

Colossians: Jesus Our Lifestyle

Colossians 3:1—4:1

Last week's lesson. Christ has done everything we need to be reconciled to God through His death on the cross. If we add anything to Christ, we will only subtract our confidence.

The Big Idea. A Christian's lifestyle will reflect the victory that Christ has already won on our behalf. There is no aspect of our personal, family and community life and relationships that will not be changed.

Summary. Being rescued by Jesus and having complete assurance as the result of His finished reconciling work is no excuse for an unchanged life. He is now our Lord. He did it all in order to restore everything in the universe to its rightful place under His authority (compare **1:18**). We have been raised in Christ and, therefore, need to live lives that reflect that (**3:1-4**, then **3:5**). This impacts our ambitions and desires, our words and deeds. It especially affects our relationships with fellow believers, among whom there should be no discrimination or division. For this to happen, we need to depend on Christ all the more and work at serving Him and His people through everything.

But this lifestyle revolution will not only affect our Christian communities, but also our homes—hence Paul's encouragements to the members of the typical household of his day: wives and husbands, parents and children, slaves and masters (in contemporary terms, employees and employers). These are all to be characterized by selfless service and other person centeredness, just as Jesus was.

Talk about: If you were to ask some non-Christians what they think of churches and Christians they have known, how would they respond? Do you think their opinion would be fair?

Investigate: Read Colossians 3:1-4

Paul has given us an astounding account of who Jesus is, and what He has done for us. He now spells out the implications of these truths for how His followers should think and, therefore, live.

1. **Colossians 3:1-4** deals with the position of the believer. It has already happened; we have died with Christ (**v. 3**), and we were raised with Christ (**v. 1**). Our life is safe with Christ (**v. 3**). All this is in the past tense. It is done and finished!
 - a. In the future, when Jesus appears—a reference to His second coming—we will be taken to be with Him.

2. Since we have been raised with Christ, Paul spells out in chapter 3 the implications this must have for everyday life. We need to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. We need to set our affection (minds) on things above, not on things on the earth.
 - a. This doesn't mean that our every thought every moment should be about Christ. But, the driving force in our life should be Jesus Christ.
 - b. We should want to live in a way that reflects where we belong (in heaven, not this world) and to whom we belong (Jesus Christ is our master—no one else is!). Our citizenship is in heaven (**Phil. 3:20 NASB**).
3. How is it possible to say that a Christian has already been raised with Christ? How can we know that this has happened?
 - a. Paul writes in the past tense because of what has already been achieved at the cross and resurrection. It is now as if there is a seat reserved in heaven for each person in Christ and marked with each person's name (**3:3-4**). Of course, we cannot see this yet—but we trust in God's promises supremely because of His track record in Christ.

Investigate: Read Colossians 3:5-14.

4. Here are some expressions that talk about giving up the old way of life and what they mean:
 - a. "Put to death"(**v. 5 NIV**): suggest that we must try to kill off our old way of thinking that leads to ungodly living.
 - b. "Used to walk" (**v. 7, NIV**): makes us think of our life as a way to be and about which we make choices each day—our daily walk.
 - c. "Rid yourselves (**v. 8, NIV**): like throwing out the old rubbish.
 - d. "Taken off" (**v. 9, NIV**): like removing and discarding an old set of filthy clothes.
5. Paul also uses some expressions that describe the way a believer should take up a new way of life—"put on the new man, put on therefore" (**vv. 10, 12**).
 - a. The coming just judgment of God (**v. 6**) and the fact that He has chosen us and demonstrated His love for us in undeserved ways (**vv. 12-14**), should motivate us to change from our old ways.
6. These phrases suggest that there will be a struggle, or fight in taking off the "old man" and putting on the "new man." But the fight starts in our mind. We have to know who

we are in Christ and understand that we are not in this battle by ourselves. We are his workmanship (**Eph. 2:10**).

7. According to **verses 11-14**, the church should actually look like people treating one another as Christ has treated us. This means that a church that is seeking to follow their Lord will be filled with people growing in Christ-likeness. Filled with truth and love. And with no partiality along racial or social lines—because in His choosing of people, God shows no distinction.

