as good if they executed the basics as consistently as the Celtics did. The same is true in the Christian life. Unfortunately, we are often tempted to abandon the basics for what appears to be more esoteric and interesting.

¹Barclay, p. 177.

²Robertson, 4:500.

³See Stewart, pp. 147-200.

Jesus Christ's present rule on His Father's throne over the church is not the same as His rule on David's throne over David's kingdom, which will begin when He returns to earth.¹

"Christ's sitting at God's right hand is the exercise of all the majesty and the power of deity according to his human nature."²

"That is a place, heaven itself, where a glorified Man, Himself God the Son, is seated, His work of salvation finished."³

3:3 Our "life" is "hidden" away "with Christ." This statement, that the believer died with Christ in the past (aorist tense in Greek), and continues to live with Christ in the present (perfect tense), suggests three thoughts: (1) Our life draws nourishment from secret springs (cf. John 14:19; Phil. 3:20). (2) Our life is as safe as a deposit locked in a bank vault. (3) Our life is one with Christ, who is in the bosom of the Father.⁴

"The aorist is simply a powerful metaphor for the fact that when they believed in Christ in baptism they were putting their previous way of life to death and having it buried out of sight. Consequently, it should no longer be a factor in their new way of life."⁵

For the false teachers, the treasures of wisdom were hidden in their secret books (Gr. *apokryphoi*), but for believers, Christ is

¹See Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):81-82; John F. Walvoord, "Biblical Kingdoms Compared and Contrasted," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, especially pp. 89-90; David A. Dean, "A Study of the Enthronement of Christ in Acts 2 and 3" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992); John A. McLean, "Did Jesus Correct the Disciples' View of the Kingdom?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:602 (April-June 1994):215-27; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, pp. 81-82; and John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pp. 224-26.

²Lenski, p. 150.

³Wuest, 1:4:217.

⁴Johnson, 479:212-13.

⁵Dunn, p. 206.

the treasury of wisdom, and our "life" is "hidden" (Gr. *kekrypta*) in Him.

3:4

"Sometimes we say of a man, 'Music is his life—Sport is his life—He lives for his work.' Such a man finds life and all that life means in music, in sport, in work, as the case may be. For the Christian, Christ is his life. Jesus Christ dominates his thought and fills his life."¹

"Whenever" indicates that a revelation of Christ in the future is certain, but its time is unknown. The Greek word *phaneroo* ("revealed") stresses the open display of Christ at His coming. This is probably a reference to the Rapture. When He is revealed to us then, our lives will no longer be hidden in Him, but "revealed" for what they are in our glorification ("with Him in glory"). The Rapture will be a glorious revelation of Christ to us, but it will also reveal us in our glorified state. Now our eternal life is hidden (v. 3), but then it will be manifest.

"In Colossians ... there is an emphasis on realized eschatology. Within the 'already—not yet' tension the stress falls upon the former, called forth by the circumstances of the letter. ... The 'already' of salvation needed to be asserted repeatedly over against those who were interested in the heavenly realm but who had false notions about it, believing it could be reached by legalistic observances, knowledge, visionary experiences and the like. . .

"But if the 'already' pole received the emphasis, the 'not yet' of salvation still needed to be mentioned, and here in verse 4 we find a clear future reference."²

"This particular language—that of divesting and reinvesting—was no doubt dramatically

¹Barclay, p. 179. Cf. Phil. 1:21.

²O'Brien, *Colossians ...*, pp. 171-72.

symbolized by the baptizand's unclenching before immersion and reclenching after it."¹

In view of this prospect, the Colossians and we ourselves need not pursue another system that claims to provide more than we have in Christ. God has provided all we need, both for acceptance with Him and for godly living in Christ. All we need to do is act on (apply) the implications of these truths, which Paul proceeded to help his readers do.

B. THE PROPER METHOD 3:5-17

"3:1-4 has provided the perspective from which the daily life of the Colossian Christians should be lived out. Now follows more specific advice that should help them the better to carry out the thematic exhortation to 'walk in him' (2:6)."²

1. Things to put off 3:5-11

On the basis of their position in Christ, Paul urged his readers to separate from the practices of their former way of life. He did this to enable them to realize in their experience all that Jesus Christ could produce in and through them. Three imperatives indicate Paul's main points: consider as dead (lit. put to death, v. 5), put aside (v. 8), and do not lie (v. 9).

3:5 In view of our actual position (v. 1), we should adopt a certain attitude toward our present phase of experience. This will help us to become what we already are *in Christ*. The key word translated "consider ... as dead" is an aorist imperative, and means "put to death." There must be a decisive initial act (aorist tense) that introduces a settled attitude (present tense).³

"God in salvation has broken the power of the evil nature over the believer's physical body. Now, the believer is charged with the responsibility of maintaining in his experience that state of liberation, and, as the behests of the evil nature

¹C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles ...*, p. 114.

²Dunn, p. 211.

³Bruce, *Commentary on ...*, p. 267.

come before him, he is to put them to death, that is, refuse to obey them."¹

"Despite the power of their having been identified with Christ in his death, there were still things, parts of their old lives, habits of hand and mind, which tied them 'to the earth' and hindered the outworking of the 'mind set on what is above.'"²

To put something to death is never pleasant. It is not the same as practicing asceticism, however. Asceticism says that I, by my own will, can subdue the flesh simply by denying its desires. Christian self-control says that I can subdue the flesh by relying on the Holy Spirit to empower me to deny its desires.

"This practice of reckoning dead finds an excellent illustration in the gardener's practice of grafting. Once the graft has been made on the old stock the gardener is careful to snip off any shoot from the old stock that may appear. So, in the believer's life, since he has now been grafted into the Last Adam and His new life, he must by the Spirit put to death any products of the old life that may appear (cf. Rom. 8:13)."³

"The false doctrine of the Gnostics had failed to check sensual indulgence (ii. 23). The true doctrine of the Apostle has power to kill the whole carnal man."⁴

Paul's first list deals with sexual practices. Lists of virtues and vices were common in the ethical systems of the ancient world, and the imagery of putting off and on was also well-known.⁵

¹Wuest, 1:4:219.

²Dunn, p. 212.

³Johnson, 481:24.

⁴Lightfoot, p. 208.

