

Lesson 9 – Colossians 3:1-9

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Review/Introduction

The apostle Paul is writing a letter to the church at Colossae – a church he does not know and one that is facing heretical attacks on the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. Today, we start the second half of the epistle to the Colossians.

Chapters one and two laid the foundation for the supremacy of Christ over all things and the believer's sufficiency in Christ for salvation and sanctification. Philosophy, human wisdom, legalism, mysticism, or asceticism by themselves or if added to Christ are useless in regards to salvation or sanctification. Salvation and sanctification are only found in Christ.

Chapters three and four will now address how the believer walks in light of Christ's supremacy and sufficiency. Here is where the rubber meets the road. Here is where Paul exhorts the Colossian (and us) to strive in the power of the Spirit to walk in our position; to live out in practice what we already are in Christ.

Putting off Sin (3:1-7)

1. The reminder of position (3:1a)

^{1a}Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ,

^{1a}If then you have been raised with Christ, (ESV)

“Therefore” indicates that something follows necessarily from another. There is nothing that Gnostic philosophy, human wisdom, legalism, mysticism, or asceticism can provide. In fact, they are “of no value against fleshly indulgence” (2:23). Christ is supreme and sufficient, you are complete in Him, therefore, here is how you must necessarily walk. You have no choice if you claim to be a believer. This should be your way of life.

“If” can be translated “since” or “in view of the fact” and is connected to the main verb “have been raised”.

“Have been raised up with” is the summary of chapters one and two. “Have been raised up with” means to be raised together. It is a statement of fact, a past completed action that occurred at the moment you exercised the gift of true saving faith. It is in the passive voice meaning that the power to be raised up came from outside yourself.

This is interesting. Doctrinal, positional fact precedes holy action. Union with Christ is the doctrinal prerequisite to walking with Christ. The internal change that God does in our heart by union with Christ should result in an external change. In fact, the external change is the demonstration that the internal change has occurred. It will be evident on the outside that Christ lives in you (Gal 2:20).

⁵Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Cor 13:5)

❖ **When is the last time you asked God to examine your life in this way?**

The Christian walk is all about Christ. Paul emphasizes this with reference to Christ five times in verses 1-4.

¹Therefore if you have been raised up with **Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where **Christ** is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with **Christ** in God. ⁴When **Christ**, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with **Him** in glory.

❖ **Is your life about anything other than Christ?**

2. The “secret” of the Christian life (3:1b-3)

^{1b}...keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

^{1b}...seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (ESV)

There are two commands here. First is “keep seeking” which means to seek after and strive for earnestly, to devote serious effort to realize one’s desire or objective. This is a command. It is to be a pattern of life (present tense) and requires a choice of the will. Second is “set your mind” which means to continually have the disposition of the affections, will, and reason set on the things above.

“The things above” means higher in place, a position above another position. Since this is “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God”, it means heavenly things or eternal things. The phrase is placed first in the Greek for emphasis. The “things” are not low or basic, they are not human wisdom or philosophy, they are not works or mysticism or asceticism. They are not imaginations about what heaven is about. These are things that can be sought after and dwelt on and are not of the earth.

So, what are “the things above”? The key is verse 3. We have died and our life is hidden with Christ in God. So, what did Christ dwell on? What were His overriding thoughts and focus? Christ’s overriding thought was to do the Father’s will and thereby glorify Him.

³⁴Jesus said to them, “**My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.** (John 4:34)

³⁰“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because **I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.** (John 5:30)

³⁸For **I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.** (John 6:38)

⁴²saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; **yet not My will, but Yours be done.**” (Luke 22:42)

¹Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; **glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You**, ²even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. ³This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴**I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.** ⁵Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (John 17:1-5)

The principle: continually devote yourself to serious effort and earnestly strive to glorify God, being a doer of His word (will), having your affections, will, and reason set on that.

From the moment you wake in the morning until the moment you fall asleep at night, are you seeking and setting your affections, will, and reason to glorify God by doing His will? In all areas of life, is your constant inclination of thought and affection to glorify God by doing His will? At home, school, work, church, or community; with family, co-workers, brethren, or strangers, is the constant inclination of your thought and affection to glorify God by doing His will?

❖ **Does this describe you? What needs to change to have this describe you?**

To be clear, “setting one’s mind on the things that are on **earth**” is a characteristic of unbelievers. A life lived with a mind set on earthly things is either an unbeliever, or a believer who refuses to avail herself/himself of the treasures in their relationship with Christ (2:3).

