
Colossians 3:1-11, *Setting our Minds on Christ*

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: We, as Christians, are to set our sights and our focus upon Christ as Lord, who raised us to new life, for this is our authentic reality and Truth. We trust in Christ who sits at God's right hand in honor and power in the reality of heaven. We are heaven bound; we are to set our thoughts and hopes on Him. Let Christ fill our thoughts and take hold of our will so we need not give a thought to earthly troubles and fears. We are in Christ; we died to Him and now He is our genuine world and life and we share in His glory. We can put sin and our sinful ways to death, those earthy wants and needs that are bad and cause harm to others and us. Have nothing to do with evil or sin or any kind of anger, greed, bad language, lying, or any thoughts of impurity or idolatry. For these things stir God's anger and we do not want that. When we have received His grace and forgiveness, why would we go back to what hurts others and us? Strip off this old nature of sin and put on His nature of fruitfulness and renewal by clothing yourselves in His goodness with your new nature within you that He created. Neither our nationality nor socioeconomic status matter when we are in Christ; all that matters is that he is real and true and lives in us all.

Contexts and Background:

It is not enough just to know what we should know; we must do as we are called to do. We need to not only engage His Word, but also obey and practice its precepts. If not, we are not living as an authentic Christian. How do we do this? Paul tells us to put to death our old man—our sin and evil desires—and not only embrace our new lives in Christ but reside in them as well. We are to make Christ first in order to receive His blessings and empowerment! That way, Jesus is our focus and attention rather than our own agendas. Then, we will lead lives of distinction, maturity, and character (Matt. 6:33; Rom. 6:1-14; Eph. 2:1-10).

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *If then/since, then/Therefore.* These are words meaning “consequently,” a practical connection to the aforementioned principles. It connects (Col. 2:6, 11-13, 20 to 3:3, 9-10), telling us that our trust leads to our obedience that will produce holy living as a result of Christ working in us. We respond to God because of His work of redemption and favor for us.
- *Raised with Christ.* This is a metaphor for our position in Christ as a result of our redemption that should be exhibited in our new life in Christ. In Christ, our old nature has died and now we are clothed in His new nature and life. We also become more Christ-like in character and attitude as we grow and mature in Him. Therefore, we can understand spiritual truths and apply them to our lives without excuse (Rom. 6:1-14; 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; Gal. 2:20-21; Eph. 1:3; Phil. 3:10-20; 2:1-10; 1 John 3:2).
- *Set your hearts/affection/seek those things.* Means to have understanding, to think, and to have a desire for real, *bona fide* truth. We are to think about Christ and consider what we have in Him to experience our new lives. Truth is something we want to learn for triumphant lives and effectual churches, something we want to live in. Again, the problem came from Plato's “shadow philosophy.” The Colossians were seeking, believing in the purity of God and Heaven thus seeking his “higher realms” and mystics while also believing in the carnality of the flesh. This is somewhat true, but the logical error is made in the conclusion that as long as we are in Christ, our connection to purity is maintained; thus, we can sin and live as we please. Paul emphatically fights this heinous notion. We have no right to sin deliberately thinking, *I am already forgiven so it is OK to sin* (Col. 1:9; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2)!
- *Sitting at the right hand of God.* This means honor and majesty, triumphant and exalted so Christ can bestow on us His blessings and empowerment (Psalm 110:1; Luke 22:69; John 14:13; Acts 2:33-35; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; 2 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 3:21)!

