

XI. On with the New Man

May 26/27, 2010

Colossians 3:10-17

Aim: To live lives within the community of believers by putting on virtues that are consistent with our union with Christ.

A. The Community of the New Man (Colossians 3:10-11)

Sinful behavior, whether mentioned in Paul's two lists (3:5, 8) or not, is to be eradicated because Christians are what they are, people who have undergone a dramatic change. Here this change is pictured for us as a dramatic change of identity. The kind of behavior that was typical of the person the Christian used to be but is no longer should be discarded as decisively as a man with a new suit puts his tattered old one out with the rubbish. Those who have been given the breathtaking gift of a new life should live accordingly.

1. Put on the New Man (3:10a)

...and have put on the new man...

What is the 'old man'? It is the unregenerate self, the former manner of existence in Adam. The 'new man' (*neon*) in contrast, is the regenerate self. It is what believers are in Christ. The new self is the new creature Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 5:17. The Bible views all men as either in Christ, or in Adam. There is no middle ground. The Puritan Thomas Goodwin wrote, 'There are but two men that are seen standing before God, Adam and Jesus Christ; and these two men have all other men hanging at their girdles.'

It is therefore our 'Adamic' identification, with its servitude to sin, that we have 'put off' in coming to Christ; and it is our 'Christic' identification, with its power over sin, that we have 'put on.' We have been brought into a new realm of existence, a realm in which the 'old man,' Adam and all that he represents, no longer dictates our thinking or our behavior.

The contrast of the 'old man' and the 'new man' alludes to one of Paul's most fundamental theological conceptions: the contrast between a realm in opposition to God, rooted in Adam's sin and characterized by sin and death, and the new realm, rooted in Christ's death and resurrection and characterized by righteousness and life. In our text Paul wants to remind us that we have been transferred into this new realm and that because of this transfer we are both empowered and required to live in a new way. The 'deeds' characteristic of the 'old man' must be 'put off.' And the practices characteristic of the 'new man' must be 'put on' (3:10, *endysamenoi*) (3:12-17).

The need to work out in daily life the reality of our transfer into the new realm, or 'new man,' reflects Paul's typical 'already/not yet' tension. While 'already' detached from the 'old man' and attached to the 'new man,' we yet live in a time when the old has not been finally defeated and destroyed. The old realm continues to exist and exert its influence over us who still live in unredeemed bodies.

The question then arises as to why believers sin if the old self is gone. They do so because the new self lives in the old body and must contend with the flesh. 'The flesh' does not mean the body in and of itself; but it does mean the body as it is being used and tyrannized over by sin. It means the body as it is possessed by sin and evil; it is the body as sin dwells in it during this

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earthly life. The flesh includes all the sinful desires, drives, and passions associated with our humanness.

2. Renewed in Knowledge (3:10b)

...who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...

All authentic believers have a new self (cp. 2 Cor. 5:17), with new spiritual sensitivities and abilities, and thus wonderfully new possibilities in this life. There is constant renewal taking place in the believer's life as he keeps increasing in true knowledge of what God is like (cp. 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16). The more we put off the old nature, the greater freedom we have for the renewal of our new self according to the image of God.

Possession of the new self does bring the believer new life, but not instant spiritual maturity. The flesh will continually dangle the garments of the old self in front of the new man and urge him to put them on. The battle against the flesh will go on throughout this life. The new self is complete, yet has the capacity for growth. Paul wrote that 'our inner man is being renewed day by day' (2 Cor. 4:16), so that it can cope with the decaying outer man.

The new self is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. This renewal is an ongoing process that begins at conversion, but which continues as the deeds appropriate to the old way of life are increasingly renounced and those appropriate to the new life are embraced (cp. Rom. 12:2). There is a definite goal in mind – namely, that believers should increasingly resemble their Creator.

'Being renewed' (*anakainoumenon*) refers to being new in quality. The preposition on the front of the verb (*ana*) makes the verb (*kaiōō*) have the sense of contrast to what was already there. This is a new quality of life that never before existed. The present durative force of the verb (a present participle in Greek) makes clear that the 'new self,' the new reality ruled by Christ, is not in its final state: it is in a state of 'becoming.'

Epignōsis ('true knowledge') refers to a deep, thorough knowledge (cp. 1:9). The process of renewal brings increased knowledge. Knowledge is the goal or object of the renewal rather than its means. This 'knowledge,' is of course, knowledge of God, an understanding of who He is in terms of Christ and what that understanding means for living rightly. It is this knowledge that human beings lost in the fall into sin (Gen. 2:17; 3:5, 7; cp. Rom. 1:28) and that incorporation into Christ makes possible once again. However, as Paul has made clear earlier in the letter by praying that the Colossians might be filled with this knowledge (1:9, 10), we do not gain this knowledge automatically.