¹⁸For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are enemies of the cross of Christ*, ¹⁹whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, **who set their minds on earthly things.** (Phil 3:18-19)

⁵For **those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh**, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 8:5-8)

The reason that setting your mind on things above should be the norm for the believer is that you have died, you no longer live (Gal 2:20), and your “life” (supernatural life including the fullness of life which comes from being united with Christ) is now all about Christ because you are united with Him. Your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

❖ **Where is your mind set – on above or on earth?**

“Hidden” means to cover, to hide, to conceal, to protectively keep secret. This idea could have multiple nuances to it. Believers have access to all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are “hidden” in Christ (2:3). Believers are also secure in Christ. Finally, the world does not comprehend the redeemed life of Christ flowing through us. In context (v4) it seems best to think of the “hidden” as Christ’s righteousness which is imputed (placed on) to the believer (more in verse 4).

This is justification – the work of God (Rom 8:33) where the believing sinner is declared righteous (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:10; Isa 55:6-7). Our sins are placed on Jesus (Col 2:14; 1 Pet 2:24) and Jesus’ righteousness is placed on us (Rom 3:24, 28; 5:9; Gal 2:16; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21).

²¹He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor 5:21)

3. The reward of faith (3:4)

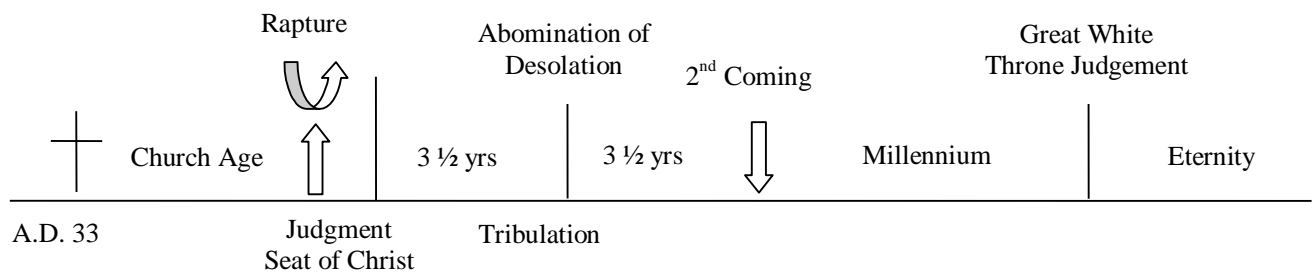
⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (ESV)

A key point Paul is making in Colossians is: “Christ, who is our life”. For the chosen, called, regenerated, justified, adopted, Spirit-indwelt, Spirit-baptized, Spirit-sealed, redeemed, reconciled, forgiven (i.e., those who have exercised the gift of true saving faith), life is not about ourselves, it is all about Christ. Christ is our life (supernatural life including the fullness of life which comes from being united with Christ). Real life, purposeful life, is all about Christ. The believer’s life should not “be” anything else.

The believer’s life is hidden with Christ in God, but one day that will be revealed. “Revealed” describes an external manifestation to the senses which is open to all making visible that which has been hidden. Our “revealing” will occur at Christ’s revealing in glory. This will occur at Christ’s second coming.

The return of Jesus is a prominent doctrine in Scripture. All evangelicals hold that Christ will return, though they differ, sometimes significantly, on the details. The diagram below shows the premillennial second coming and pretribulational rapture position held by VBC.



At the rapture Jesus is not revealed, so this must be at the second coming.

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷**Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.** ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:13-18)

What the world cannot see now visibly is the righteousness of Christ placed on the believer. At the second coming, it appears that Christ's righteousness will be outwardly evident when the church age believers who died prior to the rapture and those raptured return with Christ at His second coming.

¹³Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" ¹⁴I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and **they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** ¹⁵For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. (Rev 7:13-15)

¹¹And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. ¹²His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except Himself. ¹³*He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴**And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.** (Rev 19:11-14)

❖ **Are you striving to let the world see Christ in you now also?**

4. Putting off sin (3:5-9)

⁵Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices,

⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices (ESV)

Since we have been given a complete salvation having been raised up with Christ. And since we should continually devote ourselves to serious effort and earnestly strive to glorify God, being a doer of His word (will), having all our affections, will, and reason set on that. And since we are in union with Christ and our life is supernatural because we have access to the Spirit. And since, one day, the world will see the great work Christ has done in us by seeing His righteousness. Then consider...