⁵Dunn, p. 211; O'Brien, *Colossians ...*, pp. 179-81. Cf. Rom. 1:29-32; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-23; Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 4:3; et al. See René A. López,

- "Immorality" (Gr. *porneia*) refers to illicit sexual intercourse.
- "Impurity" (*akatharsia*) in any form is in view, especially moral impurity in this context.
- "Passion" (*pathos*) means uncontrolled illegitimate desire, "like an inward fire that is kindled in the heart."¹
- "Evil desire" (*epithymian kaken*) means any evil desire in a more general sense, reaching out for some forbidden thing to satisfy itself.
- "Greed" (*pleonexian*, lit. "desire to have more") is any materialistic desire, including lust, that disregards the rights of others. It is "the arrogant and ruthless assumption that all other persons and things exist for one's own benefit."²

"Every sin is basically selfishness, the worship of self instead of the worship of God, the substitution of self for Christ, in one's affections (cf. Col. 3:1-3)."³

The various vice lists in the New Testament, in their different contexts, reveal to some extent the social conditions that prevailed in the various places concerned.⁴

3:6-7

Such behavior will bring God's "wrath" eventually. That is, God will discipline both Christians and non-believers alike ("sons of disobedience") who practice these things. These activities normally characterize the unsaved, so Christians must lay them aside (v. 8; cf. Matt. 5:29-30; Rom. 8:13; Eph. 5:3-14)—or face severe discipline.

"The Christian must kill self-centeredness; he must regard as dead all private desires and ambitions. There must be in his life a radical

"A Study of Pauline Passages with Vice Lists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):301-16.

¹Lenski, p. 158.

²G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, p. 205.

³Hendriksen, p. 147.

⁴C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles ...*, p. 117.

transformation of the will, and a radical shift of the centre. Everything which would keep him from fully obeying God and fully surrendering to Christ must be surgically excised."¹

The phrase "the wrath of God" (v. 6) is usually eschatological in the New Testament, and refers to the Tribulation period (cf. 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rom. 5:9). That is probably one of its references here, too.

3:8-9 Paul's second list deals with sins of speech:

- "Anger" (Gr. *orge*) is a settled attitude of hostility.
- "Wrath" (*thymos*) means a verbal outburst of evil passion.
- "Malice" (*kakia*) is ill will, a vicious disposition that results in hurt to one's neighbor.

"We have three generations of sin here: anger cherished begets wrath, and wrath if not judged begets malice."²

- "Slander" (*blasphemia*) refers to insulting, injurious, malicious speech in general.
- "Abusive speech" (*aischrologia*) means filthy, disgraceful, dishonorable speech.
- *Lying* (*pseudesthe*) refers to deceptive, distorting, untruthful speech.

The imperative command against lying is very strong. Paul literally said: "Never lie!" The reason given (v. 9) applies to all the preceding activities. The "old self" is the person the Christian was before God united him or her with Christ.

3:10 The "new self" is who the Christian is after his or her union with Christ. One writer argued that "the new man" refers to

¹Barclay, pp. 180-81.

²Ironside, p. 136.

the church, the body of Christ.¹ But this is a minority view. Verse 10 describes the process of individual sanctification, in which the new self is being "renewed" or "renovated" into Christ's image. "True knowledge" (*epignosis*) is full knowledge of God and His will. Sanctification results in increasing likeness to Christ. Only by sanctification can people attain to the full image of God and Christ that God created them to bear (Gen. 1:26-28).

3:11 There is *no* national or racial "*distinction*" that determines one's acceptability to God or that puts him or her in a better position in relation to God, nor is there any religious, cultural, or social distinction. Jesus Christ is essentially "all" that we need for new birth and growth, in contrast to the additives that the Judaizers promoted. He indwells every believer and permeates all the relationships of life. "In all" probably means that Christ "is everything" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28; Gal. 3:28).²

A "barbarian" was one who did not know Greek; his or her language was foreign. They came mainly from Western Asia and the Black Sea region.³ "Scythians" originated from the Black Sea and Caspian Sea area, and the Greeks thought of them as the lowest type of barbarian.⁴ Paul often used "Greek" to describe anyone who practiced Greek culture, not necessarily a Gentile or a pagan or a native Greek (cf. Rom. 1:13-16).⁵ Whereas to the Jews, the world was divided into Jews and Gentiles, to the Greeks and Romans it was divided into Greeks and barbarians: those who were educated in Greek culture and those who were not.⁶

"The new man lives in a new environment where all racial, national, religious, cultural and social distinctions are no more. Rather, Christ is now all that matters and in all who believe. The statement

¹Darrell L. Bock, "'The New Man' as Community in Colossians and Ephesians," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 158-60.

²See C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles ...*, pp. 121-22.

³*Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴See Hendriksen, pp. 153-54; and McGee, 5:358.

⁵Lenski, p. 164.

⁶See Lightfoot, pp. 215-16.

is one of the most inclusive in the New Testament and is amply supported by the pre-eminence of Christ in New Testament theology. It is a particularly appropriate statement for the Colossians and affords an excellent summary statement of the teaching of the letter. There are three realms, relevant to the Colossians, in which He is all. He is everything in *salvation*; hence there is no place for angelic mediation in God's redemptive work (cf. 1:18-22; 2:18). He is everything in *sanctification*; hence legality and asceticism are out of place in the Christian life (cf. 2:16-23). He is our life (3:3-4). Finally, He is everything necessary for human *satisfaction*; hence there is no need for philosophy, or the deeds of the old man (1:26-28; 2:3, 9-10). He fills the whole life, and all else is hindering and harmful."¹

2. Things to put on 3:12-17

Paul urged his readers not only to divest themselves of behavior that is inappropriate to their union with Christ, but also to clothe themselves with attitudes and actions that are appropriate. He did so to complete their understanding of their responsibilities as Christians.

"The emphasis in this section is on *motives*. Why should we put off the old deeds and put on the qualities of the new life? Paul explained four motives that ought to encourage us to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)."²

"... I have written a message on this passage of Scripture, and I have called it, 'What the Well-Dressed Christian Will Wear This Year.'"³

3:12-14 Paul reminded the Colossians of who they were ("those ... chosen by God"), because an appreciation of *who one is*

¹Johnson, 481:28.

²Wiersbe, 2:137.

³McGee, 5:358.

affects how he or she behaves. In doing prison evangelism, I have learned that many prisoners grew up hearing from their parent or parents that they would never amount to anything, and would probably end up in prison. Thinking of themselves as "losers," they became what they thought they were (cf. Prov. 23:7). God has *specialy selected* believers, has set them apart for great things, and has made them the objects of His love. In view of these privileges, the following characteristics are only reasonable:

"They deal with a believer's treatment of others, with his estimate of himself, and with his reaction to his treatment by others."¹

- "Compassion" (Gr. *splanchna oiktirmou*) shows sensitivity to those suffering and in need.
- "Kindness" (*chrestotes*) manifests itself in a sweet disposition and thoughtful interpersonal dealings.
- "Humility" (*tapeinophrosyne*) means having a realistic view of oneself, "thinking lowly of ourselves because we are so."²
- "Gentleness" (*prautes*) means not behaving harshly, arrogantly, or self-assertively—but with consideration for others.
- "Patience" (*makrothymia*) is the quality of being long-suffering, self-restraining. The following two qualities expand on the thought of patience.
- "Bearing with" one another (*anechomenoi*) means putting up with others and enduring discomfort.
- "Forgiving" (*charizomenoi*) involves not holding a grudge or grievance but letting go of it immediately.³

¹Carson, p. 86.