The source of knowledge is the Bible. The Word of God is the food that fuels the growth of the new self. How fast believers grow depends on how much knowledge they put into practice in their lives.

The goal of knowledge is to conform the believer to the image of the One who created him. 'Image of its Creator,' in a context that alludes to Adam ('the old self'), inevitably draws our attention to Genesis 1:26-27. As God created human beings originally to be in His 'image,' an image defaced in the fall, so God is now working to renew human beings 'in accordance with' (*kata*) His image. Paul has already claimed in this letter that it is Christ Himself who is supremely 'the image (*eikōn*) of God' (1:15). It is Christ who supplies the pattern for the renewal of the 'new self.' The new self becomes progressively more and more like the Lord

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Jesus Christ who created him (cp. Rom. 8:29). The new self will continue to progress toward Christlikeness until the Lord returns or the believers dies.

3. United in Christ (3:11)

...where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Paul goes on to make a startling point, which again suggests that he had the unity of the church in Colossae very much in mind. This ‘new self,’ is not a ‘new nature’ or even a ‘new person’; it is a new ‘humanity.’ The renewal refers not simply to an individual change of character but also to a corporate recreation of humanity in the Creator’s image. The corporate nature of the ‘new self’ comes very much to the fore in this verse.

New life, a new humanity, where each individual has as his goal the increasing recovery of the image of God, also involves new relationships. The risen life has implications for the church. Just as individual believers put off the habits of the old self, so also the church puts off the old barriers that separated people. There is no place for racial barriers or cultural snobbery. The new self, lived out brings about the destruction of *racial* barriers, *religious* barriers, *cultural* barriers, and *social* barriers.

What follow are eight designations intended to accentuate the inclusiveness of the new humanity. Six of the eight form pairs arranged in a contrasting pattern. All three oppositions are very common in Paul (cp. Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 12:13). We have good grounds for thinking, then, that Paul ‘quotes’ in Colossians 3:11 an established tradition.

The ‘odd men out’ in the list are the two designations ‘barbarian’ and ‘Scythian.’ Given the context, it is of course natural to think that Paul intends these two words also to be in opposition to one another. However, they are not in opposition to one another; ‘Scythian’ is simply an extreme example of a ‘barbarian.’ Paul probably intends both of these terms as further examples of the general category of ‘uncircumcised,’ though perhaps with special emphasis on their social identity. Perhaps this indicates a concern, in opposition to a tendency among the false teachers to exclusivity, to stress that the new humanity is inclusive of every nation and every social class.

‘Greeks’ (*Hellēs*), that is ‘uncircumcised’ (*akrobustia*), and ‘Jews’ (*Ioudaios*), that is, ‘circumcised’ (*peritomē*), were separated by seemingly insurmountable racial and religious barriers. They had nothing to do with each other. But the gospel broke down those barriers, and Jew and Gentile became one in Christ (cp. Eph. 2:13-16).

Strong cultural barriers also pervaded the ancient world. The cultured, educated Greek or Jew looked with contempt on the ‘barbarian’ or the ‘Scythian.’ The Greeks regarded themselves as civilized people and though they later awarded the Romans a certain grudging acceptance because they were too powerful to ignore, other nations were ‘barbarians’ (*barbaros*). Barbarian was an onomatopoeic word used to describe people who spoke an inarticulate and stammering speech (‘bar bar bar’). The Greeks intended it as a term of derision on those who were not among the elite (i.e., themselves). It according is used of any non-Greek, often with an implied nuance of cultural inferiority.

The ‘Scythians’ (*Skythēs*) were by common consent the most uncivilized people in the ancient world. Scythia was a region just north of the Black Sea. They, above all barbarians, were hated and feared. They were a nomadic, warlike people who invaded the Fertile Crescent in the

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seventh century before Christ. The Scythians were notorious for their savagery. Josephus wrote, ‘The Scythians delight in murdering people and are little better than wild beasts’ (*Against Apion* 2.269). The early church Father Tertullian could think of no greater insult to the heretic Marcion than to describe him as ‘more filthy than any Scythian’ (*Against Marcion* 1.1).

A fellowship including Greeks, Jews, and Scythians was unthinkable in the ancient world. Yet that is precisely what happened in the church. In Christ ethnic hatreds can be mastered because Christ demolished the cultural barriers separating men.

A social barrier existed between the ‘slave’ (*doulos*) and the ‘freeman’ (*eleutheros*). Slaves were viewed, in the words of Aristotle, as ‘a living tool.’ However, both slaves and freemen were saved and became brothers in Christ. Paul told Philemon to view Onesimus, his runaway slave, ‘no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother’ (Phm. 16).

