

The Christ-Centered Life (Part 1) Colossians 3:1-11

Some of our most memorable days at IDC have been “**Baptism Sundays.**”

- Believers read their testimonies to the congregation, declaring Jesus as Lord, and get baptized as a visible display **of their union with Jesus.**
- We have done these baptisms in various places (**a horse trough, a portable baptistery at a storefront, at Falls Lake [I’ll never forget the day a lady was doing Yoga on a paddle board behind me while i was preaching! I didn’t know why everyone was laughing!], and now in this nice built-in baptistery).**
- **But regardless of the location, joy and gratitude have characterized these moments.**
- We long to see **more and more people converted and baptized** – and that will happen as we keep bearing witness to Christ in our everyday lives.

Kevin Vanhoozer says: “**It [baptism] is a rich theological lesson that also grips the church’s imagination, particularly when congregants are exhorted to ‘remember your baptism’ as they watch the baptism of someone else.**”

How do we live the Christian life? It involves “**remembering your baptism.**”

- It involves **recalling your death to the old self/world, and putting on of the new self/creation.**”
- It involves **walking in the newness of life** that we now have through our union with Christ.
- This passage speaks of putting off of the **old life, and putting on the new life.**

Though this passage does not speak of the ordinance of baptism explicitly, the spiritual reality is communicated powerfully.

- It is like many passages in the NT (**Eph 4; Rom 13; Gal 3:27**) that communicates this idea of taking off the old and putting on the new.
 - **Romans, Eph, Gal, & Colossians are saturated w baptism language allusions.**
- F.F. Bruce comments on our passage: “**There are old practices to be abandoned; there is a new way of life to be adopted. The old must be put off; the new must be put on – a figure of speech which has been associated with the wearing of new garments at one’s baptism.**”
- During some ancient practices of baptism, the person being baptized would **literally take off the old garment and put on new garment after being baptized.**
- **In certain places around the world today, some new baptized converts are literally given a new name.**
- **In other places, when a family member gets baptized, the family disowns them, and considers them “dead” – because they do not support the decision, and are in fact shamed by it due to their religious beliefs.**
- **Become a Christian involves a death; it involves a new life, a new identity, a whole new way to see the world.**
- **If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation!**
- **We need to “remember our baptism” because we can forget who we are.**
- **“Identity Theft” - happened recently (only on social media)...**

- Colossians were being threatened with identity theft (cf., 2:8), and much of this letter, especially this passage, is meant to remind them of who they are in Christ.

Paul has already talked about baptism in 2:12, and here the same language is conveyed to talk about our new life in Christ.

This passage is a great passage for a new believer because it is basic Xian discipleship. But it's not just for new converts; it is for every Christian, as we remember our baptism today, we need to see to it that our lifestyle accords with our new identity.

My outline (Two Weeks)

1. You're New Life is Now in Christ (3:1-4)
2. Put Off All That is Inconsistent with Your New Life in Christ (3:5-11)
3. Put On All That is Consistent with Your New Life in Christ (3:12-4:1)

In the household rules (3:18–4:1), which can be viewed as a distinct unit, it is the sevenfold reference to “the Lord” which runs through them, picking up from 3:17.

#1: You're New Life Is Now in Christ (3:1-4)

Paul makes two incredible statements about the believer's new identity in these verses:

- “Your **life** is hidden with Christ in God” (v. 3),
- “Christ Is Your **Life**.” (v. 4)
- **A believer has a brand new identity and focus in life: Christ.**

Notice four truths related to this transformed life:

A. You [Believer] Share in Christ's Victory (3:1a)

3:1: “**If then**” [or “since then”] draws our attention back to the previous sections, as Paul has already described that we have been “**raised**” up with Christ (2:12). It is reiterated here.

First, there was a historic resurrection (contrary to my friend's recent meeting re church merger). But here, we see a glorious result of X's resurrection — We share in Christ's resurrection victory!

In Ephesians 2:5-6, he says that we have been “made alive together with Christ”; we have been “raised” and “seated” with Christ...

These little word “**with**” is the word is the prefix “**syn**” – like being synching up your phone with your Ipad or computer.

- We have been synched up with Christ. **What is true of him, is true of us.**
- **Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**
- We died with him, we have been raised with him, and in some mysterious way, we have already been seated with him.
- **Nationals won the World Series: “Congratulations!” “Thanks, but I didn't play.... I tried to coach, but I had trouble communicating.”**
- You share in a greater victory!