²C. J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon*, p. 190.

³See Lenski, pp. 171-72.

- "Love" (*agape*) means doing what is best for another person.

All these features deal with the believer's interpersonal relationships. These are the things that the Colossians, and all Christians, should concentrate on, rather than the external requirements of the Judaizers. They have been called "ordinary" (common) virtues designed to reduce or eliminate friction.¹ In interpersonal relationships especially, the life of Christ should be visible in us. "Love" is the supremely important Christian virtue.

"It is not looked upon here as containing perfection within itself, but as so uniting the other graces that it gives them perfection, and keeps them in it."²

"Love, then is 'the bond of perfection' in the sense that it is that which unites believers, causing them to move forward toward the goal of perfection."³

3:15 **Four imperatives** in verses 15-17 identify which precepts (directions; instructions) believers must follow. **The first of these is "Let rule (the peace of Christ)."** When Christians need to make choices, "the peace" that Christ produces in our hearts should be a determining factor.⁴ We should choose what will result in *peace* between us and God, and between us and one another, if such a course of action lies within God's moral will (cf. John 14:27; Rom. 12:18).

"This directive forms, with the Word of God and the witness of the indwelling Spirit, one of the most important principles of guidance in the Christian life."⁵

¹C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles ...*, p. 123.

²Eadie, p. 246.

³Hendriksen, p. 159. Cf. Lenski, p. 174.

⁴Lightfoot, p. 221.

⁵Johnson, 481:30-31.

When these three indicators line up, we can move ahead confidently. Attainment of the unity of the body of Christ ("one body") and the "peace of Christ" results in a spirit of thankfulness, that should also be expressed in our behavior.

The second imperative is: "Be thankful."

3:16

The third imperative is "Let dwell (the word of Christ)." The "word of Christ," used only here in the New Testament, is Christ's teachings, not only during His earthly ministry but also in all of Scripture.¹ His Word should permeate our whole being so that we make all decisions and plans in its light.

"... as the rabbis later pointed out, he who dwells in a house is the master of the house, not just a passing guest ..."²

"Thus we are to submit to the demands of the Christian message and let it become so deeply implanted within us as to control all our thinking."³

"The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God that we know as He talks to us and guides our lives. He can efficiently talk to us to the extent to which we know the Word. That is the language He uses."⁴

"Many saved people cannot honestly say that God's Word dwells in their hearts richly because they do not take time to read, study, and memorize it."⁵

"Teaching" is the imparting of truth, and admonishing is warning against error. We should perform these activities joyfully and with song. "Psalms" probably refers to the inspired Old Testament psalms. The word "psalms" implies that the believers sang them with musical accompaniment. "Hymns"

¹Harrison, p. 91; Wuest, 1:4:226. Cf. Eadie, p. 250.

²Dunn, p. 236.

³Vaughan, p. 216.

⁴Wuest, 1:4:226-27.

⁵Wiersbe, 2:140.

are songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. "Spiritual songs" probably refers to all types of expressions of Christian experience set to music.¹ "Thankfulness ... to God" is to typify our singing, too (cf. v. 15).²

"Whether with instrument or with voice or with both it is all for naught if the adoration is not in the heart."³

"One of the first descriptions of a Church service which we possess is that of Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia, who sent a report of the activities of the Christians to Trajan the Roman Emperor. In that report he said, 'They meet at dawn to sing a hymn to Christ as God.' The gratitude of the Church has always gone up to God in Christian praise and Christian song."⁴

"Singing ... in your hearts" probably means heartfelt singing, not unexpressed singing.⁵ Private as well as public worship is in view, however.⁶

"It has often been noticed that the Colossian passage is parallel with Ephesians 5:18-20. In the latter passage the hymns and songs are the outgrowth of the filling of the Spirit, while in Colossians they are the result of the deep assimilation of the Word of God. In other words, the Word-filled Christian is a Spirit-filled Christian, and the examination of the two passages would save us from a great deal of error on this subject. Undisciplined emphasis on the Holy Spirit is

¹Lightfoot, p. 223.

²See David F. Detwiler, "Church Music and Colossians 3:16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:631 (July-September 2001):347-69.

³Robertson, 4:505.

⁴Barclay, p. 191.

⁵Harrison, p. 94.

⁶Lightfoot, p. 223.

accompanied too frequently by shallow grounding in the Word of God."¹

3:17 This verse covers all other thoughts, words, and actions ("whatever you do in word or deed").

"The NT does not contain a detailed code of rules for the Christian, like those which were elaborated with ever-increasing particularity in rabbinical casuistry. Codes of rules, as Paul explains elsewhere (e.g., in Gal. 3:23—4:7), are suited to the period of immaturity when he and his readers were still under guardians; the son who has come to years of responsibility knows his father's will without having to be provided with a long list of 'Do's' and 'Don't's [*sic*].' What the NT does provide is those basic principles of Christian living which may be applied to all the situations of life as they arise (cf. 1 Cor. 10:21)."²

The basic principle, as opposed to a set of specific rules, is this: We should say all our words, and practice all our deeds, in harmony with the revelation of Jesus Christ, namely: under His authority and as His followers. Acting in someone's "name" comprehends everything revealed and known about the person bearing the name. Moreover, we are to *do* "all" with thanksgiving to God. The fourth imperative is implicit here in the Greek text, but the translators have supplied it in the English text: "*Do*."

"Holiness and happiness go together."³

When faced with a question about what the Christian should do, Paul taught that we should simply ask ourselves what conduct would be appropriate for one identified with Christ. "What would Jesus do?" is quite similar. This approach is vastly different from the legal one that provides a specific

¹Johnson, 481:32. Cf. Ironside, p. 153.

²Bruce, *Commentary on ...*, p. 285.

³Ironside, pp. 152-53.

command for every situation. In this contrast we see a basic difference between the New and Old Covenants.

