

**Easter Sunday:
The Believer's Union with his Risen Savior**

Introduction

When Christians gather together weekly on Sunday, they do so in acknowledgment of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that took place long ago on the first Lord's Day. Every Sunday when we meet, we celebrate our Lord Jesus having risen from the dead and then having ascended to be seated on His throne as Lord of all creation through all of history. But in addition to every Sunday, we also dedicate in a special way this one Lord's Day each year to give particular attention and emphasis to our Lord's resurrection. Because we know that our Lord's Passion took place during the Jewish Passover that occurred during the phase of a full moon, we can be certain that our Lord's resurrection occurred on this day almost 2,000 years ago.¹

But if we commemorate our Lord's resurrection only as a historical fact, we will not do full justice to the event itself and the importance and relevance that the resurrection has for Christians. We should not only give regard to the historic event, but we should consider our participation with Him in His death and resurrection. For all of those redeemed by Him had died with Him and had risen with Him in that historical event. And because of our union with Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection is not only the substance of our faith, but it is also the foundation of our ethics, for it informs our morality and invigorates our motivation to live for Him. As **J. C. Ryle** once expressed, "Christ is the mainspring both of doctrinal and practical Christianity... A right knowledge of Christ is essential to a right knowledge of Christianity."²

Now this can be shown from a number of places in the Scriptures, but for our purposes this morning we will consider the words of the Apostle Paul to the church at Colossae. In Colossians 2:20 through 3:17 we read instruction of how to live the Christian life with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as informing and motivating us in the way we live unto Him and before one another. Here is **Colossians 2:20 - 3:17**.

^{2:20}If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—²¹"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"²²(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

^{3:1}If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

⁵Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

⁸But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

¹²Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a

¹ This is in contrast to the date of Christ's birth December 25, which cannot be determined with certainty.

² J. C. Ryle, **Holiness** (Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001, orig., 1877), p. 370.

complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. ¹⁴But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

At the end of Colossians 2 Paul had made reference to the believer's union with Jesus Christ in His death. We read in Colossians 2:20-23 these words:

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— ²¹“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” ²²which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

And then in verse 1 of chapter 3 the apostle expressed the believer's union with Christ in His resurrection. It is based upon this reality that he gave instruction to these Christians in the church at Colossae. He declared, *“If then you were raised with Christ”*, he then proceeded to give the proper action and response to that truth: then *“seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”* Paul wrote of the true believer's union with Jesus Christ in His resurrection which was then to direct the manner in which the Christian was to live.

The apostle was quite clear that due to the believers' union with Jesus Christ in His death and in His resurrection, they were by their union instructed and directed to order their lives as Christians. There were beliefs and behaviors that *were not* to characterize them because of their union with Jesus Christ in His *death*. There were beliefs and behaviors that *were* to characterize them because of their union with Jesus Christ in His *resurrection*.

Now we emphasize the responsibility that we have as Christians to order our lives according to the standard of God's unchanging moral law. Although the law of God cannot condemn us, it continues to be the rule of life that we are to follow as we live before God. And yet we always emphasize that the abiding authority of the moral law for Christians is that they are “under law toward Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). The law of God has been subsumed (incorporated) in Christ. And this is certainly what the Lord has set before us in this passage. Each of the sins listed and each of the acts of righteousness identified may be read elsewhere as addressed by God's law, but here we see that it is our union in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that should move us to think and live according to righteousness (law keeping). We see before us that our spiritual union with Christ informs us on how we are to live before Him and how we are not to live before Him. Jesus Christ in His death on His cross and His resurrection from the dead is the primary and central source of instruction and motivation on how to live for Him in this world. We do not look to the law of God but to the person of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and who rose for us, who thereby moves us and enables us to live according to that law through the grace that is in Him. Let us consider the passage before us to understand this issue more clearly. But first we will give some...

I. Background information regarding this church at Colossae

The city of Colossae was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus, which was on the coast of the Aegean Sea, what is now western Turkey. The city of Colossae was in the valley of the Lycus River, which is a tributary of the Meander River. It is at the foot of very high mountains, in a lush well-watered, temperate region. Colossae was not a large city in the first century. And although it had been more prominent in an earlier time, its size and influence had diminished due to the larger and more influential cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis, which were only about 12 miles to the west of Colossae.