Getting Personal: We all have our own areas of frequent temptation and failure. Which of the sins outlined in **3:5-11** are particular issues for you? Which virtue require particular effort? Make a concerted and prayerful effort to work on these in the coming week.

8. **APPLY:** What makes setting “our hearts on things above” difficult? How can we encourage one another to keep a heavenly perspective?
- a. The heavenly world seems unreal because it is invisible. So, a Christian needs constant reminders to see beyond the material and visible—reality is much bigger than what we see or feel!
 - b. We need the Bible’s reminders, but we also need the challenges of fellow-believers who live lives that demonstrate a different set of values to others around us. Seeing someone resisting worldly ambitions or influences for the sake of Christ can make a profound impact.

Investigate: Read Colossians 3:15-4:1.

Paul now moves to more general recommendations for community life. Notice that these go beyond simply what we do in church together. This is about the whole of our lives, seven days a week.

9. What are the three essential ingredients for healthy life (**v. 15, 16, 17**)?
- **The peace of God (v. 15):** Our reconciliation to God through Christ (**1:20**) must lead to reconciliation with one another (compare **3:13**).
 - **The word of Christ (v. 16):** without this, it would be practically impossible to set our hearts on things above (**3:1**), such is the lure of the world. Notice how the word should permeate not just our teaching but also our singing.
 - **Gratitude to God (v. 15,17).** This is no afterthought but is essential if we are to remember our dependence on God and what He has done for us. Once we are reminded of that, any sense of superiority over others is completely erased.
10. Look through the “household code” in **3:18—4:1**. How does the Christian attitude to relationship differ from modern views about personal rights?

- a. Each person is to be characterized by other-person centeredness. This will obviously look different, because we all have different roles within the home—that of the child is not the same as that of the parent! There are controversies here of course, but if we take the section as a whole, we can see how it subverts modern assumptions about personal rights. In that sense, the whole passage is counter-cultural today.
 - b. Paul gives rules for three sets of household relationships: 1) husband and wives, 2) parents and children; and 3) masters and slaves. In each case there is mutual responsibility to submit and love, to obey and encourage, to work hard and be fair. See **Ephesians 5:21-6:9** and **1 Peter 3:1-8** for more instructions.
 - c. Christian marriage involves mutual submission, subordinating our personal desires for the good of the loved one, and summitting ourselves to Christ as Lord.
 - d. Being subject (submitting) to another person is an often misunderstood concept. It does not mean becoming a doormat. Christ—at whose name “every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil. 2:10)—subjected his will to the Father, and we honor Christ by following his example. When we subject ourselves to God, we become more willing to obey his command to submit to others, that is, to subordinate our rights to theirs.
 - e. In a marriage relationship, both husband and wife are called to be subject to one another. For the wife, this means willingly following her husband’s leadership in Christ. For the husband, it means putting aside his own interests in order to care for his wife. *Submission is rarely a problem in homes where both parties have a strong relationship with Christ and where each is concerned for the happiness of the other.*
 - f. *Note in **Ephesians 5:25-30**, Paul denotes twice as many words to telling husbands to love their wives as to telling wives to be subject to their husbands.*
 - g. Children must be handled with care. They need firm discipline administered in love. Don’t alienate them by nagging, deriding, or destroying their self-respect so they lose heart. The purpose of parental discipline is to help children grow, not to provoke them to anger or discouragement
11. The most vital relationship for both slave and master (employer and employee) is the one each has with Jesus as Lord. That gives both individuals a heavenly perspective on how they relate to one another. Paul’s instructions for the slave illustrate a vital truth about worship—the whole of life is about our dedication and service of God (v. 23). It

doesn't matter how menial or irrelevant it might seem to us. Moreover, God's justice is perfect—something both slaves and masters (employees and employers) need constantly to remember (3:25—4:1).

Pray

Thank God:

- for the joy of knowing that if you know Christ, you have been raised with Him and that you are a member of God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.
- for the change that God has already begun to bring in your life.

Ask God:

- for the ability to set your heart on things above and thus to put off the old self and put on the new self.
- for God's peace to rule and God's word to dwell richly in your heart.
- to build up the life of the Christian community that you belong to.

Homework: Jesus Our Ministry. Read **Colossians 4:2-18**