B. You Have a New Priority [or “mentality”] (3:1b-2)

That priority is mentioned in two virtually synonymous commands: “Seek the things that are above” and “Set your minds on things that are above, no on things of the earth.”

What does this mean? It means “love Christ.”

The chief benefit that comes from Christ’s salvation is Christ himself.

“Setting your mind on things above” does not mean we are to think in **geographically and materially** about heaven – the furniture, the streets, etc.

It means that we think on Christ: His beauty; his authority and rule and kingdom: **“where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”**

Paul’s mention of Christ being seated at the right hand of God recalls **Psalm 110** – an important Psalm cited throughout the NT to speak of Christ’s reign.

**He is sitting! He is not pacing! He is not wringing his hands!
He is doing what Kings do – they sit and rule!**

The **“right hand of God”** is Bible speak for “supreme rule and authority.”

- He is already reigning! **It is the mop up work that is left.**
- **And this calm sovereign rule of Christ should ooze into our pores and give us peace.**
- **It can settle us in our pressures.**

Our priority then is to seek Christ, to “set our minds” on Christ and **his kingdom, his power, his presence, his peace, his heavenly joys given to believers** ... **“not the things of earth.”**

- That is, earthly praise, honors, advancement...
- It’s not that we don’t strive to be excellent in all our work (we do!); it’s that we do it all unto Christ, and not as an end itself. We see these things differently now.
- Do not let your ambitions be earthbound!
- Have a heavenly, Christ-centered ambition in life!

Nothing on this earth can give you what Christ can give you; and nothing on earth is as important and valuable as Christ Jesus and his honor and glory.

C. You Have a New Security (3:3)

“For you died” speaks again of dying to the old order; and having new life (cf., **Gal 2:20**). It’s a death to self that brings true liberation.

“Your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

This has at least one meaning, and maybe two.

First, it means that we are **secure and safe in Christ**.

- This verse carries echoes of **Psalm 27:5-6; 31:19-20; 49:2**

- Look how secure: We are “with Christ who is in God.” You couldn’t be more secure!
- It is “a double [fortification], all divine” (Moule)
- You are safe in Christ!
- **It doesn’t mean you won’t have hardships/pain; but that Jesus will keep you in the midst of it all. He is our refuge.**

Second, it may intend to communicate something of the **hiddenness of the Christian** – that is, there is something special about a Christian that is **yet to be revealed**.

- It will be revealed when Christ comes (v. 4; cf., **Rom 8:18**).
- **There’s something about a Christian that is very “ordinary” and “unimpressive” and there is something that is hidden and spectacular that will one day be revealed** (1 John 3:2; Phil 3:20-21)

D. You Have a New Destiny (3:4)

“**Christ who is your life**” – We died, and have taken on a new life.

- For many, they would prefer to put something in place of “Christ” -- **money, power, cars, achievements, beauty... Is that your life?**
- The story is told of Jack Benny, an old entertainer and (a apparently real penny-pincher) ... he was walking along the streets when suddenly **an armed robber approached and said, “Your money or your life!” There was a long pause as Benny did nothing. The robber impatiently cried, “Well?” Jack Benny replied, “Don’t rush me! I’m thinking about it.”**

Millions of people today think their things are their life.

No, **Christ** is our life. Or as Paul says in **Philippians 1:21**, “To live is Christ....”

But Christ is not just **our life**; he is **our hope**: Christ will appear and **we will appear with him in glory**. (1:27 – the hope in us now, we one day be fully experienced).

- “**He’s Due**”
- **Advent season is just around the corner...**

“**Then you also**” – This is vintage Jesus.

- His people are connected with him!
- “Then you also” will be put on display with him in glory.
- How do we get experience this glory? We are **with him!**
- **Have you ever hand entrance into a special place because you were with someone significant? You have no right to be there, but you are with him/her!**
- **Or are you familiar with a golf scramble... where your team of 4 uses the best ball...**
 - **Tom Underdown (Fairways for Warriors)... Ethan... Golf Pro – 17 under!**
 - **If someone on your team shot it, then you got it I didn’t contribute...**
- So it is here – we will share in his glory because we are with him!
- Right now, the glory of a saint is veiled; but it will be revealed! Christ’s glory will be on us! We died with him; we were raised with him; and we will appear with him in glory!

#2: Put Off All That Is Inconsistent with Your New Life in Christ (3:5-11)

Having established this identity change, Paul now says we must “put to death” (v. 5), or “put away” (v. 8) or “put off” (v. 9) – **say good-bye to your old life.**

- In the next section, he tells us what to “**put on**” (3:12).
- Verses 5-11 is called a “**vice list**” and verses 12-17 is called a “**virtue list**” by some.