At the time of writing this epistle, Paul had not visited this church. This is understood by Paul's comments in Colossians 1:3 and 4 which read, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

when we pray for you, since *we heard* of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.” We also read Paul’s words in Colossians 2:1, “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.*”

How, then, was the church begun? The church was probably founded by **Epaphras**, an acquaintance of the apostle Paul, who may have been converted to Christ through Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. Epaphras then returned to his hometown of Colossae, evangelizing and forming the church of new disciples of Jesus Christ. Paul mentioned Epaphras in Colossians 1:5b-8,

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Later in the epistle Paul refers to Epaphras as “one of them”, a citizen of Colossae and a member of the church located there.

Epaphras, *who is one of you*, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. (Col. 4:12f)

Again, both Laodicea and Hierapolis were not far from Colossae.

The church may have met in the house of Philemon, the same man to whom Paul addressed his short epistle. We read these words in the opening of that letter:

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, ²To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: ³(Philemon 1:1f)

It is clear that the Apostle Paul was the author of this epistle to the Colossians.³ And although he had not visited the church prior to his writing this epistle, he wrote with the authority of his apostleship. Paul was confident that the church had been well instructed in the faith. Colossians 2:6 and 7 read, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, *as you have been taught*, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Apparently Epaphras had learned well from Paul and the church had learned well from Epaphras. Again, Paul had described Epaphras as having been a “faithful minister” (Col. 1:7).

But false teachers had troubled the church. There was a terrible heresy that was threatening the wellbeing of the church. Paul wrote this epistle to address and correct this errant teaching and to affirm these believers in Jesus Christ.

Now, although it is certain that there was serious heresy in the church, it is not certain of the specific identity of the heresy. But when considering some of the apostle’s clear instruction in this epistle, the general nature of the heresy may be somewhat reconstructed. And so, what are some of these doctrinal emphases of this epistle that suggested the nature of their doctrinal aberrations?

First, Paul gave great detail and emphasis to *the Person of Christ*, particularly in the first chapter (1:15-19). The manner in which Paul depicts Christ seems to suggest that he was correcting some of the teachings of Gnosticism that had its beginnings in the first century but became a great challenge to the Christian churches of the second century.

³ It is true that there were letters written by others that had been falsely attributed to Paul (Cf. 2 Thess. 2:2). Some “scholars” have been prone to question Paul’s authorship of some of his epistles in the New Testament. “Though many modern scholars have doubts about Paul’s authorship of this letter, compelling grounds for questioning its authenticity are lacking” [R. C. Sproul, gen. ed. **The Reformation Study Bible** (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 2117].

Second, Paul warned the church of *false philosophical thinking and reasoning*. And so Paul warned the church: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). Some of the Greek words that Paul used, such as those translated as “fullness” (πλήρωμα), “knowledge” (γνώσεως) and “neglect of the body” (ἀφειδία σώματος), were words that were commonly used by the Gnostic heretics of the second century.

Third, the apostle’s references and allusions to *Jewish traditions and practices* complicate the identification of the heresy. Paul addresses the matter of Jewish circumcision. We read in Colossians 2:11, “Him (Christ) you were also *circumcised with the circumcision made without hands*, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.” And in 3:9-11 we read,

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,¹⁰ and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,¹¹ where there is neither Greek nor Jew, *circumcised nor uncircumcised*, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

And then where Paul warned the church against emphasizing matters of “food or in drink”, “festival” or “a new moon or sabbaths”, allude to Jewish traditions (cf. Col 2:16). It is apparent that the heresy that Paul was correcting contained Jewish elements.

And fourthly, the heresy probably involved some aspects of *the worship of angels*. In Colossians 2:18 and 19 we read his exhortation:

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility *and worship of angels*, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. (Col. 2:18f)

This, too, may suggest Jewish background. However, the later Gnostics had developed a very elaborate angeology, believing that angels were intermediaries who could bridge the gap between fallen, physical man and God who was holy and spiritual. Paul taught them that Jesus Christ is the only true Mediator between God and mankind.

Let us next consider the passage, with particular view to our union with Christ in His resurrection.

II. “You rose with Christ, therefore...” (Col. 3:1-4)

Verses 1 through 4 constitute one paragraph in the English Standard Version (ESV). Here we read instruction to Christians whose relationship with God and with God’s world has been radically and forever changed because of their union with Jesus Christ.

Verse one is a conditional sentence that opens with a conditional clause, “*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*” A conditional sentence will often begin its first clause with the word “if”; this clause is known as the protasis. The second clause commonly begins (either stated forthrightly or implied) with the word “then” or “therefore”; this clause is known as the apodosis.