- *Set your mind.* Meaning to place Christ first. Bad thoughts and actions lead to bad lives, so we are called to purposefully focus ourselves on Christ, His precepts, and His presence. When we focus on Christ, our attention is off other things and distractions—even sin! Heavenly values will translate into earthy values when we are centered on Christ, allowing His work in and through us. *Things above* are heavenly matters; *things below/on earth* are our desires, agendas, and sin (Matt. 6:33; Rom. 8:5; Phil. 1:23; 4:8; 1 John 2:15-17).
- *You died.* When we become Christians, our old lives die to Him so now we can live for Him and have access to His blessings and gifting (John 10:28; Rom. 6:1-11; 8:19, 31-39; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; Gal. 6:14; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 3:2).
- *Hidden with Christ.* Since we died with Him and we are then raised with Him, we are clothed in Him! Thus, our sin is hidden from the Father. This is called “atonement,” meaning “covering.” This also means that our new lives, our security, and our unity with Christ are not always evident to those who are not in Christ. To them, all this is foolishness. This also has an application to not be a secret Christian unless you live where it is illegal; rather, demonstrate and practice your faith with joy and trust in Christ (1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 2:6; 2 Pet. 1:4).
- *Who is our life.* Since Christ lifted Himself to the cross and thus lifted us out of sin’s penalty, how will we lift Him up in our lives? This also means, we are inseparably united in Him (John 6:51-58; 10:29; Rom. 8:1, 31-39; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:3).
- *Appears.* Means He is watching over us with love, anticipation, and hope that we do the right thing. This refers to the Hope of Christ's second coming. Because He is coming back, our behaviors should reflect it over and against any theory or time of when and how it will happen (Rev. 19:11-16)!
- *Put to death/mortify.* Meaning to deprive something of its power and influence as in to make a conscious decision to keep away from sin. We are called to “amputate” totally our sinful lifestyle and any form of fornication, as if these are a part of our body, and to get rid of sin that fuels vice so it never comes back, as being dead to sin and alive in Christ. This phrase starts a series of imperatives, calling us to get rid of bad behaviors and live as Christ called and died for. This is not a call to asceticism or legalism and forced obligation; rather, it is living, as we believe—putting our Christian life into practice. The image is like Lazarus who got rid of his grave clothes to begin his new life. We cannot live in both Christ and sin; they are incompatible (Zech. 4:6; Mark 5:28; 7:21-22; 9:43-47; John 11:44; Rom. 6:1-14; 8:13; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 5:18; 6:17; Col. 2:19-23; 1 John 2:14)!
- *Belongs to your earthly nature.* Paul uses their own figurative “Gnostic” language to turn the tables on them. In calling them to turn from their vices and evil deeds, here Paul highlights but a few: *sexual immorality/fornication, impurity, covetousness/lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...* These were possibly the specific sins this church was having trouble with. The second set was possibly less of a problem, less obvious, or seen in their daily lives but not in church: *anger, rage, malice, blasphemy/slander, filthy language, and lies.*
- *Earthly nature...sexual immorality/doubtless passion/inordinate affection.* Meaning sin that will cause us to fail and fall or to suffer. One’s passions and desires can easily become unhinged from thoughts and virtue and cause one to be temporally insane and do wicked things (Rom. 1:26; Gal. 5:19).
- *Evil desires/evil concupiscence.* Meaning a desire or impulse that goes unchecked or without accountability and causes one to sin. Without having our thoughts on Christ, we will lust and then sin in that lust because we are self-seeking and not Christ-seeking (1 Thess. 4:3-7; James 1:15; 4:2).

