

The Superiority of Christ The Path of Spiritual Maturity (Part 2) Colossians 3:5-17

Introduction

In Chapter 1, Paul expresses his commitment to helping the Colossians move toward spiritual maturity. Now in Chapter 3, he teaches them the path to achieve it. Last week, we saw that this path begins with cultivating a mental focus on what God has provided for us through Christ. As we keep increasing our understanding and appreciation of what God has provided through Jesus and the Cross, we learn to use these provisions to refute and replace lies about who God is and who we are.

Because of the victory of the Cross, Jesus unleashes the power of the Holy Spirit to gradually transform our lives. We read this in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom 12:2 NKJV)

Paul further emphasizes this in Colossians 3:11, when he talks about "putting on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all." (Col 3:10-11 NKJV)

To grow in Christ, we must cultivate a mental focus on God's provisions through Jesus and his death on the Cross. But we must also embrace the path to spiritual maturity that involves cultivating a new lifestyle. When we become followers of Christ, He gives us a new purpose and direction for our lives.

This is what Paul describes in 3:5-17. He compares our old lifestyle to a worn-out set of clothes to be "put aside" in verse 8, and our new life in Christ as a set of new clothes to be "put on" in verse 12. Let's begin by reading about the lifestyle we are to put aside.

I. Put to Death Your Worldly Lifestyle

"Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them." (Col 3:5-7 NKJV)

The "therefore" in verse 5 points back to our new life in Jesus mentioned in the first four verses. Because of Christ, we can put to death the things that are contrary to our identity with Jesus. We don't merely suppress or control evil acts and attitudes; we are to wipe them out and completely exterminate the old way of life.

Giving in to sensual appetites gives it the very food and nourishment by which it lives, thrives, and is active. It's much easier to sin if you don't identify the sin by name. That's why Paul lists them.

Fornication, uncleanness, passion, and evil desire are terms that refer to sexual sins. Covetousness is insidious greed that leads to idolatry. Jesus would not commit any of these sins, and neither should we.

- Fornication - translated *sexual immorality* refers to any intercourse outside marriage.
- Uncleanness - A more comprehensive meaning than fornication. It includes the misuse of sex and applies to various forms of sexual evil.
- Covetousness – the idolatry of lusting to possess something or someone.

These sins are the way the world lives, not the way Jesus lives within us. Those who commit these sins invite the wrath of God upon themselves.

Sin is self-destructive and leads you further and further away from God. Paul writes about the full-blown effects of sin in Romans 1, "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." (Rom 1:24-32 NKJV)

These sins identify a world in rebellion against God, but they are in the past tense for the Christian. Authentic Christians can never be comfortable in habitual sin. Before we became Christians, Paul says, we all committed these sins.

James 2:10 says, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all." (Jas 2:10 NKJV)

Yes, even Christians sin. The difference is a true Christian realizes his sin, confesses it to God, and turns away from it. Look at verse 8, "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds," (Col 3:8-9 NKJV)

Paul calls these sinful behaviors the lifestyle of the old man (the sinful person). He says that anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language flow out of the mouth of a sinner. Jesus said in Luke 6:45, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (Luk 6:45 NKJV)

Jesus calls us to a deeper obedience. James writes, "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless." (Jas 1:26 NKJV)

William Barclay says, "It's easy to distort the truth; an alteration in the tone of voice or an eloquent look will do it, and there are silences which can be as false and misleading as any words."

Putting off the old man with his deeds means letting go of your worldly ways and lifestyle and pursuing the transforming work of Christ. It means allowing the Holy Spirit to transform your thinking and change your behaviors to reflect God's thoughts and ways. God's work in you will make you a better person.

Before we became Christians, we had no power to change; we were slaves to sin and selfishness. But now, through Christ, we've been released from the power of sin, and God's Spirit lives within us. Moral willpower cannot produce this kind of freedom. Only Christ can change you and deliver you from your sinful heart.

But "putting off the old man" is never sufficient. Those who try to reform even for all the right reasons never succeed. Why? Because we all have a fulfillment vacuum in our hearts. Unless we fill the vacuum with something healthy and fulfilling, our old self-centered lifestyle will drag us back into our old sinful ways.

So, instead of just putting off the old self-centered life, we must put on the new lifestyle that fits who we now are in Christ.

II. Put On the New Godly Lifestyle

In verse 10, Paul says, we "have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all." (Col 3:10-11 NKJV)

The phrase Paul uses was commonly used for changing a set of clothes. You can almost picture a person taking off the old and putting on the new man in Jesus. The new man is hungry to know what *God says* in His Word. The new man is part of a family, which favors no race, nationality, class, culture, or ethnicity.