Now we might read this verse and at first wonder if the matter is in doubt: “If you have been raised?” We might ask ourselves, “Is it possible we have not been raised with Christ?” But in the Greek language of the New Testament there were different ways in which one could express very precisely the degree of certainty of a conditional sentence. Depending on the Greek words used and the tense of the verb used, various degrees of certainty are conveyed. And so, sometimes the conditional sentence is worded which implies *the statement is contrary to fact*. In other words, the implied answer is “no”, or “it is not true.” An example of this would be when Martha said to our Lord regarding the death of her brother Lazarus. John 11:21 reads, “Then Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’”

The wording of this conditional clause implies He was not there. It is as if she said, “Lord, if You had been here (but You were not here), my brother would not have died.”

But another form of the conditional sentence assumes that *the statement is true to fact*. An example of this would be when Satan challenged our Lord in His wilderness temptation. Matthew 4:6 reads, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” The devil was not challenging our Lord whether or not He was truly the Son of God, for the manner in which the condition is set forth assumes it is a true condition. In other words, it was as if the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God (and indeed you are), throw Yourself down.” It was not a challenge questioning the identity of the Son of God. It was a challenge to our Lord to show forth that He was the Son of God by performing a miracle in order to impress observers as to His identity. When a conditional sentence is expressed in this form, one could even use the word “since” rather than the word “if.”

Now the conditional clause of Colossians 3:1 is an example of this form. The matter is not in doubt, but rather it is assumed to be true. It is as if Paul wrote, “If then you have been raised with Christ (and indeed you have been raised with Him), seek the things that are above.” The matter of our having been raised with Christ is not in doubt. It is a true fact, and so, if this is true, and it is, therefore you ought to do what follows from that, “seek the things that are above.”⁴ Of course this union with Christ in His death and resurrection is only true of Christians (actually of all the elect). The non-Christian (who is not one of God’s elect) did not die and rise in union with Jesus Christ. None of Paul’s instructions here in Colossians 3 is to be applied to the unbeliever.

Now what is meant by the expression, “seek the things that are above”? First, recognize it is worded in the form of a command. If you have new life in Christ, if you have been raised with Him, then you are commanded, “Seek the things that are above.” Paul had set forth the spiritual reality, you are raised with Him. He then set forth the spiritual duty that flows from that spiritual reality: live in conformity to your high calling. **F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) set forth the matter quite clearly:

The Colossians knew that, like their fellow-Christians throughout the world, they had been “raised with Christ through faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead”; that they had been “quickened with Christ when they were spiritually dead” (Ch. 2:12f.). Every time that they recalled their baptism and its meaning, they ought to be impressed afresh with the reality of their participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, and draw the logical and practical conclusions. If their death with Christ severed the links that bound them to the old world order, which was trying to impose its dominion on them again, their resurrection with Christ established new links--links with a new and heavenly order, with the spiritual kingdom in which Christ their Lord was sovereign, ruling from the place of supremacy to which He had been raised at God’s right hand.⁵

Paul wrote, “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, *seated at the right hand of God.*” This speaks of Jesus Christ as the enthroned King, the Lord of heaven and earth. He is the one with whom we have to do. Let us seek to learn what He would have us do. Let us seek to be conformed to His will.

⁴ Actually in Greek there are four different forms in which a conditional clause or sentence can be expressed. The “First Class Condition” is a simple condition and is *assumed to be true*. An example is mentioned in the text, Matthew 4:6, which reads, “If You are the Son of God (and indeed you are), throw Yourself down.” The “Second Class Condition” is that which is looked upon as *contrary to fact, the condition is being set forth as not true*. An example is mentioned in the text, John 11:21, which reads, “Lord, if You had been here (but You were not here), my brother would not have died.” The “Third Class Condition” is a future more probable condition. Although it has not yet occurred, *it is assumed the condition will take place*. An example of this would be 1 John 2:1, “And if anyone sins (and he probably will), we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” The “Fourth Class Condition” is the future less probable condition. In this form the condition has not been determined, and *the condition is looked upon as unlikely to be fulfilled*. Although there are no true or complete fourth class condition sentences in the Greek New Testament, 1 Peter 3:14 is close. It reads, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake (and it is unlikely), you are blessed.”

⁵ F. F. Bruce, **The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians**, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 257f.