Those who belong to Christ constitute a ‘new humanity,’ within which the distinctions of this world, while not obliterated, are relativized. As the ‘household’ code in 3:18-4:1 makes clear, the Christian community is comprised of people who maintain their gender, familial, and social identities. Jews are still Jews in Christ; Gentiles are still Gentiles in Christ; slaves are still slaves in Christ. But these earthly identities are no longer what is most important: solidarity in Christ is now the ruling paradigm for the new community.

Having listed a number of different categories into which the human race is divided, Paul notes that, for all the tragic reality of discord, while it is sadly true that humanity is split up into mutually hostile races, classes, and sexes, ‘Christ is all.’ True unity is found among God’s people when their former hatreds and immoral ways are put off and the new nature is put on. Because Christ indwells all believers, all are equal. Differences of race, upbringing, and education no longer divide God’s people; Christ is all, and in all. He breaks down all racial, religious, cultural, and social barriers, and makes believers into one new man (Eph. 2:15). He is all that matters and His greatness makes the divisions of mankind pale into insignificance. Furthermore, when He takes up residence in people of all different kinds, when He is ‘in all,’ the things that divide people are of far less weight than the great reality that unites them.

B. The Clothes of the New Man (Colossians 3:12-14)

Following Paul’s positive admonitions in 3:1-4 to set our hearts and minds on heavenly things, there is a ‘therefore’ in verse 5 that warns us to put off the old man and his deeds. In verse 12, we find a second ‘therefore.’ Speaking positively, there are certain things that need to be done. Just as certain habits of thought and action are to be stamped out, it is every bit as pressing that the Christian should develop new habits to replace the old ones. From verse 12 onwards, Paul explains what it means to adopt a distinctly Christian lifestyle, to put on the new man. A religious identity must issue in righteous behavior. And in keeping with the collective significance of the new self, the focus in these verses is on those virtues that foster community identity and cohesion. The ‘new self’ brings together people from different ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds, and believers should put aside the prejudices that might arise from those backgrounds in order to facilitate the unity of the body.

1. Our Calling (3:12a)

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved...

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Paul uses three terms to describe the Colossian Christians that were standard ways to describe Old Testament Israel as well as the church as the people of God in the New Testament. He calls them ‘chosen’ (cp. Dt. 7:6; 14:2; 1 Chr. 16:13; Ps. 105:43; 135:4; Is. 41:8; 44:1; 45:4), ‘holy’ (cp. Ex. 19:6; Lev. 19:2; Jer. 2:3), and ‘beloved’ (cp. 1 Kg. 10:9; 2 Chr. 9:8; Hos. 11:1) — terms that apply not only to the Colossian church but also to all of those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. A change has taken place in the economy of God. What was once true of the elect nation is not true of all who come to faith.

a) *Chosen*

First, Paul appealed to the church members in Colossae as ‘the elect (*eklektos*) of God’ (literally, ‘God’s chosen’). No one ever became a Christian solely by his or her own choice. Behind our decision to follow Jesus lies the free choice of a sovereign God whose will can never be thwarted. The truth of divine election is clearly taught in Scripture (cp. Eph. 1:4; 1 Th. 1:4; 2 Th. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). This term reflects standard Old Testament teaching that the existence and status of Israel depend on God’s decision to choose them and form them as His people. In distinction from the Old Testament where God selects His people mainly from one nation, Israel, God now forms His new covenant people by choosing or electing individuals from among both Jews and Gentiles (cp. Rom. 9:24-25; 8:30).

The Colossians were now chosen by God and thus secure. The doctrine of election crushes human pride, exalts God, produces joy and gratitude to the Lord, grants eternal privileges and assurance, promotes holiness, and makes one bold and courageous, for one who has been chosen by God for eternal life has no need to fear anything or anyone.

b) *Holy*

Second, Christians are also ‘holy,’ set apart for the service of God. It is because of God’s gracious act of election that Israel is holy. *Hagios* (‘holy’) means ‘set apart’ or ‘separate’ and therefore it is not surprising that the notion of being ‘set apart for God’ often occurs with the idea of election (cp. Dt. 14:2). God chose believers out of the mainstream of mankind and drew them to Himself. They are different from the world.

c) *Beloved*

In the third place, Christians are ‘beloved’ (*agapaō*) as God’s own special treasure (cp. Dt. 7:6-8). That believers are ‘beloved’ means they are objects of His special love. Election is not a cold, fatalistic doctrine. On the contrary, it is based in God’s incomprehensible love for His elect. God’s love for His people is often featured in the Old Testament, sometimes as a response to the people’s obedience (e.g., Dt. 5:10), but often also as the fundamental basis for God’s election of the people (e.g., Dt. 4:37; 10:15; Ps. 79:68; Is. 41:8).

