

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes: Colossians Chapter 3

7/30/14

3:1-25 In chapter 2, Paul exposed the wrong reasons for self-denial. In chapter 3, he explains true Christian behavior—putting on the new self by accepting Christ and regarding the earthly nature as dead. We change our moral and ethical behavior by letting Christ live within us, so that he can shape us into what we should be.

3:1-2 Setting our hearts on things above means striving to put heaven's priorities into daily practice. Setting our minds on things above means concentrating on the eternal rather than the temporal. See Philippians 4:7 and Colossians 3:15 for more on Christ's rule in our hearts and minds.

3:2-3 "For you died" means that we should have as little desire for improper worldly pleasures as a dead person would have. The Christian's real home is where Christ lives (John 14:2-3). This truth provides a different perspective on our lives here on earth. To "set your minds on things above" means to look at life from God's perspective and to seek what he desires. This provides the antidote to materialism; we gain the proper perspective on material goods when we take God's view of them. It also provides the antidote to sensuality. By seeking what Christ desires, we have the power to break our obsession with pleasure and leisure activities. But it also provides the antidote to empty religiosity because following Christ means loving and serving in this world. Regard the world around you as God does; then you will live in harmony with him.

3:3 What does it mean that a believer's life is "hidden with Christ"? Hidden means "concealed and safe." This is not only a future hope but an accomplished fact right now. Our service and conduct do not earn our salvation, but they are results of our salvation. Take heart that your salvation is sure, and live each day for Christ.

3:4 Christ gives us power to live for him now, and he gives us hope for the future—he will return. In the rest of this chapter Paul explains how Christians should act now in order to be prepared for Christ's return.

3:5 We should consider ourselves dead and unresponsive to sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed. The warning in this verse is not against sex, but against sexual perversion. Where is the line between the two? The Bible everywhere celebrates heterosexual, monogamous marriage as the proper situation for sexual fulfillment. Christian men and women should be open to true love—and to sexual intimacy—within the commitment to lifelong fidelity. That is God's way. The rest is dangerous and futile. Stay away. Sexual sin and perversion will drain your energies and turn your heart away from God.

3:6 "The wrath of God" refers to God's judgment on these kinds of behavior, culminating with future and final punishment of evil. When tempted to sin, remember that you must one day stand before God. **3:8-10** We must rid ourselves of all evil practices and immorality.

Then we can commit ourselves to what Christ teaches. Paul was appealing to the commitment the believers had made and urging them to remain true to their confession of faith. They were to rid themselves of the old life and "put on" the new way of living given by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit. If you have made such a commitment to Christ, are you remaining true to it?

3:9 Lying to one another disrupts unity by destroying trust. It tears down relationships and may lead to serious conflict in a church. So don't exaggerate statistics, pass on rumors and gossip, or say things to build up your own image. Be committed to telling the truth. Jesus wants to clean your life and your church of sexual sin and verbal sin. There is no place in the kingdom of God for hedonistic sexual experimentation or for gossip, rage, and backbiting. In their place, witness to the world like a lighthouse on a stormy night by displaying love, faith, and hope.

3:10 What does it mean to "put on the new self"? It means that your conduct should match your faith. If you are a Christian, you should act like it. To be a Christian means more than just making good resolutions and having good intentions; it means taking the right actions. This is a straightforward step that is as simple as putting on your clothes. You must rid yourself of all evil practices and immorality. Then you can commit yourself to what Christ teaches. If you have made such a commitment to Christ, are you remaining true to it? What old clothes do you need to strip off? Every Christian is in a continuing education program. The more we know of Christ and his work, the more we are being changed to be like him. Because this process is lifelong, we must never stop learning and obeying. There is no justification for drifting along, but there is an incentive to find the rich treasures of growing in him. It takes practice, ongoing review, patience, and concentration to keep in line with his will.

3:11 The Christian church should have no barriers of nationality, race, educational level, social standing, wealth, gender, religion, or power. Christ breaks down all barriers and accepts all people who come to him. Nothing should keep us from telling others about Christ or accepting into our fellowship any and all believers (Ephesians 2:14-15). Christians should be building bridges, not walls.

3:12-17 Paul offers a strategy to help us live for God day by day: (1) Imitate Christ's compassionate, forgiving attitude (3:12-13); (2) let love guide your life (3:14); (3) let the peace of Christ rule in your heart (3:15); (4) always be thankful (3:15); (5) keep God's Word in you at all times (3:16); (6) live as Jesus Christ's representative (3:17). **3:13** The key to forgiving others is remembering how much God has forgiven you. Is it difficult for you to forgive someone who has wronged you a little when God has forgiven you so much? Realizing God's infinite love and forgiveness can help you love and forgive others. Let God worry about the wrongs you've suffered. Don't quench your life in bitter feuding; live renewed in love and joy.

