

Colossians 3:1-17 Study Questions

Throughout this series, we've been talking about what Jesus's supremacy over all things means for us and our lives. As we've discussed, this truth has a profound impact not just on our salvation but also our day-to-day lives.

In Col. 2:6-23, Paul has confronted the false teachings swirling around the church and Colossae and exposed it for what it is, a bankrupt system that denigrates Christ's preeminence and sufficiency. What is the alternative? Paul provides the only reasonable alternative, the Colossian church (and we) must instead focus on Christ alone and become who we are in Him. (Col. 3:1-4) We live our Christian life as a result of the Identity that we have in Jesus Christ. This new identity has made us alive in Christ and alive to the things of Christ.

Since we're alive in Christ, we can take off the old self and put on the new self, which affects our mindset, our actions toward each other, and how we engage in corporate worship.

Therefore, Col. 3:5-11, tells us we must strip off, the filthy ruined clothes, the practices that belong to the fallen old humanity to which we once belonged. We can only do so because, in Christ, this old humanity has been stripped off. Instead we have donned (like a fresh garment) the new humanity of the new creation in Christ. Consequently, we are now marked by the practices of this new humanity, putting on above these new virtues which all tie together in the ultimate virtue of love. (Col. 3:12-17)

Reflect on the following questions:

1. Read Colossians 3:1-4. Christians have died and have been raised together with Christ. (Col. 3:1a,3a) They are now hidden away with Christ in God and live in Christ. (Col 3:3, 4a) At Christ's return on the last day of history, they will be revealed with Him, clothed in glory. (Col 3:4b, Col 1:27) Now, in view of our wonderful identification with Christ, we have a great responsibility: "Seek those things (set our minds on) which are above." (Col 3:1) What do you think it means to set your mind on things above? What does it mean to think about earthly things? What things do you do to keep your heart and mind focused on God?

2. Paul tells the Colossians to set their minds above because their life is now found in Christ. He is our hope. One day, when He returns, we will also be with Him in His glory. How could focusing on the future glory of Christ help you keep your mind on Him today? According to this text, where do believers live? To what age do they belong? How did Paul expect this to impact their life?

Clarification: The language of the heavenly things "above" and the things that are "on earth" is not intended to imply that the immaterial world (e.g., the soul) is good, whereas the physical world (e.g., the body or food or sex) is evil. We spoke about this in previous messages. Such a notion is indebted more to ancient Greek philosophy than to Christian Scripture. Rather, this is a way of talking about two ages: the present fallen age dominated by sin and demonic powers (the corrupted old creation), and the future age of the kingdom of God (the incorruptible new creation).

3. Read Col. 3:5-11. What must a disciple do to maintain Kingdom focus? Why do you think Paul chose such strong language as "putting [these things] to death"? (Col. 3:5)

4. As you read the two lists in verses 5, 8, & 9a (which are not exhaustive), note that the first list deals with sensual or sexual sins; the second list deals with social sins. I love what Paul does here. He's got these giant things that everyone agrees on to be sinful, like sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed. But then he rolls it down onto an everyday level and says

things like anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language and lying to one another. Why do you think he does this? As you parse those sins out, are there any that you struggle with? Honestly assess your condition; and, in light of your identity, what does it look like to put to death the old self and its habits? How have you done this in your own life? How can the group help keep you accountable to this process?

5. Verse 11 reminds us of the unity we have in Jesus. No religious, cultural, racial, or social divisions divide Christians any longer because Jesus demolished them when He died and rose again. His blood has redeemed all of us—none of us is above the other. How have you experienced the unity of the body of Christ? In what ways do you think Christians could improve in this area?

6. Read verses 12-14. (Notice more identity language – God’s chosen people, holy, dearly loved.) We are to put on (clothe ourselves with) the virtues that correspond to the new humanity that God is re-creating in Christ. Highlight what these virtues are and try to define how they practically play out in the life of a believer. Which of the spiritual garments listed here do you need to start wearing or wear more often? How can your group members help keep you accountable in this process?

7. As elsewhere in Paul’s letters, “love” holds pride of place as the cardinal virtue that summarizes what God requires of His new covenant people. (Col. 3:14; Rom. 13:9-10; 1 Cor. 13:1-13; Gal. 5:6, 13-14, 22a; Eph. 5:1-2). Reflect upon how contemporary society defines love, and then attempt to define love from the Scripture texts mentioned above. Why is love the bond of perfection? Why do you think Paul tells the Colossians to put on love over all the other virtues he mentions? (Col. 3:14)

Note: As we saw in this passage, taking off the old self and putting on the new isn’t something we’re meant to do alone. It can seem like an overwhelming—maybe even impossible—task on our own. But we know that not only do we have the power of Christ in us through the Spirit, but we also have a community of believers to encourage us forward.

8. Read verses 15-17. One of the central means God uses to renew us into the image of God is Scripture. In verse 16, Paul urges the Colossians to “let the word of Christ dwell” among them richly. He told them to do so through teaching and singing psalms and hymns. The message of Christ was to inhabit the center of the community’s life and worship. How can you tell that Christ’s Word is dwelling us? How do songs and psalms help you remember and reflect on the gospel? What are some of your favorite psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs? Why are they your favorites? What do they teach about God and His gospel?

Going Deeper: In verse 1b, it says, “Christ is seated at the right hand of God.” Read the following passages: Luke 22:66–71; Acts 2:32–33; Acts 7:54–56; Rom. 8:34–39; Heb. 12:1–2. What do these verses reveal about the character and nature of Jesus? Would you say the “right hand of God” is an indication of Jesus’s authority? If so, why?

Jesus is at the right hand of God, which means He intercedes for us, has authority, and offers us hope as we persist in following Him. He is God. He hears our prayers. He acts on our behalf. He loves us. And He will one day return. What difference does it make in your life knowing that Jesus intercedes for you, offers you hope, and stands in authority at the right hand of God?