C. THE FUNDAMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS 3:18—4:1

Paul next set forth certain principles to guide his readers in their most important interpersonal relationships. Geisler saw this section as containing exhortations to perfect the private life (3:18—4:1), the prayer life (4:2-4), and the public life (4:5-6). He also saw 4:7-18 as expressing Paul's concern to perfect the personal lives of the Colossian believers.¹ Paul wrote this instruction to enable the readers to understand what behavior is consistent with union with Christ in these relationships. This is one of several "house-rule" lists in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 5:22—6:9; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 2:18—3:7). The writings of some Apostolic Fathers also contain such lists.² Luther referred to these sections as *haustafel*, and some scholars still use this technical term when referring to these lists.

"... the earliest churches were all 'house churches' (see on 4:15), so that the model of the well-run household provided precedent for the well-run church ..."³

The apostle grouped six classes of people, in three pairs, in the following verses. In each pair, he first addressed the subordinate member, and then the one in authority. Bear in mind that Paul was speaking to people who are "in Christ" in each case.

"The Christian ethic is an ethic of *reciprocal obligation*. It is never an ethic on which all the duties are on one side."⁴

"... household life was so transformed 'in the Lord' that each person was seen as precious to God, and that husbands and masters recognized that they had duties no less than rights."⁵

¹Geisler, "Colossians," p. 683.

²See O'Brien, *Colossians ...*, pp. 214-19, for a discussion of them.

³Dunn, p. 245.

⁴Barclay, p. 192.

⁵C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles ...*, p. 128.

6. Guidelines for Holy Living (Colossians 3:1-17)

by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson
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Much like Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, the first half of Colossians lays the theological basis, while the second half provides practical instructions for Christian living. If you see this as New Covenant Law, then you're missing the point. Paul isn't giving us regulations, but guidelines that allow the Spirit to work in us and through us.

Set Your Mind on Things Above (3:1-2)

It all begins with an attitude of heart and mind.

¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (3:1-2)

"Since then" (NIV) or "so if" (NRSV) refers back to Paul's teaching on baptism and being raised with Christ in 2:12-13. Paul grounds his ethical instructions in the regenerative work of God's Spirit in us -- "you have been raised with Christ."

Verses 1 and 2 call us to make conscious decisions about the way we think -- "set your hearts/minds" (NIV, NRSV), "set your affections" (KJV). The verb is *phroneō*, "to give careful consideration to something, set one's mind on, be intent." ¹ Consider these uses of the same verb in the NRSV, which is fairly consistent in translating the word:

"[Jesus] rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are **setting your mind** not on divine things but on human things.'" (Mark 8:33)

"**Let the same mind be in you** that was in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5)

"... Their **minds are set** on earthly things." (Philippians 3:19)

"Those who live according to the flesh **set their minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit **set their minds** on the things of the Spirit. To **set the mind** on the flesh is death, but to **set the mind** on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the **mind that is set on the flesh** is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:5-8)

Part of discipleship, Paul tells the Colossians, is deciding where our minds will go and where they won't. We must make this conscious decision perhaps several times a day as temptations come up.

What are we to think about? "Things above," which is symbolic of heaven and God's way. If you have frequent thought temptations, in order to retrain your mind you might decide in advance what you'll chose to think about when that lustful or hateful or proud thought flashes into your mind.



The classic example of a loving lifestyle is caring for those who are in need. Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), "The Good Samaritan" (1890, after Delacroix), oil on canvas, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands.

Q1. (Colossians 3:1-2) What does it mean to "set your heart/mind" on the things above? Does this mean that we're "too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good"? If not, what does it mean? What happens when we don't take control and direct our thinking and meditating?
<http://www.joyfulheart.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=977>

You Have Died (3:3-4)

Why should we control our thoughts and keep them focused in godly channels? Paul's answer is that we have changed. The "location" of our life is now different.

³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (3:3-4)

"You died"² refers to our new birth in Christ, symbolized by our baptism (2:12), when we were buried with Christ and raised with Christ. This is not just figurative language. Paul is speaking of actual spiritual changes that took place in us when we repented of our sins and received Christ into our lives. This concept of death with Christ occurs several times in Paul's letters:

"Since you **died with Christ** to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules." (2:20)

"I have been **crucified with Christ** and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Paul develops these thoughts most thoroughly in Romans 6:1-11.³

Your Life Is Hid (3:3-4)

Why should you set your mind on the things of God? Because your old life is dead, and your new life is now found only in Christ. He is your present and your future!

³ For you died, and your life is now **hidden** with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will **appear** with him in glory." (3:3-4)

"Hidden/hid" is *kryptō* (from which we get our words "crypt" and "cryptography"), "to keep from being seen, hide." ⁴ It may not appear to others that your life is in Christ. It is hidden. But it is still true! We are in a different realm -- with Christ, in God. The sooner we grasp this and begin to act accordingly, the easier the Christian life will become.

This hiddenness will finally be revealed when Christ returns in Glory. Hidden is just the opposite of "appear" or "revealed"⁵ in verse 4. The following verses also speak of the final revealing of our true state:

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20)

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

Put to Death Your Old Practices (3:5-8)

Because our true identity is now in Christ and not in our old life, it makes sense that we begin to roll this truth into our whole lives. When a large chain of stores comes under new ownership, it may take a few months or even years to change over the signage and policies and culture to that of the new corporation, but eventually,

it must take place for the new store to claim its rightful brand.

"⁵ **Put to death**, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must **rid yourselves** of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." (3:5-8)

Paul uses two verbs to describe the brand-changing process: "put to death" and "rid yourselves."

- **"Put to death"** (NIV, NRSV), "mortify" (KJV) in verse 5 is *nekroō*, from *nekros*, "dead" (which shows up in several English words that begin with "necro-"). The verb means literally, "to make something dead." ⁶ Similar ideas are found in Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:24; Titus 2:12; and 2 Corinthians 7:1.
- **"Rid yourselves of"** (NIV), "get rid of" (NRSV), "put off" (KJV) in verse 8 is *apotithēmi*, "take off," literally to take off one's clothes. Then figuratively, to "lay aside, rid oneself." ⁷ Similar language is used in Colossians 3:8; Ephesians 4:22, 25; Hebrews 12:1; James 1:21; and 1 Peter 2:1.

The words are essentially used synonymously; Paul varies the verbs for the sake of variety. These words present a very active idea -- something we must initiate and carry out, aided, of course, by the Holy Spirit.