What was once true of Israel as a nation was now equally true of a modest gathering of Christians. It is also true of every gathering of Christian people. We may not amount to much, but God looks upon us as elect, holy, and His particular treasure (cp. Rom 1:7; 1 Pe. 2:9-10). The new teachers who had made a takeover bid for the church encouraged a kind of spiritual elitism, hinting that the ordinary church, with its ordinary believers, was not at the cutting edge. Paul’s argument, however, is that every Christian, no matter how modest and nondescript he might be in his own eyes, or in the eyes of those who think themselves more spiritual, is called to spiritual excellence because, in spite of appearances, he is part of God’s Israel, a royal priesthood.

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2. Our Clothing (3:12b)

...put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

These opulent appellations were meant to soothe the Colossian believers' Gentile Christian hearts and prepare them for the great putting on which was immediately commanded. In these verses the Colossians were commanded to put on virtues which stood in brilliant contrast to the vices which the Colossians were previously commanded to put off. Here we have the wardrobe of the saints, and what beautiful garments they are!

Paul lists here five moral qualities (these five virtues may be deliberately contrasted with the five vices in verse 8 that hinder unity). The Christian is to 'put them on,' to embellish his life with them, as deliberately and consciously as someone getting dressed for a special occasion selects his clothing. 'Put on' (cp. 3:10) is from *enduō*, which means 'to put on clothes' or 'envelop in.' 'Clothe yourselves' is a present imperative: 'Put them on and keep putting them on.' The qualities that follow are to cover the new man. We are, in the words of Romans 13:14, to 'put on Christ.'

a) Tender Mercies

The first quality is 'tender mercies' or a 'heart of compassion.' The literal translation of the Greek is 'bowels (*splancha*) of mercies.' The ancients thought that the stomach and intestines were the seat of emotions, much like the way that we today speak of the heart. The word is used this way regularly in the New Testament (cp. Luke 1:78; 2 Cor. 6:12; 7:15; Phil. 1:8; 2:1; Phm. 7, 12, 20; 1 Jn. 3:17). *Oiktirmos* ('compassion') means 'pity,' 'mercy,' 'sympathy,' or 'compassion.' It signifies sympathy and tenderness of heart that comes with the gospel. Paul's words therefore had the same force as 'a heart of mercy,' 'a heart of compassion,' or 'love characterized by mercy.' What Paul envisages is not a superficial emotion, but something that comes from deep inside.

b) Kindness

The second item is 'kindness' (*chrēstotēta*), the opposite of 'malice' described in verse 8. This virtue sometimes denotes God's own 'goodness,' especially as it is expressed in His gracious acts. Kindness is something that does not happen naturally in human relationships, because we all have a bias towards selfishness (see 'greed' in 3:5). The Greek word for 'kindness' refers to the grace that pervades the whole person, mellowing all that might be harsh. It was used to describe wine which has grown mellow with age and has lost its harshness. It was used by Jesus to describe His yoke: 'My yoke is easy' (Mt. 11:30); His yoke is not harsh or hard to bear. The kind person is as concerned about his neighbor's good as he is about his own.

c) Humility

In the third place we meet 'humility.' *Tapeinophrosunē* ('humility') and its related words always have a negative connotation in classical Greek, signifying servility or cowardice. To the Greeks, humility was not a virtue but a weakness, something they never applied to themselves. But the gospel took this word of contempt and made it one of its chief graces. It is the antidote for the self-love that poisons relationships. Paul advocates genuine humility, in contrast to the false humility of the false teachers (2:18, 23, where the same word is used).

The call to humility in the New Testament is based on the supreme act of humbling, Christ's taking on human form and going to death on the cross on our behalf (Phil. 2:3, 8). Jesus Himself invited His followers to learn from Him, as he was lowly in heart (Mt. 11:29). Jesus was *not*

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suggesting a cringing, groveling servility; nor was He teaching His followers to think poorly of themselves. Rather, He was teaching the necessity of the absence of self-exaltation. The person who wears the garment of humility knows who God is, what man is, and who he or she is.

