

# COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

## 12: HOLY LIVING



### Context & Historical Background

The Apostle Paul was a traveling missionary and church planter, so he made his way around the globe (even without a Rick Steves travel guide). One of the little towns Paul had visited was in a small valley in Asia Minor, called Colossae. Paul caught wind of some teachings that were spreading around the area, and he became worried that these teachings would distort the gospel. He was worried, specifically, that the uniqueness of Jesus would be obscured. This letter is written to the church in that little town, partially to remind them of the importance of Christ. In the first chapter, Paul reminds the Colossians that Jesus is the image of God and the foundation of the world. This passage, a little over halfway through the letter, is a reminder from Paul that the way we think and the way we live are connected. Paul wanted to re-enforce holy living in the lives of the Colossians, because he knew that their right-living would make it harder to fall into the wrong-teaching that was rampant in the area.



### Related Scriptures

**Romans 6:4-11** - As in Colossians 3, Paul emphasizes a new way of living, a Jesus-way, in this passage in Romans.

**Hebrews 6** - Hebrews 6 underscores the importance of making Christ the foundation of all we do.

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21** — Those in Christ are a new creation.



### Key Terms

**Fornication:** The Greek word here is *porneia*, and in most translations it is translated as “fornication.” But this word feels a bit outdated. Some translations say “sexual immorality,” which probably gets it closer. It’s any behavior outside of the Biblical, sexual ethic. Examples might illuminate the word more: sleeping around, looking at porn (notice the Greek word *porneia*), etc.

**“Earthly”:** Paul instructs the Colossians to put to death whatever is “of the earth” (3:5). Don’t confuse this with saying that the body, or that things on earth, don’t matter or are bad. How we spend our money, treat our body, treat our planet—these are all important. But, as Paul reminds us, we shouldn’t focus on these to the exclusion of the “spiritual” or “heavenly.”



## Key Themes

**The Do's and Don'ts:** As you can tell, there are a lot of lists here. A couple of them outline how not to live (see 3:5 or 3:8), and one shows us a better way to live (3:12). What's the deal? Isn't this just a list of do's and don'ts? Yes and no. First off, notice who Paul has in mind: those who "have been raised with Christ" (3:1); those whose lives are now "hidden with Christ in God" (3:3). Paul is describing two different lives: one without Christ and one with him. Think of it as a "before photo" and "after photo." So it's important to realize that Paul doesn't see the list of good things as getting folks into heaven; he sees this as what a person clothed with a new self looks like once they have Christ. The point is a life with Christ looks radically different than a life without him.

So these are good questions to reflect on: what does my life look like? Does it look like a life with Christ? Does it look like all my classmates, who live without Christ? If our lives don't look different than the rest of the world, then we need to ask the degree to which we really are clothed with a new self. Thankfully, Paul gives us some examples of what such a life looks like: compassion, kindness, humility, patience—these aren't abstract, but concrete. We have opportunities for these every day. Of course, the lists here aren't exhaustive; there are some things we can do as an "old self" that aren't listed here, and living as a "new self" means more than just doing what Paul lists here. But this is a good place to start.

**With Christ Now:** Paul makes a pretty radical statement early on: "for you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:4). Although, at some previous time, we lived as an old self, but now we are "clothed with a new self" (3:5-9). The implication here is pretty straight forward: you used to be without Christ, but now you are with him. This actually brings about a change in us. We are now new selves. Some people think of life with Jesus like this: Jesus lived 2,000 years ago, he died for me, he's in heaven, and then one day he'll return. But in the meantime, I just do the best I can to live like a good person. Paul sees things quite a bit different: our lives are hidden with Christ now, and "the word of Christ dwells in us richly" (3:16). Our very ability to live as a new self is due to Christ living within us.

What Paul teaches here requires us to see Christ as living and operative in our lives now. This alters how we think, live, sleep, eat, go to class, shoot hoops, workout—anything we do, "in word or deed," we do "everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (3:17). Since we live with Christ, our life is not our own. We have died, says Paul. Which in turn makes everything we do holy. It makes everything we do worth doing with careful thought and with love. So see your lives—from Synergy to homework—as being the work of Christ on campus.

**Living in a Community:** At first, this passage seems fairly individualistic—focus on holy living and avoiding your old ways. Live your life with Christ. And it's true that Paul sees our individual lives as important. But all throughout the passage, Paul sees our life with Christ as flowing with, and through, other people around us. Re-read 3:12-17: it's filled with instructions for living in a community. "Bear with one another"; "forgive each other"; clothe yourselves in love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony"; "you (plural) were called in one body"; "teach

and admonish one another in all wisdom." Paul sees living in a community as a necessary part of life with Christ, or, at least, an unavoidable part of it. Together, we are called to live as the body of Christ, and these instructions offer some suggestions of how to live like this.