Sinful Behaviors (3:5-8)

We shouldn't feel insulted if Paul's instructions about sin seem pretty basic. Paul was writing to a primarily Gentile church in a culture that didn't have much concept of sin at all. Let's consider these sins one at a time:

Put to Death Sexual Sins (3:5-6)

"Sexual immorality" (NIV), **"fornication"** (NRSV, KJV) is *porneia*, from which we get our word "pornography". It means, "unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication." ⁸ A *pornē* was a prostitute or harlot. The KJV tends to translate *porneia* as "fornication," but this is too narrow. "Fornication" is defined in English as "consensual sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other." ⁹ *Porneia*, on the other hand, includes not only fornication, but adultery, homosexuality, and any other kind of imaginable sexual perversion.

I once had a couple in my church who became fond of each other and then became engaged to be married. Both of them loved the Lord. Both were children of the '60s. The man had grown up in the California surfer culture and sex between two people who loved one another seemed right to him. She wasn't so sure. I patiently explained what the scripture taught from Old Testament to New, but he couldn't see it. His culture had blinded him. However, he said, "Pastor, though I don't see anything in the Bible against sex before marriage, I'll abstain because you say so. His bride looked relieved. And eventually they were married, and enjoy, I am sure, the joys of marriage together.

Paul is even more specific in 1 Thessalonians as he instructs a pagan culture in ways of holiness:

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit." (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

This runs directly against our culture, which says that sex between consenting adults is okay. We don't have to condemn and put down all those around us who live loosely, but we need to hold high standards for ourselves, and see that our churches hold high standards for members.

"Impurity" (NIV, NRSV), **"uncleanness"** (KJV) is *akatharsia*, literally, "any substance that is filthy or dirty, refuse," figuratively, "a state of moral corruption, immorality, vileness," especially used of sexual sins.¹⁰

"Lust" (NIV), "passion" (NRSV), "inordinate affection" (KJV) is *pathos*, "experience of strong desire, passion." ¹¹ The word doesn't have to refer to sexual sin, but does here and in its two other New Testament occurrences (Romans 1:26 and 1 Thessalonians 4:5).

"Evil desires" (NIV, NRSV), "evil concupiscence" (KJV) is *epithymia*. The word can be used for positive desire, but here it is, "a desire for something forbidden or simply inordinate, craving, lust." ¹² In the context, these words probably have a sexual connotation.

"Greed" (NIV, NRSV), "covetousness" (KJV) is *pleonexia*, "the inappropriate desire for more."¹³ In some contexts, this refers to the desire for more money, but in this context it could also refer to the insatiable desire for sexual pleasure, or greed for one more sexual conquest. Whenever we put sex (or wealth or anything else) on the pedestal of our greatest goal, it becomes a false god to us, and makes us guilty of idolatry.

In our world it is common to try to rationalize sexual sins as merely normal human desires. It is quite true that the desire for sex is a strong, innate drive. And surely God created this drive, for it fuels his command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28).

But to suppose that God is neutral about how we exercise our sexuality runs directly in the face of Scripture. He has given us an arena in which we can exercise our sexuality freely -- the bonds of marriage. Outside of the bounds of marriage, sex can become destructive -- to children and families, for example. Sexual sins outside of marriage, both of the body and of the mind, can become compulsive and dangerous. So we are to put to death in us the permission to exercise our sexuality outside of the bounds of marriage.

Then, lest we rationalize our behaviors in order to permit ourselves these things, Paul reminds us:

⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived." (2:6-7)

These sins belong to your former life, not your new life.

Q2. (Colossians 3:5) Why is sexual lust so difficult for people, especially males? Though we cannot deny that we are sexual beings, how can we keep sexual desire from controlling us and causing us to sin?

<http://www.joyfulheart.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=978>

Put Off the Sins of Anger and the Tongue (3:8)

The next list of sins relates to unrestrained anger and the damage it causes through our tongues.

"But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." (2:8)

Let's consider the words

"Anger" in verse 8 is *orgē*, the "state of relatively strong displeasure, with focus on the emotional aspect, anger." ¹⁴ Anger is a God-given emotion that moves us to action when we are treated unjustly. Without it we might be passive to great evil. There is "righteous anger," a correct response to injustice -- though often our anger is based more on selfish reactions that put us at a disadvantage, rather than based on a reaction to sin. It is also possible to experience the emotion of anger without sin. Paul writes to the Ephesian church (quoting Psalm 4:4):

"In your anger do not sin! Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." (Ephesians 4:26-27)

So anger, in and of itself, is not sin. But anger has a way of loosening our inhibitions, making it much more likely that we will do something or say something that we will regret later. Paul warns us of unrestrained anger.

Anger can also dwell in us for long periods of time if we allow it to. Victims of sexual abuse or returning soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), for example, can have their lives destroyed by anger. Sometimes we need help in how to let go of our anger so it doesn't poison our relationships and ruin our lives.

"Rage" (NIV), **"wrath"** (NRSV, KJV) in verse 8 is *thymos*, "a state of intense displeasure, anger, wrath, rage, indignation." ¹⁵ Vincent states the shade of difference between *orgē* and *thymos* in this way: " *orgē* denotes a deeper and more permanent sentiment; a settled habit of mind; while *thymos* is a more turbulent, but temporary agitation." ¹⁶ Perhaps rage or wrath describe us when our anger flares up and becomes loud and perhaps violent. "Rid yourselves" of this, Paul says. The Holy Spirit can help you tame your anger, but you must humbly allow him to work.

"Malice" in verse 8 is *kakia*, "wickedness," here, "a mean-spirited or vicious attitude or disposition, malice, ill-will, malignity." ¹⁷ You've seen this terrible motivation in others' behavior. Has it afflicted you -- especially in relation to certain people in your life?

"Slander" (NIV, NRSV), "blasphemy" (KJV) is *blasphēmia*, "speech that denigrates or defames, reviling, denigration, disrespect, slander." ¹⁸ We get our word "blaspheme" from this Greek word. This could refer to using God's or Jesus' name in a curse. But more likely here it means the kind of terrible things we say about people when we are angry at them. In English we have three words which describe such behavior:

- **Slander** -- "the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another's reputation."
- **Libel** -- "a written or oral defamatory statement or representation that conveys an unjustly unfavorable impression."
- **Gossip** -- "a rumor or report of an intimate nature." ¹⁹

I've caught myself relaying information that puts someone in an unfavorable light, when I should have kept my mouth shut. But anger and unforgiveness often feed talk that defames and hurts. We are to rid ourselves of this destructive habit!

"Filthy language" (NIV), "abusive language" (NRSV), "filthy communication" (KJV) is *aischrologia*, "speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste, obscene speech, dirty talk," perhaps "scurrilous talk," especially since *blasphēmia* immediately precedes.²⁰ This compound word is derived from *aischros*, "base, dishonorable, shameful" + *logos*, "speech." This word covers all sorts of speech that is punctuated by sexual terms and bathroom language. This is the way the world talks, not we followers of Jesus Christ the Lord.