What God has done for us in Jesus Christ is both the incentive and the argument for authentic Christian living. We are citizens of a realm that has opened before us, and we should live as its citizens while in this fallen world. The idea being conveyed is that we have become participants in a new world order. We live in the promised age foretold in the Old Testament that has been realized through Jesus Christ. God has raised His people in Christ Jesus. They possess the life of the resurrection in themselves. Therefore, they need not await for the second coming of Jesus Christ in order to experience life in the eternal state, they may live by the power of the resurrection now. Christians have the ability, and therefore the responsibility, to experience in increasing degree the life now, that they will one day experience fully when they will be raised from the dead unto eternal life. And so, for Christians, “Let their union with the exalted Christ transform their entire life: mind, heart, and will.”⁶ Again, **F. F. Bruce** stated it well:

But what are the implications of being raised with Christ? This, that believers have now no life of their own. Their life is the life of Christ, maintained in being by Him at God’s right hand and shared by Him with all His people. Their interests must therefore be His interests. Instead of waiting until the last day to receive the resurrection-life, those who have been raised with Christ possess it here and now. The new creation--the “regeneration”--has already begun in them. Spiritually--that is to say, “in Christ”--they belong already to the age to come and enjoy its life.⁷

How do we obey this command, “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God”? The answer is in **verse 2**, which reads, “***Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.***” Our way of life should be characterized by setting our minds upon what the will of God is in Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior. We are to set our minds to view ourselves and the world from the perspective of Jesus Christ enthroned in heaven. We are to ponder upon those things that we have in Jesus Christ. This knowledge of who we are in Christ should inform our way of assessing ourselves and the world in which we live.

This view of ourselves of having our minds fixed on the things that we have in Jesus Christ above, may be contrasted with those who are Christian in name only, but who are actually strangers to Jesus Christ. We read of this in **Philippians 3:12-20**, in which Paul wrote,

¹²Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. ¹⁶Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

¹⁷Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—***who set their mind on earthly things.*** ²⁰***For our citizenship is in heaven,*** from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²⁰who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

What is implied in this activity of setting our minds on things above, is that the result that the things of this earth, that being our sin, will lose their appeal and power over our lives. And so, to the degree that we are successful in seeing life in this way, the sin that characterizes us will weaken in its power within us. It is as the hymn we sing,

⁶ William Hendriksen, **Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon**, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 140.

⁷ Bruce, p. 259.

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Verse 3 gives a further explanation of this spiritual reality. “*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*” Paul was referring to their lives before they became Christians. They had died to their former life. And since that time their new life is “hidden with Christ in God.”

In what sense is our new life in Christ “hidden”? **Richard Sibbes** (1577-1635) gave a message on this subject of “The Hidden Life.”⁸ He first addressed Paul’s word, “*For you have died.*”

You see first the proposition, ‘Ye are dead.’ With whom? ‘With Christ, in God.’

A Christian is dead in many ways. He is dead *to the law, to the moral law*. He looks not to have comfort and salvation by it, by the law; he is dead to the law, so he flies to Christ.

A Christian is dead to the *ceremonial law*. Now, in the glorious lustre of the gospel, what have we to do with those poor elements that were for children? A ceremonious disposition is opposite to the glory and lustre of the gospel, as the apostle speaks of in the former chapter.

He is dead likewise *to sin*. Having communion with Christ, when He died for sin, he is dead to sin. He that hath communion in the death of Christ, hath the same affection to sin that Christ had. Christ hated it infinitely when He suffered for it; so every Christian thinks that Christ died for my sins, and by union with Christ he hath the same affection to it, he is ‘dead’ to it.

And because this is but an inchoation (onset) and beginning, a Christian is not perfectly dead to sin. He stands in need of afflictions, and in regard to *afflictions* he is dead. They must help in the work of mortification. And because no affliction can sufficiently work mortification but death itself, which is the accomplishment of mortification, we are dead in respect to *death itself*, which is the accomplishment of all.⁹

But not only is the Christian in one sense “dead”, yet in another sense he is alive. Sibbes wrote:

We are dead, and yet we have life. A Christian is a strange person. He is both dead and alive, he is miserable and glorious. He consists of contraries. He is dead in regard to corruption and miseries, and such like, but he is alive in regard of his better part, and he grows in two ways at once. It is a strange thing the Christian doth. He grows downwards and upwards at the same time; for as he dies in sin and misery, and natural death approaching, so he live the life of grace, and grows more and more till he end in glory.¹⁰

Sibbes then went ahead to write upon Paul’s second statement, “*and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*” In what way(s) is our life “hidden” with Christ? He proposed two ways.