d) *Meekness*

‘Meekness’ or ‘gentleness’ (*prautēs*), like humility, is not a weakness. It is not spinelessness, but rather the willingness to suffer injury instead of inflicting it. The gentle person knows he is a sinner among sinners and is willing to suffer the burden others’ sin may impose on him. The standard Greek lexicon for the New Testament defines it as ‘the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance.’ There is gentleness and self-effacement in this word, but behind the gentleness is a steel-like strength, for the supreme characteristic of the meek person is that he is under perfect control. Meekness is strength under control. Meekness was supremely the virtue of Moses (Num. 12:3). Those wearing the true garment of meekness are immensely powerful people, for they are controlled by God.

e) *Patience*

Our list concludes with ‘long-suffering’ (*makrothumia*) or patience in the face of insult or injury. Patience is the opposite of resentment or revenge. The patient person does not get angry at others. This is not a passive attitude towards life; it is a positive spirit of endurance despite the problems that may arise. It means more than just enduring difficulties or passive resignation to the circumstances. It is based on a lively, outgoing faith in God and is to be exercised toward ‘everyone.’

So we have Heaven’s wardrobe from the hand of the Ultimate Tailor. Here are two observations about this list of virtues. Firstly, every one of the qualities that Paul mentions is to do with relationships. Christians become better Christians in community, in their families, among their associates, in their churches, where there is sweat and breath. A local church where these are in evidence will be a happy community.

Secondly, it is also worth noting that putting on these qualities will make us resemble God Himself. All five of these garments were perfectly worn by Christ. Therefore, when we put on these five graces, we are putting on a family resemblance to Christ.

3. Our Communion (3:13)

It is not sufficient to own the spiritual clothes of 3:12; we have to display them for the benefit of other people. Paul now indicates what the fundamental attitude of the Christian should look like in action. There is a close relationship between the actions commanded in verse 13 with the attitudes of verse 12. Paul likely intends to present these actions as the natural outgrowth of the general attitude conveyed by all five virtues together. The person who is ‘in Christ’ does not think selfishly. He bears with the faults and failings of his fellow Christians and is ready to forgive his brothers and sisters when they irritate him.

a) *Bearing with One Another (3:13a)*

...bearing with one another...

Wearing saintly attire promotes the capacity to ‘bear with each other.’ This phrase means ‘to endure, to hold out in spite of persecution, threats, injury, indifference, or complaints and not retaliate.’ The verb ‘bear with’ (*anechomai*) indicates a somewhat grudging willingness ‘to put up with’ difficult circumstances or people. In the New Testament, it is only in the closely

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parallel Ephesians 4:2 that ‘bearing with each other’ is present, as here, positively. While not requiring the greatest display of Christian kindness and patience, ‘bearing with one another’ is nevertheless a first and necessary step in establishing community. The demand acknowledges that every Christian fellowship is made up of all kinds of people and that we will accordingly sometimes find ourselves in close fellowship with people who are very different than we are. For the sake of maintaining community, we will sometimes have to ‘put up with’ people with whom we would not normally choose to associate.

b) Forgiving One Another (3:13b)

...and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Inevitably, this mutual forbearing must extend to mutual forgiving. The Greek *charizomenoi* literally means ‘to be gracious’ and the text uses a reflexive pronoun, so it literally reads, ‘forgiving yourselves.’ It conveys the idea that forgiving others is an act of grace, freely offered, often not deserved. The church as a whole is to be a gracious, mutually forgiving fellowship.

Paul frankly realizes that in the Christian community there will be times when a person will have a ‘grievance’ (*momphēn*), a ‘cause for complaint,’ against someone else within the fellowship. In such cases, believers are to imitate their Lord, who has ‘graciously forgiven’ them. Paul makes Christ the model of forgiveness. Because He has forgiven us, so also must we forgive others (cp. Eph. 4:32; Mt. 18:21-35).

*To live above with the saints we love,
Oh, that will be glory.
But to live below with the saints we know,
Well, that’s another story.*

4. Our Completion (3:14)

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

In addition to the qualities already noted, the Christian must ‘put on love.’ (In the Greek text, the verb *endysasthe* is absent, but is meant to be supplied, as the versions and commentators agree, from verse 12.) The other qualities matter very much. This matters even more. It is love that binds all of these other graces together in perfect unity. ‘Bond’ translates a word that means, essentially, ‘that which binds together’ (*syndesmos*). The word here pictures love as a binding or unifying force.

The apostle envisions a man dressing his body with the flowing garments of the day, and then it occurs to the man that as beautiful and fine as his garments are, they can never be worn with comfort or grace until they are held in place by a belt. So he adds the belt: ‘love’ (*agapē*). Love is not just another virtue to be added but the supreme virtue. It is possible to have some of the five recommended garments and not have love, but it is impossible to have love and not have all of the five garments. Bruce calls love ‘the grace that binds all these other graces together.’

