



COLOSSIANS
RAISED
COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

MAIN IDEA

We are raised to transformational life with Christ by persistently fixing our minds on heavenly realities.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- **Growing up, who had the most influence on your identity and actions—a parent, sibling, teacher, grandparent? When you reflect on that person's influence, what is one thing you will never forget?**

- **Think about those who have most influenced your walk with Jesus. Brainstorm a list of some of the attitudes or behaviors that characterize someone who lives under the influence of Christ.**

Throughout our lives, many people and experiences influence who we become and how we live. Nothing should have more influence over our lives, though, than our relationship with Jesus. Paul began Colossians 3 by stating that if we have been raised with Christ, then we seek the things above. In other words, our relationship with Jesus empowers us to live in a way that reflects Jesus to the world and grows us to be more like Him.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read Colossians 3:1-4.

In the previous two chapters, Paul explained to the Colossians who Jesus is, what He came to do, and why that matters. In chapter 3, Paul transitioned to application. If Christ is who we believe He is, what does that mean for our lives?

- **What four things did Paul describe happening for believers in these verses?**

If you are a Christian, Paul said four things are now true for your life: You died with Christ; you have been raised with Christ; He is your new life now; and He is your life forever. We cannot accomplish any of these changes on our own—they all result from God's power at work in our lives.

From the day we become Christians, we are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have renewed minds (Romans 12:2). Our new lives and new minds guide us to seek the things that are above where Christ is (Colossians 3:1). If Christ is who He says, then our lives cannot be the same. If Christ is our life, then we now live under His influence and not the influence of the world or ourselves.

- **What does it mean to seek what is above? How do we do that?**

- **How should our future hope change our day-to-day focus?**

Paul's statement, "For you died" (v. 3) seems contrary to fact—we're still living and breathing. He was referring to believers' participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 2:12-13). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul explained, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). We have died to sins, so we might live for righteousness (1 Peter 2:24).

- **What are the benefits of seeking what is above? What are the pitfalls of keeping our minds set on the things of the earth?**
- **What worldly distractions can get in the way of believers keeping their focus on Christ?**
- **What are some practical ways to keep our thoughts focused on Christ as we fulfill our earthly obligations?**

> Have someone in your group read Colossians 3:5-9.

- **What do the sins listed in verse 5 have in common? What do they reveal about our hearts?**
 - **Why did Paul say greed was equivalent to idolatry? What do we worship when we are greedy?**
 - **Christ changes everything about our lives. Specifically, what must a Christian exclude from their lives based on these verses?**
 - **What types of sins do verses 8 and 9 deal with?**
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- **Read James 3:1-12. Why are the words we say so dangerous? How do we take control over our mouths?**

We are to put to death what belongs to our worldly nature (v. 5). In Greek, this command is literally to put to death “what is earthly in you.” We are to do away with the ungodly characteristics and affections that were formerly significant parts of our identities.

- **What do the negative attributes in the second list (v. 8) have in common? What do they reveal about our hearts?**
- **How do these verses show the tension between the change in who we are (and whose we are) and the changes that still need to take place in our thoughts and actions? What is the connection between renewing our minds and transforming our behaviors?**
- **What is our part in this transformation? Can we accomplish this by our own human effort alone? Explain.**
- **What does verse 9 inform us about earthly relationships between believers? Why must truth be prioritized as a core value in our relationships?**

We often stand as the ultimate barrier to joy in our lives. The sins Paul lists in Colossians 3:5-9 are all rooted in selfishness. When we give into lust, greed, slander, or rage, we demonstrate that we have an inflated view of ourselves. Such selfishness cannot be dealt with lightly. Paul did not mince words about what a believer’s relationship should be with regard to sin. We must not put up with, or even be patient with, our sin.

If this seems difficult or impossible, it is because we have lost sight of who we are in Christ. We have been raised with Him. And He has given us the power of His Spirit and each other as encouragement to put away the old. Our honesty about our struggles is both an act of putting the old life to death and an act of unity and accountability toward that pursuit.

> Have someone in your group read Colossians 3:10-11.

- **From verse 10, what is God's part in our renewal? What does this verse reveal about the goal of our renewal?**
- **Which sins and attitudes of the old self do you think are most difficult to leave behind?**
- **What does it take to find the desire and discipline to put off the old ways?**

Having put on the new self, we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. But we operate in two dimensions: in Christ (spiritual) and in the world (physical). Only when we get to heaven will we be free from the propensity toward sin that remains with us daily.