God's new creation work not only deals with the old man and gives us the new man patterned after Jesus Christ; it also breaks down the barriers that separate people in society. Christians don't care if you're Greek or Jew or circumcised or

uncircumcised or a Scythian or a barbarian; a slave or a free person or a Republican or a Democrat. Christ breaks down all these barriers. God's love reaches out to all people, even those of extreme positions and lifestyles. These same barriers existed in the ancient Roman world, and God's power through the Gospel of Jesus Christ broke them all down.

Christianity even changed the barrier between slave and free. F.F. Bruce writes, "In times of persecution, slaves showed that they could face the trial and suffer for their faith as courageously as freeborn Romans. The slave-girl Blandina and her mistress both suffered in the persecution that broke out against the Rhone valley churches in A.D. 177. But it was the slave-girl who was the hero of the persecution, impressing friend and foe alike as a 'noble athlete' in the contest of martyrdom."

"In the arena of Carthage in A.D. 202, a profound impression was made on the spectators when the Roman matron Perpetua stood hand-in-hand with her slave Felicitas, as both women faced a common death for a common faith." (Bruce)

Paul describes how this new lifestyle in Christ works in verses 12-17.

III. Characteristics of the New Life In Christ.

In verse 12, Paul writes, "Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col 3:12-17 NKJV)

As a new person in Christ, we are the elect of God. What does that mean? It means that God has chosen us to be something special in His plan. "Elect" means we have been chosen and given a destiny to fulfill. Each one of the qualities Paul mentions in this passage is connected to relationship. How we treat people and relate to one another is an accurate measure of our Christian life.

The first thing Paul says we are to put on is tender mercies. If something is tender, it is sensitive to touch. Christians should be able to feel another person's misery, just as they feel the cloth touch their body as they put on their clothes. The ancient writers defined kindness as the virtue of the person whose neighbor's welfare is as dear to him as his own.

Humility is the "parent" of meekness and longsuffering. Meekness determines how humility affects my actions towards others. It prevents me from trying to dominate, manipulate, or coerce things for my own ends, even if I have the power

and the ability to do so. Longsuffering determines how humility affects my reaction and responses. It keeps me from becoming impatient, short, or resentful towards others' weaknesses, shortcomings, and sins.

Christians forgive one another. If anyone has a complaint against another, they are to work it out. We forgive others even as Christ forgave us. Forgiveness is the antidote to revenge and wanting to retaliate. Knowing how much Jesus forgave us should always make us *more* generous with forgiveness.

God bears with us a very long time even when we sin against Him. He even reaches out to those in the darkest places with His forgiveness. Jesus even forgives, transforms, and reconciles people of sinful habits and flawed character. And God makes the first move towards us in forgiveness; the natural human response is to expect the other person to make the first move.

God forgives even knowing that we will sin again, sometimes in the exact same way. Human nature won't forgive unless the offending party solemnly promises never to do the wrong again. God's forgiveness is so complete that He restores those who have offended to fellowship and meaningful position. We have a tough time doing that!

God bears all the penalties for the wrong we committed against Him, but human nature refuses to forgive unless the offender agrees to accept all the penalties for the wrong done they've done. God keeps reaching out to us even when we refuse Him again and again, but our human nature is to give up on people who reject us. God doesn't even require a probationary period for us to receive His forgiveness. God's forgiveness is complete, and He never holds it against us. On the other hand, we often think we ought to be complimented for merely tolerating those who have offended us.

When God forgives us, He restores us and puts His trust in us, and invites us back to work with Him as co-laborers. Human nature tends to distrust a person who has wronged us and refuses to ever work with them again.

And finally, Paul says, "Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." Love is the summary of all the things described in this passage. Love perfectly fulfills what God requires of us in our relationships. We are to be clothed in the love of God. God is love! And we are to put on His very nature.

The Apostle Peter, who really struggled in these areas, writes, "His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust." (2Pe 1: 3-4 NKJV)

All the virtues Paul lists are manifestations of God's divine love. Any virtue pursued without divine love become distorted and unbalanced. What was at the center of

the old lifestyle? Self-centeredness. What is at the center of the new lifestyle? Godly Love. Verse 14 is the key, "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

Conclusion

Paul concludes by saying, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col 3:15-17 NKJV)

Peace is the standard for discerning God's will. "The apostle says, Let it rule. The Greek word means arbitrate. Whenever there is a doubtful issue to be decided, choose the things that make for peace.

Let the peace of Christ judge, decide, and govern your heart. When you lose your peace, you are tempted to give way to evil, and you grieve the Holy Spirit. Let the Prince of Peace, the Shechinah Glory of God, dwell within you! In the Old Testament, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. It was the symbol of God's abiding presence.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul writes, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1Co 6:19-20 NKJV)

When God's presence dwells within you, your heart can't help but burst forth with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. God delights in creative, spontaneous worship. And the Holy Spirit within you cries out in praise to God through words and songs that are anointed worship! This melody of praise to the Lord will cause you to do all that you do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Live your life, all of your life, for Jesus. And whatever you do, do it for the name of the Lord and for His glory!