

Colossians 3 • Putting It Into Practice

Introduction

Up to this point in Colossians Paul has been dealing with one of the primary theological issues of his day wherein false teaching gives Christ a place of eminence in the scheme of things, but falls well short of attributing to Him **preeminence** as the head over all things from which everything else is derived. Having established that Christ must be preeminent in all things doctrinally, Paul takes it a step further to show that Christ must also be preeminent in our lives personally. In chapter 3 Paul not only makes it an issue of paramount personal importance, but teaches that this must be revealed in our Christian fellowship, our family relationships, and even in the daily workplace. As with all biblical doctrine, the theological must intersect with the practical.

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.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: What does “raised up” refer to?

A: It is the working of the resurrection. As it states in v.3, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”—the working of the cross, and therefore as stated in v.4 when Christ is revealed at the ultimate work of resurrection, “then you also will be revealed with Him in glory”.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

— Philippians 3:20–21

Point: Just as we are to consider our past life and sins to have been nailed to the cross as shaping the way we look at our past, we are to look forward in life through the prism of the resurrection and what it will ultimately work in and for us.

Q: Why does Paul assert for this to happen one must “set your mind”?

A: Where our thought life and attention are focused, so follows the heart and soul. Setting our mind “on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” establishes the path which our visible actions and behavior follow.

Application: Making Christ personally preeminent is to seek and set our mind on the things above, not the earthly.

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, ¹⁰and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— ¹¹a renewal in which there is no distinction between

[Read v.5-11]

Q: What are the two basic things being contrasted here?

A: The “old self” (v.9) and the “new self” (v.10). It is the difference between how we lived and behaved **before** the cross and **after** the work of the cross in us.

Q: How would this be a dramatic contrast to the religions of the day?

A: Those religions addressed little or nothing when it came to the issue of personal holiness. A worshiper could bring sacrifices, say prayers, participate in rituals, and then go away to commit sins and nobody would think they were acting inconsistently. Christianity demands that with new spiritual life comes the responsibility of living a visibly changed earthly life.

Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Q: What are thing things listed which Paul categorizes as “disobedience”?

A: “...immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed...” (v.5) These are the general conditions we “also once walked, when you were living in them”—the chief characteristics of our life before Christ.

Q: What are the “evil practices” which Paul says prove the presence of the characteristics of v.5 which he calls “the old self”? What do they all have in common?

A: “...anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech...” (v.8) along with lying to one another. (v.9) They are all behaviors which are betrayed in the course of our relationships with others.

Q: Why does Paul say in v.8 to “put them all aside”?

A: Believers are to no longer live in the character of the “old self” but we are to “put on the new self” (v.10) The proof of a regenerate life is a changed life.

Q: What is the specific proof of the existence of what Paul terms “renewal” in v.11?

A: A regenerate life in Christ is proven in the quality of its relationships with others.

Q: What is the model for a visibly, regenerate believer? How does such a process work?

A: By “being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (v.10) In other words, it is someone who personally applies God’s Word to the point that it is allowed to change them into the image and character of Christ.

Application: Making Christ personally preeminent is visibly proven by a changed life which forsakes the “old self” for the “new self” in the image of Christ.

¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

[Read v.12-17]

Q: What personal relationships are specifically being addressed here?

A: These are all actions which are supposed to be present in the course of Christian fellowship. Although there is an application for all aspects of life, what is specifically being targeted here is what takes place within the Church.

Q: Whereas in the previous section Paul listed the “evil practices” of the “old self”, what is being provided here?

A: Here we are provided with the practices of the “new self”, the chief characteristics of someone who has undergone an authentic “renewal”.

Q: What are these characteristics?

1. We are changed from the heart as evidenced by those behaviors listed in v.12-13. Every single behavior can only be proven in the course of our personal relationships with others.
2. “...love, which is the perfect bond of unity”. (v.14) Biblical unity is proven in the course of our personal relationships.
3. “...the peace of Christ, to which indeed you were called in one body...” (v.14) What reigns inside us is visibly proven by how it is revealed in our personal relationships.
4. “...be thankful”. (v.15) An attitude that transcends circumstances.
5. “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...admonishing one another...” (v.16) Again, the proof is revealed in our personal

relationships.

Q: Why might these verses sound familiar? How do they parallel other teachings of Paul?

A: These same characteristics which are present in someone filled with the Word produce the same blessings as someone filled with the Spirit.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

— Ephesians 5:18–21

Application: Making Christ personally preeminent is visibly proven in the quality of our personal relationships in the course of Christian fellowship.

[Read v.18-21]

Q: What is being specifically addressed here?

A: Family relationships. Each Christian family member is to exhibit changed behavior in direct relationship to their respective position in the family.

Observation: This is speaking about Christians who are a husband, wife, or child. Such in our family who are not believers are not going to act according to this standard because they first need to come to Christ.

Q: What is the priority of family relationships in the scheme of things?

A: In his correspondence with Timothy Paul established that the first place our Christian faith should go to work is in the home.

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.

— 1 Timothy 5:3–4

Application: Making Christ personally preeminent is visibly proven in the quality of our family relationships.

[Read v.22-4:1]

Q: How do we relate this to ourselves personally?

A: It is our conduct in the course of our daily work.

Q: What is the chief behavior evidencing a right Christian heart in the workplace?

A: "...not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of the heart fearing the Lord". (v.22) It is a heart that is sincere and not merely going through the motions.

Q: How does our behavior in this situation reflect the overall behavior Paul addresses from the outset of this chapter?

A: It is living in full recognition of the full work of the resurrection to direct us away from earthly circumstances toward what we will ultimately

¹⁸Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. ²⁰Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

²²Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. ²⁵For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

¹Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a

receive in Christ. (v.23-24)

Q: How does v.25 illustrate a basic truth about the Christian life in all situations?

A: We do not want to bear a bad testimony or witness by reaping the consequences of living in the character of the old self where punishment for our behavior is justified, but to live in the character of the new self whose behavior is changed and cannot be faulted in this way.

Q: Why is it important that masters are included in the equation?

A: The same standard applies whether we are a worker or a boss.

Application: Making Christ preeminent is visibly proven in the quality of our workplace relationships.

Overall Application

When someone wants to tell wives how they should act, or children or workers or employers, they will often come to this chapter and pull out the relevant verses as a kind of rule book. But because they do not teach these verses within the proper context of the whole chapter, they are not providing the greater teaching and motivation for putting that behavior into practice.

We should not preach the doctrines of chapters 1-2 at the expense of the duties for practical application of those doctrines in chapters 3-4. Doctrine is meant to be lived from the heart in order to experience the true "fullness" Paul speaks of in this epistle. Doctrine is not meant to be expressed as a scholarly debate, but evidenced in each believer's personal behavior in the course of their personal relationships with others.

The ultimate application of this teaching is one of self-examination:

- *Can the preeminence of Christ in your life be proved by the quality of your personal relationships with other believers?*
- *Can it be proved by the quality of the personal relationships with family members?*
- *Can it be proved by the quality of your workplace relationships?*

Those relationships are the visible proof of a life that has truly crucified the "old self" and is living like the "new self" in the character and power of a resurrected life in Christ.