The theme here is summed up well with "bear with one another." Paul desires unity for the Colossians, as he would for any Christian community. The words he uses—"bear with," "forgive," "let the peace...," and "teach and admonish"—suggest conflict. Paul knows that no community is perfect. Conflict of some kind is inevitable. CSF is no different. There are disagreements. There will be butting heads. There will be times when we don't see eye-to-eye. But unity is worth pursuing anyway. As a part of Christ's body, we can all play different roles just like parts of a body. But this will require buy in from everyone, and, above all, to love the community. He even describes the extent to which this should happen: "forgive one another, just as the Lord has forgiven you." That's a tall task. But since we have been forgiven, we have reason to forgive others. It's a good reminder.

## 📖 Quotes & Illustrations

### EUSTACE SCRUBB STRIPS OFF THE OLD SELF

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, there is a little twerp called Eustace Scrubb who is accidentally taken into Narnia. While in Narnia, Eustace is basically the worst. But he has an experience where he turns into a dragon, and in this experience his selfishness is exposed. In a defining scene, the dragon scales must be clawed off—a painful experience—in order to become a boy again. In becoming a dragon, Eustace is, literally, clothed with his old self—his selfishness, greed, and ugliness. But in the clawing off of his scales proves to be a conversion. He has "stripped off the old self with its practices" and put on instead a new self. He is from then on changed—made new. No longer a twerp, Eustace begins to change into a person who is kind, compassionate, caring, humble, and more.

### PADDINGTON BEAR TEACHES US ABOUT LOVE

In the Paddington movies, Paddington is a bear who loves. He really excels at "bearing with one another." But the remarkable, and refreshing, characteristic that Paddington displays is a genuine care and concern for other people. No bone (or feather?) in his body is interested in exploitation. And Paddington's love is contagious. Those around him not only become more loving, and more interested in the things of life which matter, but they become more unified. The Brown family, and really anyone who knows Paddington, are drawn not only to Paddington, but to each other. This is what Paul has in mind with his exhortation to love, and an example of how love "binds it all together in perfect unity."

### DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

Brother Lawrence is something of a spiritual master. He wrote a Christian classic: *The Practice of the Presence of God*. In it, Brother Lawrence talked about the importance of doing everything—everything—with great love. He was known, in the monastery he lived in, for volunteering

for, and enjoying, chores that no one else wanted to do. Whether cooking or janitorial duties, Brother Lawrence saw everything he did as an opportunity for praise and worship. The very acts themselves took on a holiness because he took Colossians 3:17 seriously.

## ! Three Main Points

1. The lists Paul gives us here is not a mere lists of do's and don'ts, but an old way of living and a new way of living. Those who live with Christ will live, Paul says, in this new way of living.
2. It is Christ who operates within us now; he is not merely a historical character.
3. Everything we do is holy when done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

## ? Discussion Questions

- When Paul says "old self" and "new self," what does he have in mind? Are these different people?
- How can we "clothe" ourselves with the virtues Paul lists in 3:12?
- Or, similar to the above question, how do we "strip off" the old practices like Paul says in 3:9?
- Of the list of "earthly" vices Paul lists in 3:5, which of these do you struggle with the most? How can you put those to death?
- Of the list of virtues Paul lists in 3:12, which do you find to be a strength for you and how? Which do you find to be a weakness?
- Paul says to "forgive as the Lord forgave you." Practically, what does this look like?
- Paul says to "be honest with one another." Clearly, lying is bad. Being honest is good. But is this always true? Are there times when lying is morally permissible or, perhaps, morally necessary?
- What does Paul mean when he says "we were called in the one body"?
- How can you study for a test (or other regularly college-y things) "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (3:17)?
- What does Paul mean by "the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient" (3:6)?
- What is the significance of 3:11?
- Paul says to sing songs to God, but also says that we should sing in a particular way. What is that way? Why is singing a good thing? Why is worship music important? How does music personally encourage or edify you?
- Why does Paul make such a big deal about Jesus? Read Colossians 1:15-20 (from earlier in the same letter). How does that impact our reading of this passage?
- How do we "teach and admonish one another with all wisdom"? How can you do that with friends? Is it different for those who follow Jesus and those who do not? How?
- Paul says part of our "old self" is "abusive language," also translated "filthy" or "dirty." What do you think he's referring to? Do you have tendencies that Paul could be talking about here?
- What's this business of being "revealed with Christ"?

- How can the “peace of Christ” rule in our hearts? What habits or practices could help us practice this?

## Application & Practice

**Be honest with one another:** Paul exhorts us to “be honest with one another.” Honesty is a virtue almost lost in our culture. Lying is people—“it’s just a little white lie”—isn’t really a problem, and it’s just expected. In your accountability groups, have a mini-discussion on the importance of being truthful. This week, for every little white lie you tell, for any bit of the tiniest dishonesty, text your accountability partner (or partners). Of course, the goal should be total honesty, but we often slip up more than we realize. Again, this isn’t just lying. Anything that is even slightly dishonest. Hopefully, it will be illuminating, showing us just how often we aren’t truthful.

**Phone a friend.** This week, call a friend who you don’t see often and just catch up. Being in the lives of others is, according to Paul, worth persevering for. It’s not always easy to be in the lives of others, especially when they live in a different place. So this week, phone up a friend and have a chat.

## Going Deeper

**Article:** “Brother Lawrence” - Christianity Today

**Sermon:** “Centrality of the Gospel” - Tim Keller