This vice list contains attitudes and actions that must not be part of a Christian’s life:

- (1) **sensuality and greed (v. 5-7), and**
- (2) **sinful attitudes and speech (v. 8-9a).**

The list touches on the basic human temptations and problems of humanity...

- to feel - sex, passion - pleasure (Hedonism)
- to have - possessions (Materialism)
- to be - pride (Narcissism, expressed in anger, jealousy/rage)

Every single commercial ever made were one of those three!

Note two things before we look at these:

(1) You have power to do this!

- Paul has already made this point in the first four verses. You have been **raised with Christ!**
- **You don’t have to be enslaved to sin.**
- He also alludes to this fact when he says “you have put off the old self and have put on the new self” (v. 9).
- This passage is filled with what we call “**the indicatives**” and the “**imperatives.**”
 - Indicatives are statements of facts about who we are; and the imperatives are commands about what we should do.
 - It is the **indicatives that empower the imperatives.**
 - We need both to grow in Christ-likeness.
 - **We need to be reminded of who we are – constantly; and we need to be exhorted to put off sinful patterns and action, and put on godliness.**
 - **The indicative/imperative is saying this: Be who you are!**
 - **You have been raised to walk in new life – walk in it!**

(2) This list (3:5-17) is a picture of the Lord Jesus.

- The goal is Christ-likeness. Being “renewed after our Creator” (v. 10).
- We are taking off the old Adam, and putting on the New Adam.
- That’s what godliness and holiness is, **looking like Jesus.**
- **Don’t think of some goody-goody, or someone who is isolated from the world.**
- **Don’t think of outward appearances (robe/holy man), but think desires and actions.**
- **Think of Jesus when you think of this list.**
- **If you have a problem with this list, then you have a problem with Jesus** – he never committed these sins – and he manifested all the positive traits in v. 12-17.

A. Sensuality and Greed (3:5-7)

Paul tells the church to “**put to death**” (or as it might be rendered “**reckon as dead**”) these sins: **sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.**

- The language is intense, but it is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

- The believer is not to try to simply get sin under control, but to **kill it** – or as he says later, put it away.
- “Reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (**Rom 6:11**)
- Don’t play around with sin – with your old life – realize your’re dead to it!
- You don’t have to live in that realm anymore. You aren’t a slave to sin!
- **That game is over! – Playing Gallaga as a kid... GAME OVER**

4 Sins Related to Sensuality that Must Be Executed:

1. Put Sexual Immorality to Death

- The word is *porneian* from which we get the word *pornographic*.
- This includes every kind of sexually immoral relationship.
- One writer says, **“Chastity was the one completely new virtue which Christianity brought to the world.... In the ancient world, regarded the sexual appetite something to be gratified not controlled.”** (Barclay)
- So we shouldn’t be surprised Paul brings it up in a letter to **the church**.
- **“Adulterous relationships, men sleeping with slave girls, incest, prostitution, sacred sexual encounters in the local temples, and homosexuality were all the part of every day life in that culture”** (Clinton Arnold).
- That’s the first century.
- **It was radical in Paul’s day to adopt a Christian view of sexuality and it is radical today!**
- You will be labeled as narrow-minded, bigoted, or worse if you affirm the traditional Christian teaching on singleness and marriage. (And there is a traditional teaching on these matters that the church has affirmed for 2,000 years contrary to what some say).

2. Put Impurity to Death

- This refers to all moral uncleanness and evil.
- This is a more broad term, that would include things like **filthily thoughts, imaginations, speech...**

3. Put Passion to Death

- There is a passion we need: Passion for God’s glory.
- But here it’s used in a negative context. Some translate it as **“lust.”**
- Paul speaks of **“passionate lust”** in **1 Thess 4:5** that we must avoid, and **“shameful/dishonorable lust”** in Romans 1:26.

4. Put Evil Desires to Death

- This speaks of wicked, self-serving, desires that leads to various sinful actions.

This deadly quartet in verse 5 must be executed.

- **“Be killing sin or it will be killing you” (John Owen)**

These sins are inconsistent with our new life.

Christ has given us a new cleanness positionally; let us live clean lives practically.

Covetousness (v. 5)

- That is, desiring that which belongs to someone else. It is **“have-moreism.”**
- Paul may mention it here because he has sexually-driven covetousness in mind.
- In the Ten Commandments we see that connection (Do not covet your neighbors house, *wife*, possessions).