1. It is hid *to the world, to worldly men*, because a Christian man is unknown to them. Because they know not the Father that begets (gives spiritual life), therefore they know not them that are begotten... They know not the advancement of the Christian: he is raised into a higher rank than they... A worldly man sees not this life in regard of the excellency. He passeth scorns and contempts of it, of folly and the like. A Christian, in respect of his happy life, is a stranger here, and therefore he is willing to pass through the world, and to be used as a stranger.

⁸ Richard Sibbes, **Works of Richard Sibbes**, vol. 5 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), pp. 205ff.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 205f.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 206.

2. It is a hidden life likewise oftentimes, not only to worldlings, but in regard of the children of God themselves; because by reason of some infirmities that are in the best of God's children, they are apt to judge amiss, harshly and rashly one another...

It is hid likewise from themselves, for often God's children know not themselves, in temptation, in their nonage, in the beginning of their conversion, in the time of their desertion, and spiritual slumber and sleep, grace seems to be dead in them, and then they know not that they have this spiritual life... Partly through distemper of body, and partly distemper of spirit, there are clouds raised between them and their happiness, that they cannot see their spiritual life.¹¹

But the idea of "your life hidden with Christ in God" is not so much that your Christian life is not obvious to others about you and perhaps to you yourself. Rather, your new life in Christ that is presently "hidden with Christ in God" speaks of its certainty and security. No one is able to take it from you. The emphasis here is the assertion that our new life in Jesus Christ is secure for us. Our new life is a spiritual reality and it is secure for us. It is as Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1 that our salvation inheritance is reserved in heaven for us being kept or secure by the power of God. Our life is hidden in Christ where no one can tarnish it, damage it, or remove it from us.

And then **verse 4** directs the Christian's attention toward the day when our new life in Christ will be finally and fully experienced and enjoyed by us. "**When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.**" Jesus Christ Himself is our life. Probably few of us see the full reality and significance that this has for us. But this is a spiritual reality for every true Christian; the Holy Spirit is the only One who can make the reality evident to us. Here is a testimony of this very thing:

Bishop Moule tells of a friend of his to whom, "early in his course, those five words, '*Christ, who is our life*', were made a new world... As he walked back to his home over the dark fields from a mission-service he had been conducting, these simple, these familiar words passed through his soul in one of those moments of insight which God alone can explain. 'Within ten paces, as I walked, life was transformed for me,' he said; so wonderful was the discovery that the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely Rescuer, Friend, King, but Life itself, Life central, inexhaustible, 'springing up within my heart, rising to eternity.'"¹²

Christ is our life. We are to see Jesus Christ as the center and meaning of all we are as Christians.

The Scriptures use this kind of idea or language in a number of places. Our Lord told His disciples, "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. **Because I live, you will live also**" (John 14:19). Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that **the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.**" Galatians 4:19 reads, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again **until Christ is formed in you.**" And Paul expressed in Philippians 1:21, "**For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**" The life we live is the life that we have in Jesus Christ.

Paul declared that "when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) commented on this:

We shall then appear with Him in glory. It will be His glory to have His redeemed with Him; He will come to be glorified in His saints (2 Thess. 1:10); and it will be their glory to come with Him, and be with Him for ever. At the second coming of Christ there will be a general meeting of all the saints; and those whose life is now hid with Christ shall then appear with Christ in that glory which He Himself enjoys (John 17:24). Do we look for such a happiness, and should we not set our affections upon that

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, pp. 261f.

world, and live above this? What is there here to make us fond of it? What is there not there to draw our hearts to it? Our head is there, our home is there, our treasure is there, and we hope to be there for ever.

At this point the apostle Paul concluded the first portion of this epistle to the Colossians, which was primarily *doctrinal* in content. But with Colossians 3:5, the apostle began the second division of his epistle, which is primarily very *practical* in its content. Beginning here Paul instructed these Christians to live according to the truths that he had set forth in the first two chapters of this epistle.

III. The Christian life in Christ (3:5-17)

This is in two arenas of living. First, because of our union with Christ in His death we are “to put off” sin. And then second, because of our union with Christ in His resurrection we are “to put on” acts of righteousness.

A. Our union with Christ in His death directs us to “put to death”, or “put off” sin (3:5-11)

Because of our union with Jesus Christ in His death, we are to put off attitudes and behavior that are inconsistent and incompatible with our new life in Christ. Here are verses 5 through 11.