3:14 All the virtues that Paul encourages us to develop are perfectly bound together by love. As we clothe ourselves with these virtues, the last garment we are to put on is love, which holds all of the others in place. To practice any list of virtues without practicing love will lead to distortion, fragmentation, and stagnation (1 Corinthians 13:3). **3:14-15** Christians should live in peace.

To live in peace does not mean that suddenly all differences of opinion are eliminated, but it does require that loving Christians work together despite their differences. Such love is not a feeling but a decision to meet others' needs (see 1 Corinthians 13). To "put on" (live in) love leads to peace between individuals and among the members of the body of believers. Do problems in your relationships with other Christians cause open conflicts or mutual silence? Consider what you can do to heal those relationships with love.

3:15 The word rule comes from the language of athletics: Paul tells us to let Christ's peace be umpire or referee in our hearts. Our hearts are the center of conflict because there our feelings and desires clash—our fears and hopes, distrust and trust, jealousy and love. How can we deal with these constant conflicts and live as God wants? Paul explains that we must decide between conflicting elements by using the rule of peace. Which choice will promote peace in our souls and in our churches? For more on the peace of Christ, see Philippians 4:7.

3:16 Although the early Christians had access to the Old Testament and freely used it, they did not yet have the New Testament or any other Christian books to study. Their stories and teachings about Christ were memorized and passed on from person to person. Sometimes the teachings were set to music, and so music became an important part of Christian worship and education.

3:16 Thankful people can worship wholeheartedly. Gratitude opens our hearts to God's peace and enables us to put on love. Discontented people constantly calculate what's wrong with their lot in life. To increase your thankfulness, take an inventory of all you have (including your relationships, memories, abilities, and family, as well as material possessions). Use the inventory for prayers of gratitude. On Sunday, before worship, quit rushing around; instead, take time to reflect on reasons for thanks. Declare Sunday as your "thanks, faith, and hope" day. Celebrate God's goodness to you, and ask in prayer for all your needs for the week ahead.

3:17 Doing "all in the name of the Lord Jesus" means bringing honor to Christ in every aspect and activity of daily living. As a Christian, you represent Christ at all times—wherever you go and whatever you say. What impression do people have of Christ when they see or talk with you? What changes would you make in your life in order to honor Christ?

3:18–4:1 Paul gives rules for three sets of household relationships: (1) husbands and wives, (2) parents and children, and (3) masters and slaves. In each case there is mutual responsibility to submit and love, to obey and encourage, to work hard and be fair. Examine your family and work relationships. Do you relate to others as God intended? See Ephesians 5:21–6:9 for similar instructions.

3:18–19 Why is submission of wives to husbands "fitting in the Lord"? This may have been good advice for Christian women, newly freed in Christ, who found submission difficult. Paul told them that they should willingly follow their husbands' leadership in Christ. But Paul had words for husbands as well: "Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them." It may also have been true that Christian men, used to the Roman custom of giving unlimited power to the head of the family, were not used to treating their wives with respect and love. Real spiritual leadership involves service. Just as Christ served the disciples, even to the point of washing their feet, so the husband is to serve his wife. This means putting aside his own interests in order to care for his wife.

A wise and Christ-honoring husband will not abuse his leadership role. At the same time, a wise and Christ-honoring wife will not try to undermine her husband's leadership. Either approach causes disunity and friction in marriage.

3:20-21 Children must be handled with care. They need firm discipline administered in love. Parents should not aggravate (embitter) them by nagging, deriding, or destroying their self-respect so that they quit trying. However, the opposite problem occurs when parents are afraid to correct a child for fear of stifling some aspect of his or her personality or losing his or her love. Single parents or parents who cannot spend much time with a child may be prone to indulgence. But such children, especially, need the security of guidance and structure. Boundaries and guidelines will not embitter a child. Instead, they will set the child free to live securely within the boundaries.

3:22-4:1 Paul does not condemn or condone slavery but explains that Christ transcends all divisions between people. Slaves are told to work hard as though their master were Christ himself (3:23); but masters should be just and fair (4:1). Perhaps Paul was thinking specifically of Onesimus and Philemon—the slave and master whose conflict lay behind the letter to Philemon (see the book of Philemon). Philemon was a slave owner in the Colossian church, and Onesimus had been his slave (4:9).

3:23 Since the Creation, God has given us work to do. If we could regard our work as an act of worship or service to God, such an attitude would take some of the drudgery and boredom out of it. We could work without complaining or resentment if we would treat our job problems as the cost of discipleship.