We must rid ourselves of this kind of language. When we slip into our old vocabulary, we stop, ask forgiveness of God and any who may have heard us, and then substitute a more appropriate expression. After a dozen or several dozen repetitions of this process, our vocabulary gets much cleaner. Oh, we may slip occasionally, but it will no longer be our normal manner of expression.

We can't isolate ourselves from people who talk this way, as if we are too holy to hear such words. Nor should we be constantly putting them down for their crude speech, as if we are the language police for our sector of the world -- in your home maybe, but not in the marketplace where you don't have the authority to set the rules. We live in this world, but are not of it. What's more, the people who talk this way need our Savior desperately. But our vocabulary needs to be cleansed so that it reflects well on our Master. They will notice.

Q3. (Colossians 3:8) Why are sins of the tongue so easy to slip into? In what ways do they damage us and others? How can we break free of sins of the tongue?

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Don't Lie (3:9)

Next, Paul touches a problem that afflicts us Christians far too often. Lying.

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices." (3:9)

"Lie" is *pseudomai*, "to tell a falsehood, lie." ²¹ What makes lying wrong? Satan is known as "the father of lies" (John 8:44). Our God, on the other hand, is a God of truth. Our faith in God is based on us trusting him completely. Lying is utterly contrary to God's nature. And we have "taken off" our old self with its evil practices and are being renewed in God's image.

We know that trust builds community, builds marriages, builds relationships. Lying, by its very nature, undermines and explodes marriages and relationships. It destroys communities. Yes, there may be special circumstances in times of war -- or admiring a woman's ugly dress. But Paul is not speaking of the exceptions, but of the practice of truthful speech in contrast to angry, slanderous, abusive speech.

The New Self, Being Renewed (3:9-10)

Let's explore this idea of renewal further:

⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have **taken off** your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is **being renewed** in knowledge in the image of its Creator." (3:9-10)

Paul's analogy in verses 9 and 10 is taking off²² and putting on²³ clothing. In Christ we have changed clothes. But the change is not just external, but internal, in our spirit and in our character. No, it is not instantaneous. We are "being renewed," that is, literally, "made new again." ²⁴ Praise God! This is the process of sanctification. We see several other uses of the word in Paul's letters:

"Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are **being renewed** day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16b)

"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and **renewal** by the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5b)

"Be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind." (Romans 12:2b)

We are obviously to cooperate in the process of renewal, rather than thwart it by our obstinate rebelliousness. But ultimately it is God's work in us, the fruit of the Holy Spirit of God. The renewal involves our mind, as we take hold of and internalize God's truths (knowledge²⁵). But the goal is far beyond ourselves; it is to restore God's image²⁶ in us that has been marred and fallen through sin. God wants to renew us all the way back to his original creation:

"So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

In a number of passages in the Bible, we see our final destiny to be found as restored to our original perfect state in the Garden of God (Luke 23:43 and 2 Corinthians 12:4, where "Paradise" means "garden"; Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).

What are you doing that enables the process of renewal in your heart? What are you doing that hinders that process of renewal?

One in Christ (3:11)

We no longer lie to each other, says Paul, because we are one in Christ. People lie to protect themselves from those who are different from them, who might threaten them. But you are one, says Paul:

"Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." (3:11)

Greeks worshipped many gods, Jews worshipped one God. But now they are one in Christ. Jews took great pride in circumcision as a symbol of their distinctiveness as people of the Covenant. It separated them from all others. But now we are one in Christ.

"Barbarian" referred to a non-Greek, a foreigner.²⁷ A Scythian lived in the region of the Black Sea and was viewed as the epitome of unrefinement or savagery.²⁸ But Christ unites both! Slave and free were common divisions in the world of Paul's day. In fact, many Christians were slaves. But in Christ we are one! There are no divisions, nor may we allow divisions to arise.²⁹

Cloth Yourselves with Virtue (3:12)

No longer divided by race, religion, geographical origin, social status, or gender, the church is special:

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." (3:12)

See how we are described:

- **Chosen**, "the elect of God" (KJV), is *eklektos*, "pertaining to being selected, chosen."³⁰
- **Holy**, *hagios*, means "dedicated to God, holy, sacred, that is, reserved for God and God's service."³¹
- **Beloved**, *agapaō*, "loved." Think of the immense status there is in being greatly loved and cherished by the Creator of the Universe and the Savior of Mankind!

Because we are God's people, we are to clothe ourselves with the character of Christ. We are to take off the old clothes and to put on the new clothes, the Christian virtues that bring honor to our Savior.

"Compassion" (NIV, NRSV), "bowels of mercies" (KJV) is actually two words in Greek: *splanchnon*, "inward parts, entrails," thought of in the ancient world as the seat of the emotions,"³² and *oiktirmos*, "display of concern over another's misfortune, pity, mercy, compassion." The two words together might be translated "heartfelt compassion."³³ We are to be a people marked by a sincere and ready compassion.

"Kindness" is *chrēstotēs*, "the quality of being helpful or beneficial, goodness, kindness, generosity."³⁴ This is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

"Humility" (NIV, NRSV), "humbleness of mind" (KJV) is *tapeinophrosynē*, "humility, modesty,"³⁵ "the having a humble opinion of oneself; a deep sense of one's (moral) littleness; modesty, humility, lowliness of mind."³⁶ We aren't to feign humility of the surface, self-deprecating Uriah Heep sort. Rather, we are to live in the knowledge that what we have received is a gift, not a reward for our greatness. Thankfulness is present in a humble person.

"Gentleness" (NIV), **"meekness"** (NRSV, KJV) is a related idea. The Greek word is *prautēs*, "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness" in the older favorable sense.³⁷ This is also a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). This doesn't mean a poor self-image. Rather it is the characteristic of a person who doesn't feel the need to impress others and force oneself on others.

"Patience" (NIV, NRSV), "longsuffering" (KJV) is *makrothymia*, from *makros*, "long"+ *thymos*, "passion." It means, the "state of being able to bear up under provocation, forbearance, patience toward others."³⁸ This is also a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

What a beautiful set of characteristics that adorn a person with the beauty of Christ!

Forgive Each Other (3:13)

Now Paul mentions two character qualities that are necessary for a healthy Christian community -- whether it be a church or a family: forbearance and forgiveness.