Yet even now, we are being renewed in the image of our Creator. If we look at the sin in our lives and think it is impossible to overcome, we are living in the past— out of our old identity in the flesh. We must remind ourselves daily of our new position in Christ so we can begin living in the joy that Christ has won for us.

As we look to Christ, our minds are renewed in knowledge. This frees us to put off the old practices concerned with satisfying our worldly appetites and criticizing others for our own benefit. We instead seek to become more like Christ.

- **What barriers are represented in verse 11? How does our culture deal with them? As believers, how should we view them?**
- **Why should there be no barriers of segregation or prejudice among God's new people?**

Christ is all and in all. He is the sphere in which all believers live, and He is all that ultimately matters. He lives in each Christian, and each Christian represents Him to all other believers. Thus faith and love overcome earthly categories in God's new people. The result is oneness in His body, the church.

APPLICATION

- **Does your life show that the kingdom of God is primary? Why or why not?**
- **What is one step you need to take to give Jesus the primary place of influence and power over you?**
- **What worldly distractions can get in your way and keep you from focusing on Christ?**
- **We are to live under the influence of Christ as individuals and as a church. How well do we make the story of Christ the center of everything we do at Northbrook? How can we make this more fully the topic of our conversation and our praise?**

PRAY

Express your gratitude to God for raising you to new life in Christ. Confess your need for Him to daily renew your mind. Ask for the Spirit to help you daily choose the things above where Christ is.

Historical Context of Colossians

Purpose

Paul wrote to counter the “Colossian heresy” that he considered an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The false teaching is identified as a “philosophy” (2:8), presumably drawn from some Hellenistic traditions as indicated by the references to “his fullness” (1:19); the “elements of the world” (Gk *stoicheia*, 2:8, 20); “wisdom” (2:3, 23); and “self-made religion” (2:23). In addition, the false teaching contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11); “human tradition” (2:8); Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation (2:16); the “worship of angels” together with “access to a visionary realm” (2:18); and harsh human regulations (2:21–23). Paul addressed this syncretistic philosophy by setting forth a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by noting appropriate implications for Christian conduct.

Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

3:1-2. The phrase “if you have been raised” connects what follows with “if you died with the Messiah” in Colossians 2:20. The word if has the force of “because.” Believers had died to sin’s rule and had been raised with Christ to new life. Thus they were to seek (go on striving for) what is above—the lofty qualities of character that Christ revealed. He is seated at God’s right hand, the position of honor, majesty, and power. Believers consistently were to make the victorious, reigning Christ their priority—to center their lives in Him. Believers were to set their minds on what is above. The Greek word translated set your minds on has the idea of continually focusing total attention on something. Such focus involves affections, will, and intellect. The phrase “what is above” essentially refers to Christ’s character traits. The words what is on the earth refer to worldly goals and values.

Notes:

3:3. Believers had died spiritually to their old, sinful way of life. Because of that complete break, their lives were hidden with Christ in God. Three interpretations of Paul’s statement are possible. (1) He may have had in mind their spiritual safety and security. (2) The words could have pointed to Christ as the Source (whom the world could not see) of believers’ new quality of life. (3) Paul may have meant that in the present they could not grasp the fullness of their life in Christ. In light of verse 4, a combination of (2) and (3) seems likely.

3:4. Believers’ lives were to demonstrate love for and faithfulness to Christ. His being revealed referred to His return, when all people will acknowledge His lordship (see Phil. 2:9-11). Also, Christians will realize the fullness of their new life in Christ. The phrase “in” glory refers to more than Christ’s (and believers’) radiant splendor. The term glory indicates God’s character revealed as redemptive. All people will see Christ for who He is and will recognize believers as reflecting His character. We live in accordance with new life in Christ when we consider Him and base our actions on what He has done and will do for us. For us, “living is Christ” (Phil. 1:21).