Love is the most important moral quality in the believer’s life, for it is the very glue that produces unity in the church. Believers will never enjoy mutual fellowship through compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, or patience; they will not bear with each other or forgive each other unless they love one another. These virtues and actions attain their full power only when they are unified by and empowered by love. In fact, the way to sum up the commands of 3:12-

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13 is to say, ‘Love one another.’ Love is the beauty of the believer, dispelling the ugly sins of the flesh that destroy unity.

Paul has returned once again to his great theme of the unity of the church. This unity is not to come from the edicts of a bishop or elder. It comes about solely through love (cp. Eph. 5:25-26). In a local community of Christians, love is the ‘bond of perfection,’ perhaps better translated as the ‘bond of unity.’ It fastens a church together. ‘Perfection’ or ‘completeness’ (*teleiōtētos*) is the goal of the binding force of love.

C. The Conduct of the New Man (Colossians 3:15-17)

Paul concludes his look at the qualities that should mark the lifestyle of the new man by giving three exhortations on how the community of the church should conduct themselves. These are the outermost garments of the new man, those which cover all the others. The new man is concerned with the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, and the name of Christ. Each exhortation ends with a further exhortation to thanksgiving or gratefulness. Thankfulness is a constant theme in Colossians (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2).

1. The Peace of Christ (3:15)

And let the peace of God...

a) *Peace (3:15a)*

In secular Greek, the word translated ‘peace’ (*eirene*) was sometimes used to describe a formal treaty that brought an end to hostilities between two warring cities. ‘A peace’ had been concluded. It was also used to describe the state of calm and well-being and the attitude of rest or security that followed the official conclusion of peace and flowed from it. Both aspects are in view here. Objectively, believers are at peace with God. The war between the believer and God is over, and the treaty was paid for by the blood of Christ. Because of that, believers are at rest, and secure.

Paul is speaking of a peace that is supernatural in origin. The ‘peace of God’ means more than just ordinary tranquility. Inward peace of heart and mind is only possible because of all that God has done in Christ to be reconciled to those who were once His enemies. Paul has already reminded the Colossians that Christ had made peace through His blood shed on the cross (1:20).

He gives us his own *personal* peace. It is not just the peace we experience when there is no conflict. It is a sense of wholeness and well-being, completeness and totality. But it is even more – it is the *presence* of Christ. His peace and His presence are marvelously associated in both the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Num. 6:24-26).

b) *Rule (3:15b)*

...rule in your hearts...

The word translated ‘rule’ (*brabeuō*) describes the actions of an umpire or arbiter. In many extra-Biblical sources, the Greek word used here referred to the function of one who took it on himself to decide what is right in an athletic contest. The peace of Christ guides believers in making decisions. The sense here is, ‘Let the peace of Christ be umpire in your heart amidst the conflicts of life. Let it decide what is right. Let it be your counselor.’

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The verb ‘rule’ naturally takes on the connotation of ‘control’; the standard Greek lexicon paraphrases, let the peace of Christ ‘be the decisive factor.’ In general, then, Paul wants the Colossians to make ‘peace’ the arbiter, the factor that should be given preference over competing concerns and interests. And in the context it is in their relationships with each other that the ‘peace of Christ’ should play this role. Without sacrificing principle, believers should relate to one another in a way that facilitates and demonstrates the peace that Christ has secured for them (cp. Rom. 14:19).

Paul’s description of the ‘peace of God’ acting like an umpire is not so much to do with peace in the heart of one person, who would otherwise be at odds with himself, put peace instead of tension and strife between believers in a given local church. In other words, God’s gift of ‘peace’ has a crucial role in keeping churches together. The fact that a church is at peace should be a strong incentive to do nothing that would threaten this precious tranquility. The new teachers in Colossae threatened the peace of the church by creating an atmosphere where the spiritually elevated wrote off everyone else.

Paul does not say that this peace is in our hearts; rather, he is saying that this peace should rule ‘in the heart.’ Paul is saying that the peace that characterizes the ‘new self’ should be a ruling principle or virtue in our innermost being and that it should affect all our relationships – and in this context, our relationships with one another.

c) One Body (3:15c)

...to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

‘You were called’ (*eklēthēte*) picks up the language of election that Paul used in verse 12 – ‘God’s chosen people.’ Paul frequently uses the verb call (*kaleō*) to denote God’s gracious and powerful summons to human beings, by which they are transferred from the realm of sin and death into the realm of righteousness and life. God has chosen His people not simply to be His people but to live a certain kind of life. That life is bound up with the calling and cannot be separated from it. The gospel is inescapably individual in its focus: each of us, on our own, is ‘called’ by God and responds in faith on our own. Yet, at the same time, the gospel is inescapably corporate: we are called along with other people, with whom we make up ‘one body.’