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances³⁹ you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (3:13)

"Bear with" (NIV, NIV), "forbearing" (KJV) is *anechō*, "to regard with tolerance, endure, bear with, put up with."⁴⁰ We see a similar exhortation in Ephesians:

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)

Forbearance doesn't require forgiveness. It requires tolerance, patience, and love. We're all different. We have quirks and idiosyncrasies that can drive each other crazy. And so often we're blind to them ourselves. Forbearance is the willingness to put up with each others' differences.

"Forgive/forgiving," is used twice in this verse. It is the ability to forgive not just differences, but sins against us. The verb is *charizomai*, which we saw in 2:13, "to show oneself gracious by forgiving wrongdoing, forgive, pardon."⁴¹ So long as we are constantly clamoring to be "right," we will destroy community. In our quest to be vindicated, we can easily destroy. Often, to preserve the community, the marriage, the family, we must forgive sins and refuse to hold them against the person any longer. God will bring justice in the end. It's not our job.

Love (3:14)

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (3:14)

Verse 14 begins "upon all these things." Paul seems to be continuing his metaphor of putting on garments from verse 12 -- "clothe yourselves with..." So love⁴² would be the outer cloak or overcoat put on "over" (*epi*) all the others that unifies them. The phrase "binds together in perfect unity/harmony" (NIV, NRSV), or "bond of perfectness" (KJV) is two words, *syndesmos*("bond")⁴³ and *teleiotēs* ("perfection").⁴⁴

Q4. (Colossians 3:12-14) Why are Christian virtues so important to Christ? Why are they so important to the church? Why are they so important to non-Christians? Why are they so important in our homes?

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Peace and Thankfulness (3:15)

The result of the Christian virtues capped by love is peace.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." (3:15)

"Peace" is used twice in the verse, as if to emphasize it. "Rule" is *brabeuō*, not the usual word for "rule." Originally it referred to the referee or umpire who would "award prizes in contests." Here it means by extension, "be in control of someone's activity by making a decision, be judge, decide, control, rule."⁴⁵ Peace is to "call the shots." It is the standard of keeping unity within the body. We are different members of the body, but we are members of the same body, so we should not war with ourselves. God calls us to peace. In Ephesians, Paul put it another way:

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)

The final virtue he mentions -- almost as an afterthought -- is thankfulness: "And be thankful." "Thankful" is *eucharistos*, an adjective "pertaining to being grateful, thankful."⁴⁶ We get our word "Eucharist" from this word, because the word was used in giving thanks or blessing God for the bread and cup in the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:22-23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Corinthians 11:24).

Teaching, Exhorting, and Singing (3:16)

How are we to live? Not in legalism or in the flesh. Rather the Christian believers are to set their minds on the things of God, to live out and embody the Christian virtues, with peace in their community. Paul has given two exhortations for the community:

1. " Let the peace of God rule ..." (3:15) and
2. " Let the word of Christ dwell in you...." (3:16)

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (3:16)

"Dwell in" is *enoikeō*, "live, dwell (in)." ⁴⁷ "Richly" is *plousiōs*, "richly, abundantly," ⁴⁸ from *ploutos*, "wealth, abundance." Christ's words are to fill our mouths and be the center of our community.

"Teach and admonish" is a pair of words we saw earlier:

"We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." (1:28)

"Teach" refers to the positive expression, "admonish" to the negative expression. "Admonish," *noutheteō*, means "to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, admonish, warn, instruct." ⁴⁹ Positive Thinking, championed by Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993) and later by Robert Schuller (1926-), has downgraded the idea of warning and admonishing from the pulpit. This is probably in reaction to the harsh haranguing that sometimes characterized preachers of another era. But warning and admonishing -- as well as exhorting or urging or encouraging -- were certainly the practice of the early church in forming disciples. This was not only Paul's practice of training disciples (1:28). He also encourages it as part of their regular meetings together in conjunction with their singing.

Songs, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs (3:16b)

"... As you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (3:16)

This trio of terms for songs is also found in Ephesians 5:19:

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:19-20)

1. **Psalms** were singing the Psalter, the book of Psalms, which was written to be sung, and was sung by the Jews in Paul's day. Though these also could have been Christian odes patterned on the Psalter.
2. **Hymns** "probably had a religious and cultic significance ... as a technical term for festive psalms of praise, and for liturgical calls and recitations." ⁵⁰ Group members were encouraged to each bring a hymn or some other contribution from the Spirit when the believers gathered, in order to build up one another (1 Corinthians 14:16). These may have been longer compositions.
3. **Spiritual songs** may have been more spontaneous, perhaps like Paul's "singing in the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 14:15), though the lines between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are not firmly drawn. Martin says, "The terms are probably used loosely to cover the various forms of musical composition." ⁵¹

Do Everything in the Name of Jesus (3:17)

Paul sums it all up with a final statement, one that has served as a guiding verse for me in the earlier years of my ministry:

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (3:17)

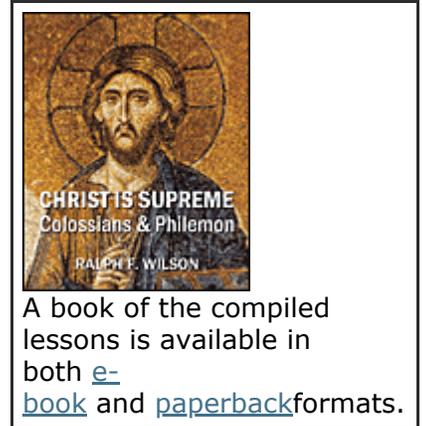
In our culture, "name" refers primarily to what a person is called. But in Hebrew thought that underlies Paul's usage, "name" can imply "something real, a piece of the very nature of the personality whom it designates, expressing the person's qualities and powers." ⁵² For an Old Testament prophet to speak "in the name of the Lord" implies that he speaks on a commission from Yahweh himself. In the New Testament, words and actions "in the name of the Lord" infer that the person is acting or speaking "in the sphere of power of" or "in the presence of." ⁵³

So when Paul says "do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus," he is saying that we should speak and act in full consciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. If what we are planning to do or say can't stand the test of Jesus' presence and approval without our being ashamed, then it isn't appropriate. Like Jesus' Golden Rule, this verse helps us evaluate our words and actions to see if they stand the test.

The second part of this verse asks us in all our words and deeds to act in a way that we are "giving thanks to God the Father through him." Does this deed represent thanks to God? Is this word spoken in thankfulness? If so, let it be done. If so, let it be spoken.

Is this a new Christian Law? No, Paul is presenting guidelines for living as a Christian. Paul lays out the principles:

1. Set your heart on things above (3:2).
2. Live like those who have died to the old life and look forward to the new one to be revealed (3:3-4).
3. Put to death sexual sins and sins of the tongue, which aren't appropriate to your new state (3:5-10).
4. Rather clothe yourselves with Christian virtues, especially love, and live at peace with one another (3:12-15).
5. Let your conversation and worship be full of Christ's words (3:16).
6. And let your actions and words be said and done under the view of and with the pleasure of the Lord Jesus (3:17).