Whether he has sensuality in mind, or materialism in mind, he says it is **idolatry**.

- **Both sins (sexual sin or material greed) have the same source: idolatry.**
- Idolatry happens when we look to someone or some thing to give us what only Christ can give us: Joy, satisfaction, meaning, identity.

Material greed is so dangerous because it is **a more socially acceptable sin.**

- You’ve heard me say before that **no one thinks they’re greedy!**
- **In 15 plus years of pastoring, and 20 years of ministry, no one has ever confessed “greed!”**
- Why? I think the answer is reflected in Jesus’ words in **Luke 12:15**: He says, **“Watch out, you might be greedy.”**
- **He doesn’t have to say that about other sins.**
- **Why? Because you know when you commit adultery! It’s obvious. No one wakes up and says, “You’re not wife.” But greed is sneaky.**

Christian, beware of greed. It is destructive.

- How do we put it to death?
- One way is to simply **become a generous person.**
- **Every time you give, you break the power of materialism.**
- **Generosity frees you from greed.**

V. 6: “One account of these, the wrath of God is coming.”

How serious are these sins?

- **More than we realize, and certainly more than the outside world thinks.**
- These sins provoke the wrath of God, and there are illustrations throughout Scripture.
- We could go read the sexual sin with Israel and the Moabite women that lead to God’s judgment – 24,000 were killed. (Number 25)
- Or we could read the sin of Achan or Judas, regarding coveteousness...

V. 7: Here’s what we must remember: **“We once walked in this way”** **“but now “** (v. 8) we don’t have to!

- **We are new. We are different.**
- **We have been raised to life!**
- **Therefore you are not without hope if you are entangled in these sins!**
- **New creations can put these things to death!**

B. Sinful Attitudes and Speech (3:8-9a)

This next list of sins falls generally under the **relational sin** category.

- They’re not the gross sins mentioned in verse 5; so we tend to not take them as seriously as we should. But we must put these way, also!

- It speaks of those who cannot **control their temper or their tongue.**

V. 8: Temper

- **Anger** is sinful, inner anger. It is the person who lives with this chip on his/her shoulder. Always upset about something. “Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the hearts of fools.” (Eccl 7:9)
- **Wrath** or “**rage**” anger that is boiling over. **It is the quick temper.** Put it away.
- **Malice** speaks of a malignant attitude, which usually **involves planning to do evil.**
 - It also involves **rejoicing when misery falls on the one he or she hates.**
 - Example: Haman/Mordecai (Esther 5:14).

Since Christ gives us a new **calmness**, let us put aside this anger...

- **This is one of the primary ways a person may show that Christ has changed them – in their attitude and speech.**
- I have seen Jesus take a guy who was overly-competitive; who led the high school basketball team in technical fouls, and used to brawl a lot, and calm him down – though he can still get riled up (that would be me!).
- John – The Apostle of Love” who wanted to burn up the Samaritans!
- Peter – Who cut a guy’s ear off!
- **Slander** follows these attitudes.
 - This is **hurtful and harmful speech, which dishonors a person’s character.**
 - Sadly this **happens all the time in the Christian community.**
 - Gossip and slander are **perhaps the most acceptable sins in the church.**
- **Obscene talk** also follows uncontrolled anger.
 - That is, foul, obscene, abusive speech.

Now sometimes freedom from these sins (like the sins in verse 5) happens in suddenly, as God gives liberty, but other times this change comes through a gradual struggle.

Ralph Davis tells the story of a man during Lloyd Jones’ ministry in the 30’s in Wales named William Thomas, who was up in his 60’s-70’s that was a nasty fella. He had a foul mouth, and was drunk often. Other guys in the pub didn’t even want to drink with him. That’s really bad if guys in a village pub won’t even hang with you!!

But he went to the evening service one night and heard the gospel. He got converted. It was an amazing transformation.

Then, he had a huge problem. No one in the church really knew about it, but he was driven almost to the point of despair. He was so used to using profanity and foul talk that he had a hard time even communicating a sentence without cursing! Then after he would say something obscene, he would be guilty and become full of despair.

One day he was getting dressed, and he couldn’t find his socks. And he yelled, “I can’t find my _____ socks. Where are the _____ things?” And as soon as he heard himself, a great horror came over him and he cried out aloud, “O Lord, cleanse my tongue! I can’t even put my socks on without saying something nasty!”

Mrs. Lloyd-Jones writes, "As he lay there and as he got up from that bed, he knew that God had done for him what he could not do for himself. His prayer had been heard and from that day, there was not a profane or filthy word that came out of his mouth."