Peace is not only objective and subjective, but also relational. Christians are called to live ‘in one body’ (*en eni sōmati*). Individuals who have peace with Christ and in their own hearts will live in unity and harmony with each other. It is no small matter to keep a church together. It is telling that thankfulness is mentioned in the same connection. When peace is in evidence in a church, then there will be much thankfulness. If we can keep at the forefront of our joint lives a shared sense of amazement at what God has done for us in Christ, we will be less likely to fall out.

Believers who are full of gratitude to God for His gracious calling will find it easier to extend to fellow believers the grace of love and forgiveness and to put aside petty issues that might inhibit the expression of peace in the community.

2. The Word of Christ (3:16)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...

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a) Let It Soak In (3:16a)

Paul's next challenge was intended as a corrective to one damaging aspect of the situation in Colossae. There had been no shortage of words there in the recent past, particularly of authoritative pronouncements from the new teachers, but Jesus is the only Lord and teacher of the church.

By the 'word' (*logos*), Paul probably does not mean 'the word, or message, that Christ proclaimed,' but rather 'the message that proclaims Christ.' Paul uses the phrase to summarize the authentic teaching about Christ and His significance. The rest of the verse, with its focus on the worship of the collective body, suggests that Paul is urging the community as a whole to put the message about Christ at the center of its corporate experience.

The 'word of Christ' refers to the revelation He brought into the world, which is Scripture. Peace and thankfulness, as well as unity, love, and all the required virtues, flow from a mind controlled by Scripture. 'Dwell' is from *enoikeō* and means 'to live in,' or 'to be at home.' *Plousiōs* ('richly') could also be translated 'abundantly or extravagantly rich.' The truths of Scripture should permeate every aspect of the believer's life and govern every thought, word, and deed.

The phrase 'dwell in you richly' invites us to become soaked, saturated, and marinated in the word of Christ from the inside out. (Spurgeon said of John Bunyan that his blood was 'Bibline.' If you pricked him, he would bleed Bible verses.) They would not find wisdom from these visiting false teachers; they would discover it only in the word of Christ.

How can we allow the Word of God to dwell richly among us? We must begin by reading it. However, simply reading does not guarantee that the Word of Christ will 'dwell' in us 'richly.' Ephesians 5:18-19 teaches us that God's Word must be read and meditated on under the influence of the Holy Spirit if it is to dwell richly in us. Richness comes when, as we are yielded to the Holy Spirit, we meditate upon short passages, memorize others, and then do what they say. It is not just a question of disciplined study. It is a matter of the heart. It is Spirit-filled participation in Christ and His Word.

Constant reference to the word of Christ should not be superficial or passing but it should be a deep and penetrating contemplation that enables the message to have a transforming power in the life of the community. Those who read and meditate deeply on the Scriptures will be richly blessed. A Christian community will not be happy if the word of Christ is not abundantly available so that the people of God can read, study, hear, and live it out. Ultimately a church which neglects the Word of God silences the Spirit of God.

b) Let It Come Out (3:16b)

...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

The rest of verse 16 is governed by three participles, the first two which are clearly coordinate: 'teaching and admonishing'; 'singing.' But their relationship to one another and, especially, the relationship of the various modifying phrases to them are debated (cp. Eph. 5:19). There are two key decisions. The first is whether 'psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs from the Spirit' modifies the previous participles, 'teaching and admonishing,' or the following participle, 'singing.' The second difference is whether to take the phrase governed by 'singing' with the immediately preceding participles – in which case 'singing' modifies in some way 'teaching and

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admonishing’ – or to take them back to the main verb of the verse – in which case ‘teaching and admonishing’ and ‘singing’ are parallel ways in which the ‘message of Christ’ dwells richly in the community. Moo concludes that the TNIV has the basic structure of the verse right: Paul wants the community to teach and admonish each other by means of various kinds of songs, and he wants them to do this singing to God with hearts full of gratitude.

(1) Teaching and Admonishing

Paul mentions two specific results of the Word of Christ dwelling in the believer, one positive and one negative. ‘Teaching’ (*didaskontes*) is the impartation of positive truth. ‘Admonishing’ (*noutheteuntes*) is the negative side of teaching. It means to warn people of the consequences of their behavior when straying from the truth. Both are the result of a life overflowing with the Word of Christ. These activities take place ‘in all wisdom’ (*en pasē sophia*). Those doing the teaching and admonishing do them in appropriate ways, governed by insight into the situation and the people being addressed.