Prayer

Father, thank you for the new life we have in Christ. Thank you that we can live in the light, with peace and love and harmony. Thank you for the joy we have in this new life, and the integrity to which you call us in Christ Jesus. In his mighty name, we pray. Amen.

Key Verses

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:2-3, NIV)

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13, NIV)

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17, NIV)

References

1. *Phroneō*, BDAG 106, 2a. The word *phroneō* has a wide range of meanings, "to be minded," either of reflection or of purpose. (Liddell-Scott). So it can mean (1) "think about, hold an opinion on," (2) "be intent on" (as in our verses), or (3) "to develop an attitude based on careful thought, be minded/disposed" as in Philippians 2:5.
2. "Died/are dead" is *apothnēskō*, "to cease to have vital functions, whether at an earthly or transcendent level, die" (BDAG 113, 1bβ). The word is in the Aorist tense, past tense at a particular point in time.
3. I've spent considerable time seeking to explain this in my book [Christ Powered Life: Romans 5-8](#) (JesusWalk Publications, 2008).
4. *Kryptō*, BDAG 573, 1d.
5. "Appear/s" (NIV, KJV), "revealed" (NRSV), which appears twice in verse 4, is *phaneroō*, "to cause to become visible, reveal, expose publicly" (BDAG 104, 1aβ).
6. *Nekroō* means, "to deaden or cause to cease completely, put to death." A figurative extension of the primary meaning is, "to put an end to the life of something, to cause to be dead" (BDAG 668).
7. *Apotithēmi*, BDAG 123, 1b.
8. *Porneia*, BDAG 854, 1. Also Friedrich Hauck and Siegfried Schulz, *pornē, ktl.*, TDNT 6:579-595.
9. *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*.
10. *Akatharsia*, BDAG 34, 2.
11. *Pathos*, BDAG 748, 2.

12. *Epithymia*, BDAG 372, 2.
13. Moo, *Colossians*, p. 257. The state of desiring to have more than one's due, greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness" (*Pleonexia*, BDAG 824).
14. *Orgē*, BDAG 720, 1.
15. *Thymos*, BDAG 461, 2.
16. Vincent, *Word Studies*, at John 3:36.
17. *Kakia*, BDAG 500, 2.
18. *Blasphēmia*, BDAG 178, a.
19. *Merriam-Webster 11th Collegiate Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster, 1993).
20. *Aischrologia*, BDAG 29.
21. *Pseudomai*, BDAG 1097, 1. It is derived from *pseudos*, "falsehood," from which we get our prefix "pseudo-".
22. "Taken off" (NIV), "stripped off" (NRSV), "put off" (KJV) is *apekdyomai*, which we saw in 2:15 ("disarming" the principalities and powers). The basic meaning is "to take off, strip off," of clothes. Here it is used figuratively (BDAG 100, 1).
23. "Put on" (NIV, KJV), "clothed yourselves with" (NRSV) is *endyō* (from which we get our English word, "endue"). It means, "to put clothing or apparel on someone, dress, clothe someone." It is used figuratively here at 3:12 (BDAG 333, 2b). We see a similar uses in Ephesians 4:24; Romans 13:14; and Galatians 3:27. In Luke 24:49 it is used of the baptism of the Holy Spirit: "clothed" (NIV, NRSV) or "endued" (KJV) with power from on high.
24. "Renewed" is *anakainōō*, from *ana-*, "again"+ *kainōō*, "make new" (BDAG 64). The noun is *anakainōsis*, "renewal."
25. "Knowledge" is *epignōsis*, "knowledge, recognition" (BDAG 369).
26. "Image" is *eikōn* (which we saw in 1:15, from which we get our word "icon"), "that which represents something else in terms of basic form and features, form, appearance" (BDAG 282, 2).
27. *Barbaros*, "a non-Hellene, foreigner." Our similar word, "barbarian" is frequently used in a negative sense, which the Greek word doesn't necessarily imply (BDAG 166, 2b). This word is *not* related etymologically to "barber, beard."
28. *Skythēs*, BDAG 932.
29. In Galatians, Paul adds male and female to such a list: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)
30. *Eklektos*, BDAG 306, 1.
31. *Hagios*, BDAG 10, 1aβ aleph.
32. *Splanchnon*, BDAG 938, 2.
33. *Oiktirmos*, BDAG 700.
34. *Chrēstotēs*, BDAG 1090, 2a.
35. *Tapeinophrosynē*, BDAG 989.
36. *Tapeinophrosynē*, Thayer. from *tapeinos*, "low"+ *phrēn*, "the mind."
37. *Prautēs*, BDAG 861.
38. *Makrothymia*, BDAG 612, 2a.
39. "Grievances" (NIV) "complaint" (NRSV), "quarrel" (KJV) is *momphē*, "blame, (cause for) complaint" (BDAG 657).
40. *Anechō*, BDAG 78, 1a.
41. *Charizomai*, BDAG 1078, 3.
42. "Love" (NIV, NRSV), "charity" (KJV) is *agapē*, "the quality of warm regard for and interest in another, esteem, affection, regard, love" (BDAG 6, 1aα).
43. "Binds together in unity/harmony" (NIV, NRSV), "bond" (KJV) is *syndesmos*, "that which holds something together, fastener," here, "that which brings various entities into a unified relationship, uniting bond" (BDAG 966).
44. "Perfect" (NIV), "perfectness" (KJV), is *teleiōtēs*, "perfection, completeness" (BDAG 996) from *teleios*, "attaining an end or purpose, complete."
45. *Brabeuō*, BDAG 183.
46. *Eucharistos*, BDAG 416.
47. *Enoikeō*, BDAG 338, from *en-*, "in"+ *oikeō*, "reside, inhabit."
48. *Plousiōs*, BDAG 831.
49. *Noutheteō*, BDAG 679.
50. Karl-Heinz Bartels, "Song, Hymn, Psalm," NIDNTT 3:668-670. *Hymnos* (from which we get our word "hymn") is "a song with religious content, hymn/song of praise," especially in honor of a deity (BDAG 1027).
51. Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (revised edition, Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 39-52, with this quote on p. 47.
52. *Onoma*, BDAG, 312, 1dy,Gimmel.

^[53] Hans Bietenhardt, *onoma*, *ktl.*, TDNT 5:242-283, especially pp. 260, 271.