Unfortunately, the NASB does a poor job of translating the phrase, "therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead". It is literally, "effectively put to death, therefore, the members which are on the earth".

“Members” is literally a limb or member of the body. In the plural "members" refers to the seat of the desires and passions. “Which are on the earth” addresses the Gnostic false teaching that viewed the soul as eternal, but the body as earthly, perishable and thus unimportant. Paul says that how one lives is important because it demonstrates the inner truth about union with Christ.

“Put to death” means literally to put to death, to slay utterly, to kill. In the Latin Vulgate the verb is “mortifico” which is related to our English "mortify". The verb is a command, it calls for doing it effectively producing a result, and calls for decisiveness.

Paul just said in 2:23, “These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.” Human wisdom and philosophies that deny the sufficiency of salvation or sanctification in Christ, legalism, mysticism, asceticism, etc. are not effective against “fleshly indulgence”. But Christ is! So how is the flesh put to death? How is sin mortified?

1. You must first be connected to the power to walk in the Spirit, you must be regenerated through exercising true saving faith (Col 2:11-15).
2. Walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 23) being filled with the Spirit (Col 3:16-17; Eph 5:18-20), living your life by faith in the Son of God (Gal 2:20).
3. Continually devote yourself to serious effort and earnestly strive to glorify God, being a doer of His word (will), having your affections, will, and reason set on that (Col 3:1-4).
4. Put off sin, renew your mind with God’s word, and put on righteousness (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:8-14; Rom 12:1-2).

Paul gives two lists of sins to be put off. The first deals with sexual sins (3:5b). These are the sins that were prevalent in the culture of his day. Immorality was the norm of the Greco-Roman world. It has become the norm in our culture as well.

Immorality [porneia] originally referred to any excessive behavior or lack of restraint, but eventually became associated with sexual excess and indulgence. It describes any illicit sexual activity outside God’s only design for sex in marriage. It includes every kind of extramarital sexual intercourse. This is what believers are to “abstain” from (1 Thess 4:3). This is what believers are to “flee” from (1 Cor 6:18).

“Impurity” literally describes any substance that is filthy or dirty and could refer to refuse or to the contents of graves. It described an infected, oozing wound. It is a broad term figuratively referring to moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed, but its primary sense speaks more of an internal disposition, describing a filthiness of heart and mind that makes a person defiled.

“Passion” is an affection of the mind, a passionate desire. It describes an inward emotion aroused by some external object. It is a desire that does not rest until it is satisfied.

“Evil” is wickedness as an evil habit of the mind. “Desire” can be translated “lust” (Matt 5:27-28 – “everyone who looks at a woman with **lust** for her”) and conveys the idea of “having one’s passion toward”. When used negatively, it means perverted strong desire. So “evil desire” is a wicked habit of perverted strong desire. It is difficult to distinguish the difference between “passion” and “evil desire”. Some commentators say that “passion” has to do with physical desire where “evil desire” is more mental.

“Greed” describes a strong desire to acquire more and more of something, especially that which is forbidden. It is a desire to have more irrespective of one's need and is always used in bad sense. It describes an insatiable selfishness.

“Idolatry” describes an extreme attachment or devotion to something or someone. It is anything or anyone that comes between you and God. It is any master that you bow to other than Christ.

So, working backwards from heart to action, from inside to outside, we see that someone who sins sexually is involved in idolatry, they have bowed before another master other than Christ. They want (covet) more and more of sexual gratification. Here is an indication of the insidiousness of sexual sin. It is a greed-like sin; a sin that involves insatiable appetites. The mind is involved with evil desire moving the body to have passions that are dishonoring to God. This in turn leads to filthiness on the inside, culminating in immoral sexual acts.

Idolatry → Greed → Evil desire → Passion → Impurity → Immorality

❖ **In regard to sexual sins, are you along this scale? If so, what should you do?**

This chain must be broken. Ideally, for the glory of Christ, the believer would walk in the Spirit not bowing to other masters and not go down this path. However, through repentance, putting off sexual immorality (heart, mind, and body), renewing the mind by the word of God, and putting on righteousness, those who have sinned in this way can return to glorifying God.

Paul gives the reason that these sins should be put death – they do not characterize the reconciled. All people deserve wrath because of sin, including these sexual sins. Before Christ entered your life, sin used to characterize you (in them also you once walked, when you were living in them). But now you have been changed by Christ, therefore, live like it.

⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹**Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.** (1 Cor 6:9-11)

❖ **Are you striving to live your position?**

The second list is a list of interpersonal sins (3:8-9) that can be prevalent in community, even within the local body of Christ. Since you have been made new through exercising true saving faith in Christ and you now longer walk in sin, then put off all sin including those that harm body relationships.

“Put aside” means literally to take something away from its normal location and put it out of the way. The idea is to stop doing what one is accustomed to doing; to throw it off like filthy, foul smelling clothes; to be done with it. You can think of it as having your clothes soaked with sewage and stripping them off and throwing them away and never putting them back on. Like repentance from sin – we strip the sin off and never go back to it. The verb is a command that calls for a decisive choice to effectively accomplish an action and conveys the idea of doing so with some degree of urgency.

¹²The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us **lay aside** the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Rom 13:12)

²²that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside** the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, (Eph 4:22)

²⁵Therefore, **laying aside** falsehood, speak truth each one *of you* with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (Eph 4:25)

¹Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also **lay aside** every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (Heb 12:1)

²¹Therefore, **putting aside** all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)

¹Therefore, **putting aside** all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, (1 Pet 2:1)

“Them all” are to be put away. These are all the things for which the wrath of God will come and in which you once walked when you were living in them. Examples of speech are given that demonstrate the issue is not external, but internal – the heart.

“Anger” is a deep, smoldering, resentful bitterness. It is the settled heart attitude of the angry person.

“Wrath” is an intense expression of the inner self, frequently expressed as strong indignation, a state of intense displeasure or rage (violent and uncontrolled anger or a fit of violent wrath).

“Malice” describes a mean-spirited or vicious attitude or disposition which includes a desire to harm other people.

“Slander” is translated “blasphemy” when it is against God and “slander” when against people and is speech that denigrates or defames (injury to another’s character).

“Abusive speech” refers to speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste, obscene, filthy or dirty.

Unlike the sexual sins where Paul started from the outward and moved inward, here he starts inward and moves outward. The point is clear in both lists. The heart must be dealt with. Work on the heart by walking in the Spirit, by progressing in sanctification and the outside will follow.

❖ **When you think of addressing sin, do you focus on the inside or the outside?**

“Do not lie” means to communicate what is false, with the evident purpose of misleading. It involves not only the communication of a falsehood, but also the intent to deceive. The change in address from a list of sins to a one-another is instructive.

What is the subject of the lies? It appears from the context that the lying is about the evil practices of the old self. The sins that we are in the process of putting off. Here the lies are that we are doing better than we actually are at putting off the old self. We can deceive the brethren into thinking we are doing well in the battle against sin, when in reality we are not. We must not deceive each other in this area. Ultimately, we are only deceiving ourselves and each other because God knows (1 Sam 16:7; Prov 21:2; Acts 1:24). Care cannot be brought to the body if we lie about the battle.

¹⁴Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. ¹⁵And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, **but God knows your hearts**; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. (Luke 16:14-15)

❖ **Are you honest with the brethren about your battle?**

Unfortunately, both the NASB (“put them all aside” and “laid aside”) and the ESV (“put them all away” and “have put off”) use similar phrases between verse 8 and 9. They are actually two different words. Essentially, we must put aside sin because sin has been laid aside (stronger, compete word). We have been made new through spiritual circumcision (2:11), spiritual baptism (2:12), spiritual crucifixion (Gal 2:20; 5:24). Yet we still battle the remnants of the flesh. We have been sanctified (set apart), yet we must strive for sanctification.

❖ **Are you striving to progress in sanctification?**

Conclusion

We have been given a complete salvation having been raised up with Christ. Therefore, we should continually devote ourselves to serious effort and earnestly strive to glorify God, being a doer of His word (will), having all our affections, will, and reason set on that. We are in union with Christ and our life is supernatural because we have access to the Spirit. One day, the world will see the great work Christ has done in us by seeing His righteousness. The believer’s heart should be to progress in sanctification by putting to death, laying aside heart level sin motives.

Additional Study

1. Look up the following verses and write down what reason each gives for why you should be sanctified.
 - Philippians 1:9-11
 - John 15:8
 - 2 Peter 3:18
 - 1 Timothy 6:9-10
 - John 15:11
2. How are you doing in the following areas that cultivate sanctification (spiritual growth)? If you are not involved in these areas, what needs to change so you are? If you are involved in these areas, what can you do to “excel still more”?
 - Personal time reading God’s word
 - Personal time in purposed prayer
 - Faithful attendance in a Bible teaching church
 - Involvement in a local church in a way that others know you well
 - Service in the body of Christ