- Jesus gave him a new cleanness and a new calm.
- It may be different for you; God may change these habits in your life abruptly, or you may find freedom through an agonizing fight; but either way, there is hope because we are new creations in Christ. We have a new identity; new desires, new power.

Verse 9: Paul adds...**"Do not lie to each other" (v. 9a).**

- Jesus gives us a new candor – a new truth telling habit.

Lying is a sin **against God**. It's a characteristic of Satan (as is slander)

- It is a sin against a **fellow human being**.
- How serious is lying? God struck down Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 due to their deception.
- Our God is the God of truth, the God who Titus says, "never lies."
- He expects his people to be truth tellers.
- Ephesians 4:25 – put off falsehood and put on truth.
- Great churches are filled with honest people.
- They are **filled with men and women of their word**.
 - It is easy to develop these habits of **making promises you don't keep; or making commitments you don't keep**.
- We can become skilled in not speaking the truth candidly, even over little things.
 - **If someone asks you to go watch professional wrestling, but you could care less about wrestling, you don't have to lie and say, "I have to get my haircut that night." You can just say, "I'm not interested in wrestling; thanks for thinking of me."**

C. The Rational (9b-10)

Why should we adopt this pursuit of godliness? **Because we have put on the new self!**

Notice the theology, **"seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self...."**

- Something has already happened; and now we must live out this new identity (cf., Rom 13:14).
- We renounced the evil practices mentioned in verses 5-8 when we came to Christ, as we were baptized into Christ, and born anew.
- We already took off the old garment of this earthly life, and put on Christ's life.
- We have a new self – that is, new sensibilities, abilities, and possibilities.

"which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (v. 10).

- Since we are new and are being renewed, live in a way consistent with this reality.
- The "image" recalls Colossians 1:15; we are being renewed in the image of Christ.
- **2 Corinthians 4:16** – it is happening.
- How? **2 Corinthians 3:18**.

D. A Practical Implication of This Way of Life: Harmony (3:11)

“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”

If we put off the old way of thinking and acting, and live out our new identity, what difference will it make? It will make a ton of difference:

- You can live with a **clean conscious**, instead of walking in darkness!
- You will start giving and **being generous**, instead of being greedy – which will not only bless the world but bless you too.
- What Paul emphasizes here is that if we put away **these sinful attitudes and sinful speech then it will change our human relationships**. We can experience the blessing of harmony.

Barriers to relationships will be removed, and a sweet unity will be enjoyed.

Christ changes not just our sexual views and practices, and not just our use of money, but Christ also changes our relationships!

- *Racial* barriers (“Greek or Jew”) are broken down.
- *Religious/ethnic* barriers (“circumcised or uncircumcised”) are broken down.
- *Cultural* barriers (“barbarian [non-Greek], Scythian, viewed more uncouth the Barnabrians [in North around black Sea – on the edge of civilization]) are broken down.
- *Social* barriers (“slave or free”) are broken down.
 - Bruce: “Within the believing community slaves as much as free persons were brothers and sisters “for whom Christ died” (Rom 14:15)... A slave might be a leader in a Christian church by virtue of his spiritual stature and ability, and freeborn members of the church would humbly and gratefully accept his direction.”

This bears similarity to **Galatians 3:28**.

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The gospel transcends these barriers!

- **This made a powerful impact on the pagan world! And it will today!**
- When this happens, **John 13:35** will be lived out: “All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Finally, notice the Christological climax, “Christ is all, and in all.**”**

Because Christ lives in each person, Christ unites us together.

Paul is not saying that these distinct characteristics are gone (race, ethnicity, background), but that being in Christ takes precedence over all differences.

Oneness in Christ does not mean external sameness.

No, it is when unity exists amid diversity that the glory of Christ is magnified.

When our identity in Christ is more important than other identities, then we can have such unity amidst our diversity.

Isaac Watts, “Jesus Invites His Saints” (a Communion Hymn)

*Jesus invites his saints
to meet around his board;
here pardoned rebels sit, and hold
communion with their Lord.*

When you remember where you were before Christ, a rebel until Jesus pardoned you, you won't get uppity with other people.

The Table is powerful way to express Colossians 3:11: Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”

Conclusion: Jesus changes everything.

- He overcomes our filthiness, our fury, our falsehood, and our fragmentation.
- He makes us clean, calm truth-tellers, united together in Christ.
- Now we walk in newness of life!
- Remember your baptism, Christian.
- Remember who are, and live in a way that is consistent with your new identity.