- *Wrath of God....* This is God's just reaction to sin, as He is totally against sin and will make sure that it is punished. Sin brings out **God's anger** because it hurts too many of His children whom He loves (Zech. 1:2; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; Titus 2:12; Rev. 11:18).
- *Coming on those who are disobedient/sons of disobedience.* Referring to the bad character of unbelievers and repeating the bad patterns of our forefathers or self-thinking. When we sin, we are mimicking wicked people and not our Lord (Phrase not in the NIV because it is not in older manuscripts, but it is implied by context) (Eph. 2:2).
- *Used to walk/once walked.* When we are in Christ, there should be a radical transformation from how we were before becoming a Christian to how we are living in Him. If not, we must ask "why not?"
- *Rid yourselves... put off...put on.* This is the language of putting on armor for battle and then taking it off when the battle is over. As Christians, our battles are not over until we are called to our eternal home. The image is to put off sin and embrace righteousness, as we are to be clothed in the Spirit, not in the world or in our desires. Also, this is a baptismal image as it was common practice to disrobe for the baptism and then put on new garments afterward if available. This is accomplished by focusing on Christ, right thinking, and faith (Mark 1:5; Acts 7:58; Rom. 13:12-14; Eph. 4:24-25; 1 Pet. 2:1)!
- *Anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language.* This is a list of the vices of sin that abuse others and us and should not have a hold on us. These are unjust and all they do is bring us unpleasantness and bitterness. When this happens, we must seek to break the bonds that destroy others and us. Our beliefs must affect our behaviors; our language must affect and reflect our faith. If not, our faith and thinking are skewed or even absent (Eph. 4:31; James 1:19-20; 3:9-10).
- *Old self/old man.* A metaphor for sin from Adam who represented all of humanity. His fall begets our sinful nature and separation from God, because all of humanity would have made the same choice to sin (Gen. 1:26; Rom. 5:12-14; 6:6; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22).
- *New self/new man.* The image is renewal and that we display Christ by our words and actions; we demonstrate His image by our representation. In Christ, we are declared "new" and sinless by Christ's work. However, we still have a sinful nature and we are called to cast it away. The character of God clothes us to produce our good character and to share it with others (Psalm 51:10; Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:20-28, 45-49 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16).
- *No Greek or Jew, circumcised.* This means He rules all races. There is equality, not division or prejudice in the Kingdom of God; we are all united and equal in Him (Gen. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 7:17-24; James 4:11-12; Gal. 3:26-28). Greeks were especially prejudicial as were Jews, thinking they were the best and most favored race. A *Barbarian* was a person who did not speak Greek; hence the term "bar," meaning nonsense language, possibly intended to insult the Germanics (Germans who were at war with Rome at this time). *Scythian* was a slave or uncultured person of low means. These were the scapegoats and people who were ridiculed by others, *slave or free*, meaning the ultimate in social separation; thus, all are equal in Christ in liberty and rights. We are never to be prejudicial or condescending to another person because of race or any social classification. This does not necessarily mean all are equal in capacity, gifting, or position; but we are never to pretend or presume that we are superior to others. Like in the military, not all are equal or standardized in function or capacity, nor does everyone have the same rank; but all have equal rights and are not to be discriminated against. (1 Cor. 7:17-24; 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:15).
- *Christ is all in all!* Referring to our liberty and worth in Christ and the fact that it is Christ as Lord who rules all and gives us liberty and is totally sufficient for our living faith. The question is, *is He your all in all?*

Devotional Thoughts and Applications: There is no reason or necessary function for an authentic Christian to be drawn to sexual sin, greed, rage, dirty language, gossip, slander, malicious behaviors, or idolatry ruling our hearts and minds. Such things cause us to seek other things to be our god and direction in life. We may not be able to remove sin completely, but we can move away from sin and towards our Lord. We can throw off our wrong desires, and live a life that is real, impacting, and triumphant! Do not allow your life to be hidden or ineffectual. You are so much better than the world says you are or people at school or work say you are; you have power from on High! You were dead; now you are alive in Him. What more can you possibly need or want? Christ is all that matters and He is living, working, and guiding you as a Christian! Real, spiritual improvement comes from surrendering our will—not opposing or imposing upon His will!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What kind of clothes can you buy to make you feel like a new person? How does this make you feel? How is this like being in Christ?
2. How have you set your focus upon Christ? How have you failed at this? What does it mean that Christ is Lord and has raised you to new life? How does this motivate you?
3. How is Jesus Christ your real reality and Truth? What does it mean to you to trust in Christ? How is He your reality?
4. How do you feel that you as a Christian are saved by grace and heaven bound? How does this help you today and in the future to set your thoughts and hopes in and with Him?
5. What can you do to put to death sin and your sinful ways, such as bad wants and needs?
6. What causes God's anger? Do you think this is just? What about when you are angry? How and why is our anger sometimes sin?
7. How do the sins listed in this passage ignore grace and forgiveness, thereby hurting others and us?
8. What do you think God needs to be doing in you? What are you going to do in allowing Him to do so?
9. How does your trust lead to your obedience of God's precepts? How does it motivate you knowing that your trust in Christ will produce holy living as a result of Christ working in you? What stops you from allowing this to happen?
10. What does/should it mean to the Church that mere nationality or socioeconomic status does not matter when we are in Christ? When we sin, we imitate evil people and not our Lord. How does this make you feel and act?
11. What can you do to fill your thoughts and hopes with Christ so you do not think of your earthy predicaments and worries?
12. What do you need to do to strip off your old nature of sin and put on His nature of fruitfulness and renewal?