

7th July 2026. - “Put On The New Self” - Colossians 3 v 1-11

3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Most of Paul's references to baptism as death and resurrection emphasize the old sins which are left behind, the death of the old nature which has been buried with Christ. However, here he emphasised the new life in Christ, being raised with Him. This new life is characterised by setting our hearts on things above. In the old life we were controlled by the values and powers of the sinful world. Now we are to be controlled by the vision of Christ, seated at the right hand of God (which means He is exercising the power of God in the world through our lives). Others around us may be controlled by the worldly values, but we as Christians are to be controlled by the values of Christ. (Romans Ch6 v 3-4).

This short paragraph (v 1-4) occupies an important pivotal position in the letter. Containing both statements and encouragement, it concludes the section where Paul attacks the “philosophy” of the false teachers and provides the true alternative to the false teaching. The passage draws together themes previously mentioned (Ch 2 11-13, & 20) and provides the theological basis for the words of encouragement that follow.

As the positive counterpart to Ch 2 v 20 the opening verse of Ch 3 affirms that the Colossians have already been raised with Christ. They now share in His resurrection life, so their lives are to be different. Their interests are to be focused on Christ, their minds, aims, ambitions, in fact their whole outlook, are to be centred on that heavenly realm where He rules and where their lives truly belong.

A continuous ongoing effort is required (to “keep on setting your minds/hearts”) for such a focus does not come automatically. The godly man or woman will regularly assess whether their ambitions and life-style are consistent with the ultimate goal to which God has called them. This realm above has to be sought diligently (and in contrast with and false seeking of heavenly experiences by the promoters of the Colossian “philosophy”) for this is where Christ is, seated as king in the place of honour. (On Christ’s ascension to “the right hand of God”, Acts Ch 2 v 33-25: Rom Ch 8 v 34: Eph Ch1 v 20)

The grounds for Paul’s appeal to set their minds on things above in verses 2 are twofold. First, they died to that old order with its spiritual powers (Ch 2 v 20), its self-denying and enslaving regulations, visionary experiences and useless self-centred worship. Secondly, their new “life is hidden with Christ in God”.

With Christ because they have been joined with Him in His death and resurrection, and in God for Christ himself has His being “in God” and those who belong to Christ have their being there too. Centred in God means that their hidden life is secure, unable to be touched by anyone. Their new life “in Christ” is not visible to others and, in some measure, is hidden from themselves.

It will be fully evident only when Christ, who is that life, appears at His second coming. Indeed, the day of revelation of the Son of God will be the day of revelation of the sons and daughters of God. That disclosure will take place “in glory” for it will involve the sharing of Christ’s likeness and the receiving of the glorious resurrection body.

In urging the Colossians to be heavenly minded Paul does not suggest that Christians are to be living in the clouds! Rather, setting their minds on the things above will result in a concrete obedience to the following: “Put to death therefore what is ...” (v 5), rid yourselves (put away v 8), “do not lie to one another” (v 9), and “clothe yourselves” or put on then (v 12). In fact the whole section from Ch 3 v 5 to Ch 4 v 6, a piece of early Christian instruction, stems from or rather flows out of Ch 3 v 1-4. The Believer who is truly heavenly minded will be of maximum earthly use.

The warfare between flesh and Spirit still continues until the last day and we are urged by the apostle to press on in our Christian lives, as we all long for the final adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

At the beginning of V 5 “Put to death.....” recalls the Colossian’s union with Christ in His death (Ch 2 v 20, Ch 3 v 3 + Ch 2 v 11 & 12), they have died with Him, therefore they are to deal a death blow to evil habits and thoughts.

Two lists, each of five sins (also v 8), similar to those found among pagan moralists and in the anti-pagan arguments of the Jews, are followed by five graces in V 12.

The five sins which belonged to their past pagan activity and associated with their “earthly nature”. Paul practically identifies these members with the sins committed by them as he describes first the outward expressions of sin (“sexual immorality”) and then the inward cravings of the heart (“ruthless greed”). The danger of greed is especially emphasised as a “gross sin” for it is equated with idolatry.

Such a person, instead of focusing his or her whole life on the things above, where Christ rules as King, is seeking the things below, and therefore worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator (Rom Ch 1 v 25). Paul knew the special deadliness of this sin (Rom Ch 7 v 7&8, Matt Ch 6 v 24). Perhaps it is so dangerous because it may assume so many respectable forms. After all, are not those things we do not have but earnestly desire simply “necessities”? We deceive ourselves into making idols of our own demands.

In verse 6, as often elsewhere, the list of pagan sins is set within the context of God’s judgement. The “wrath of God (Rom Ch 1 v 18-32) describes His holy anger against sin and the judgement that results. It has nothing to do with spiteful reaction or outburst of passion. Nor is it an unchangeable process of cause and effect. Rather, it is the outworking of God’s holiness against all unrighteousness. “Is coming” indicates that God punishes sin in the present as well as on the final day.

Using a “once//now” contrast in verses 7 & 8, the readers are shown how their present behaviour is to be different from their pagan past. Formerly their lives were characterized by the very vices on account of which God’s wrath is coming.

They are to get “rid” of (or put away, put off) their old, repulsive habits, including evil speech, like a set of worn-out clothes, anger and rage destroy harmony in human relationships. “Malice” is a general term describing an evil force that wrecks fellowship. “Slander” here means the insulting of human character but elsewhere can mean blasphemy against God (Rom Ch 2 v 24 + 1 Tim Ch 6 v 1).

“Obscene talk” as the last in the series, is here emphasized as in need of being stopped before it comes out of their mouths. Two reasons are given for this abandonment of evil ways. First, they “have taken off” their old self with its practises. Your “old self” speaks of the whole personality of an individual when ruled by sin (Rom Ch 6 v 6; Eph Ch 4 v 22), at the same time it points to that person’s belonging to the old sinful humanity in Adam.

The “practises” include the two lists of vices in V’s 5 and 8. Since these have been “taken off” in Christ’s death, the Colossians are to have nothing to do with false speaking and the other repulsive habits mentioned.

The second reason is that “the new self” has been put ON in place of the old. “The new self” means the new nature which each of the Colossians had put on when they were joined to Christ in His resurrection. The phrase literally means “the new man” and signifies also a corporate figure referring to the new humanity found in Christ (see also 2 Cor Ch 5 v 17 + Gal Ch 6 v 15).

The image of the Creator serves as the model or pattern for the renewal of the new person- a renewal that has in view the readers’ progressive increase in true knowledge, which includes their ability to recognize God’s will and command. There is a similar idea in Romans Ch 8 v 29 (compare 1 Cor Ch 15 v 19) where the Christian’s change is “into the image of Christ”. Within this new humanity there is no inferiority of one class to another. Men and women of completely different origins are gathered together in unity in Christ, sharing a common allegiance to their Lord.

Christ is all that matters, He lives in all members of His body, regardless of race, class or background, giving them life and power.

Transcript of the presentation given by Deacon Rodney Burge and discussed at the church-based, morning home group on Tuesday 7th July 2026. All scripture is from the ESV Translation.

