

The New Man

Colossians 3:1-15

The earthly rules and rigors of false religion are worthless; worse, they indulge the flesh (2:23). So what should a Christian pursue to grow in holiness and joy? Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of God (v1). Paul is not being simplistic or spiritually vague. In Christ are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3), and focusing on him produces very practical results (vv5-15). He tells the Colossians not to think of themselves in terms of past or future sins, but in who they are positionally in Christ (v3). To look at them at the time you wouldn't know it, but every faithful Colossian is now with Christ and will appear with him in glory (v4). We are the new man, so by grace we put him on (v10).

Put Off

Every Christian is seated in the heavenly place in Christ. We can ignore those who require holy days, special foods, justification by recycling, and hyped-up spiritual experiences (2:16-23), but we can't ignore the remaining corruptions within us. In regard to these, Paul says to *put them to death*: sexual immorality, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry (v5). This used to be their way of life, and the wrath of God is coming upon it (vv6-7). Similarly unfitting is anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscenity (v8). Anger begins and can stay inside, but bursts out as wrath. It plots a target as malice and follows through as slander. The *church* has put off the old humanity, so lying is out (v9). How do you like my tie? The two lists here can be generally classified as relating to sins of desire (vv5-6) and sins of the tongue (vv8-9), and it is common in churches to refrain from one or the other type of sin, but not both. The church must live in purity to Christ, and our words must reflect the Word who is love (1 Jn. 4:8). The new man renewed in knowledge breaks the barriers of hostility that exists between Greeks and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians and Scythians, slaves and free. Here is Christ (vv10-11).

Put On

The identity of being elect, set apart and loved by God drives imitation (v12). God paid the price to give us himself, and calls us to reflect this great gift. So we clothe ourselves. "Compassion" is literally "bowels of mercy". It means having inner concern for the troubles of others. Kindness is the outward working of that compassion. The attitude toward the self is humble, which is not so much self-deprecation as it is a willingness to serve (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). The diversity in the church requires gentleness and patience. The test of faith comes when faced with complaints, when we are offended and sinned against. If you are truly forgiven by God, you forgive in the same, full, warm, pain-bearing way (v13). Love binds the entire community together, and when it does so the world sees a *ruling* peace that passes all understanding (v15).

Application

Paul's gives us many things to put off and put on, and doing so is meant to be part of Christ's light burden, as natural as getting dressed. The Heidelberg Catechism reminds us that the holiest men make a small beginning of obedience in this life. As we set our minds on Christ, this is a liberating exercise. What needs mortification in your life? Who needs your help? What are you grumpy about (v15)? Everyone has a role in the one body of Christ.