3:5. Because believers’ lives centered on Christ, they were to put to death (completely break with) worldly elements in their lives. They had to remove every facet—every expression—of the old, sin-dominated life. Worldly values, goals, attitudes, and actions were incompatible with their new life in Christ. Paul addressed sexual immorality and listed five vices believers were to eliminate from their lives. In his

day, sexual promiscuity among pagans was rampant. Believers were to make a complete break with an immoral lifestyle. The Greek word translated sexual immorality was an umbrella term for all sinful sexual activity, whether by married or unmarried people. The word impurity expanded the range to include unclean thoughts and words as well as actions. Here, the term rendered lust has the sense of uncontrolled sexual urges. The phrase evil desire includes sinful sexual desire and broadens the scope to all evil passions. The word translated “greed” has the idea of a feverish desire for something someone else has or for something not yet obtained. Here, the term probably refers to unrestrained pursuit of sexual pleasure. Such greed is idolatry. Self becomes the center of life, and life’s energies are focused on self-gratification.

Notes:

3:6-7. The vices listed bring God’s wrath on people who habitually practice them. God’s wrath is His settled opposition to sin, not the emotion of anger. If people choose to disobey God and insist on their sinful course, He will give them over to their choice. Evil, however, has within it the seeds of its own destruction and will work its way out to its inevitable result: death. Disobedient people make themselves God’s enemies. Before the Colossian believers became Christians, they practiced the vices Paul listed. The word “walked” means “lived.” The five sins were characteristic of believers’ former lifestyles. The phrase “when you were living in them” may refer to the inner principle of evil that generated their sinful practices.

3:8. The words but now contrasted believers’ old lifestyles to their new life in Christ. Paul listed five elements believers were to put away (lay aside, as soiled clothing). Three sins pertain to attitudes and two concern speech. Thus Paul emphasized that sinful attitudes and words are as serious as sinful acts. The Greek term translated “anger” is the same word Paul used in 3:6 for God’s wrath. When it refers to a human attitude, it has the sense of a continuing, seething resentment toward others. The word rendered “here” as wrath also can be understood as “rage”—a sudden, heated outburst of temper that dies down quickly. The term rendered malice conveys the idea of ill will that awaits an opportunity to inflict intentional harm. These attitudes have no place in believers’ lives. Paul urged believers to get rid of two kinds of speech. The Greek term translated “slander” means “speaking critically of another person with the intent to hurt.” The Greek term rendered “filthy language” has the sense of obscene and abusive speech.

3:9-10. Paul stressed that truthfulness was to be a mark of believers' lifestyle. The phrase "do not lie" can have the force of "stop lying." The Colossian believers' relationships with one another and their witness to unbelievers required truth and honesty. Lying, dishonesty, and deceit had characterized their pagan lifestyles; but because they had put off the old self (nature), they were to shed these practices (habitual actions) as they would discard old, ragged, filthy clothing. At conversion, believers had put on (as new, clean clothing) the new self (nature). In Greek, the tense of the verbs translated "put off" (3:9) and "put on" (3:10) convey once-for-all action. When believers placed their faith in Christ, He gave them a new nature governed by His grace. The new self is (continually) being renewed (transformed in quality) in knowledge. Christ works in believers to facilitate a process of renewal—of their continuing to gain new insights into and understanding of God's will. False teachers in Colossae offered secret knowledge they claimed was necessary for people to be fully Christian. Paul countered that Christ in believers was progressively supplying them with the knowledge they needed.

Notes:

3:11-12. The phrase "in Christ" refers to God's new people. The phrase "there is not" has the force of "there cannot be." It expresses the impossibility of humanly devised barriers among God's new people. Christ is all and in all. He is the sphere in which all believers live, and He is all that ultimately matters. Also, He lives in each Christian, who represents Him to all other believers. Thus faith and love remove earthly categories in God's new people. The result is His people's oneness. New people in Christ were to put on certain virtues as they would don new clothes. Paul addressed them with three descriptive terms. They were God's chosen ones. Through faith in Christ, they had taken their place among God's people. Believers were holy—set aside for God's service and for moral purity. They also were loved; they lived in God's love. Paul listed five attributes of believers as new people in Christ. The phrase "heartfelt compassion" conveys the idea of feeling so deeply with others who are hurting that a person shares their pain. The Greek word translated "kindness" has the idea of goodness, of considering others' good to be as important as a person's own. Humility is a healthy view of oneself in which a person thinks neither too highly nor too negatively of self. It also involves willingness to forgo rights and privileges to help others. Gentleness has the sense of strength that is controlled and channeled constructively. Patience literally is "long-suffering."