A church must give pride of place to ‘teaching and admonishing one another.’ This suggests that teaching should not be the exclusive preserve of a single person, but the fact that it is to be done in ‘all wisdom’ suggests a need for maturity on the part of those who teach it.

(2) Singing

Having the Word of Christ richly dwell in us produces not only information, but also emotion. Paul’s logic is that if the word of Christ is at home in our hearts, this will affect our singing. ‘Psalm’ refers generally in Greek to a song that is sung to the ‘plucking’ (*psallō*) of the strings of an instrument, such as a harp. In the New Testament ‘psalms’ points us back to the Old Testament, to the book of praises inspired by the Holy Spirit.

‘Hymns’ (*hymnos*) were religious songs that contained expressions of praise to God. This generally sense of a song in praise of a god imitates the usage of the word in general Greek. According to Augustine, a ‘hymn’ will have three elements. It must be sung; it must strike the note of praise; and it must be directed to God. Understood in this way, many of the psalms are also hymns. Nevertheless there are hymns in Scripture outside the Old Testament Psalter (e.g., the Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55; the Benedictus in Luke 1:68-79). It is thought that some portions of the New Testament (such as Col. 1:15-20 and Phil. 2:6-11) were originally hymns sung in the early church.

The Greek word for ‘song’ was a very general term, used in secular Greek, and the LXX of all kinds of songs. It occurs very often in the LXX titles of psalms. In attaching *pneumatikais* to this last term only, then it possibly refers to a spontaneous, musical praise of God or Christ promoted by the Spirit. A ‘spiritual song’ would be a song with a spiritual and edifying theme, but which may not take the form of direct praise to God. They emphasized testimony (cp. Rev. 5:9-10), expressing in song what God has done for us.

It is attractive to identify ‘psalms’ as songs based on Scripture, ‘hymns’ as songs about Christ, and ‘songs’ as spontaneous compositions ‘prompted by the Spirit.’ Whether these distinctions are maintained or not, it is perhaps notable that *pneumatikais* does qualify only the last of the three terms, since only the last term was general enough to require a qualification that would limit its meaning to religious songs.

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Since we are singing ‘to the Lord,’ anything else would dishonor Him. The church in every age therefore needs to ensure that it is careful about what it sings. Do we sing Scripture itself? Are the other things that we sing entirely agreeable to what Scripture says? A hymn, whether old or new, stands or falls entirely by what it says.

It is also important that we sing in the right frame of mind and heart. Paul encouraged the believers in Colossae to sing ‘with grace (*chariti*)’ in their hearts. The ESV is probably correct in rendering the original here as ‘with thankfulness.’ Our singing will be perfunctory and mechanical unless it stems from a sense of warm gratitude for all that God has done for us in Christ. Believers sing out of thankfulness for God’s grace. Singing is to be directed to God as praise and worship offered to Him for His pleasure and glory.

This verse is one of the very few that provide us with any window at all into the worship of the earliest Christians. It makes three points worth emphasizing. First, the ‘message about Christ, or, more broadly, ‘the word of God,’ was central to the experience of worship. Second, various forms of music were integral to the experience. And third, teaching and admonishing, while undoubtedly often the responsibility of particular gifted individuals within the congregation, such as Paul or elders, were also engaged in by every member of the congregation.

3. The Name of Christ (3:17)

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.

Our section closes with a general exhortation regarding community life that is universal in scope. ‘Word (*logos*) or deed (*ergon*)’ takes in everything in life. It is a common way of referring to the totality of one’s interaction with the world. *Everything* we say or do is to be done ‘in the name (*onomati*) of the Lord Jesus.’ We should be governed in our words and actions by the consideration of what it means to live in the realm of the risen Christ. To do everything in the name of Jesus is to act consistently with who He is and what He wants (cp. 1 Cor. 10:31). To put on the new lifestyle is to put on Christ. That is the obligation of every believer (cp. Rom. 13:14). The goal of the Christian lifestyle is Christlikeness.

The fullness of Christ comes from an overflow of His *peace* and His *word* and His *name*. It is also seen in our thankfulness. Verse 15 ends with, ‘And be thankful.’ Verse 16 concludes with, ‘gratitude in your hearts to God.’ Verse 17 says, ‘giving thanks to God the Father through Him.’ The Greek word for ‘thankful’ is *eucharesteo*, from which we get the English word ‘Eucharist,’ another word for the Lord’s Supper – a time of giving thanks. Thanksgiving is an important component of Christian obedience. But more than attitude is called for here. Gratitude in the heart (v. 16) must come to expression in actual, verbal giving of thanks to the Father ‘through’ Christ.

In conclusion, we have a clear call to bring our every moment and every action under the lordship of Christ.

For next time: Read Colossians 3:18-4:6.