⁵Therefore *put to death* your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

⁸But now you yourselves are *to put off* all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Before us are a number of very practical and straightforward commands that address specific sins that need to be forsaken by Christians. This is the way unto Christian maturity. Maturity would not result from esoteric communications from astral powers, as the Colossian Christians were being instructed by the false teachers. **The Reformation Study Bible** footnote states the matter well:

The route to maturity is not the path of secret revelations, or of self-punishing disciplines. It consists in understanding and living on the basis of the believer’s death (2:20; 3:5), resurrection, and heavenly enthronement “with Christ” (3:1). The Colossians have a false notion of heavenly reality, which ironically leads them to fruitless efforts on the earthly plane. Fruitful living on earth begins, rather, with right understanding of heavenly reality.¹³

Again, **verse 5** reads, “*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*” Paul instructs these Christians to “put to death” these sins. The KJV is perhaps more rhetorical, which reads, “*Mortify* therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

“To put to death” means that we are to remove these sins from us. We are to repent of these and see to it that they are no longer practiced by us. As **Matthew Henry** wrote:

The apostle exhorts the Colossians to the mortification of sin, the great hindrance to seeking the things which are above. Since it is our duty to set our affections upon heavenly things, it is our duty to mortify our *members which are upon the earth*, and which naturally incline us to the things of the world:

¹³ Note on 3:1-4:6, see R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 2126.

“Mortify them, that is, subdue the vicious habits of mind which prevailed in your Gentile state. Kill them, suppress them, as you do weeds or vermin which spread and destroy all about them, or as you kill an enemy who fights against you and wounds you.”¹⁴

The New King James Version (and the KJV) is more faithful to the Greek text. It reads “Therefore put to death *your members* which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Perhaps the ESV translated it the way it did in order to avoid a “difficulty” in translation. For how is that these sins can be called our “members”? Are not our “members” physical parts of us, our eyes, hands, feet? How can these sins be called our “members” and not our vices? Calvin proposed the idea that these sins are referred to as our “members” because these sins become so much a part of us when we commit them.

He makes mention of certain vices which he calls, not with strict accuracy, but at the same time elegantly, *members*. For he conceives of our nature as being, as it were, a mass made up of different vices. They are, therefore, our *members*, inasmuch as they in a manner stick close to us. He calls them also *earthly*, alluding to what he had said — *not the things that are on earth*, (Colossians 3:2,) but in a different sense. “I have admonished you, that earthly things are to be disregarded: you must, however, make it your aim to mortify those vices which detain you on the earth.” He intimates, however, that we are earthly, so long as the vices of our flesh are vigorous in us, and that we are made heavenly by the renewing of the Spirit.¹⁵

This idea of Christians needing to put to death is somewhat of a paradox. The Scriptures had very clearly taught us earlier in the epistle that *we had already died* in our union with Jesus Christ. But here we are told to “*put to death*” these sins. The spiritual reality is that we died with Christ. The practical reality is that we still have sins that we must deal with, that we must “put to death.” Paul is calling upon these Christians “to become in practice what they are in principle: dead to sin and alive to God.”¹⁶ **F. F. Bruce** stated it this way:

Now that you are new men in Christ, says the apostle, live like new men. You have said good-bye to your old life; therefore have done with all those things that were characteristic of it. You have died with Christ; act and speak and think therefore so as to make it plain that this “death” is no mere figure of speech, but a real event which has severed all the links which bound you to the dominion of sin. In short, be (in actual practice) what you now are (by a divine act).¹⁷

There are five sins listed in verse 5. The first four are sexual sins. The fifth is the sin of covetousness. Later in verse 8 he identifies five more sins, which concern anger and abusive speech. There are ten sins listed all together.

The first four sins that are to be mortified, or put to death, are *sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire*. The first speaks of evil deeds done. They stem from the “evil desires” that a person has, which are driven by a person given over to “passion” and “impurity.”

He mentions *covetousness* as the fifth sin, which he equated with idolatry. Covetousness is the desire to have more than what God has righteously given to you. It is the longing for something more than what God has righteously given you. It is the failure to be content with what God has given you.

In **verse 6** Paul states why these things must be forsaken. “*On account of these the wrath of God is coming.*” The verb Paul used is in the present tense. This is sometimes referred to as a “prophetic present tense.” The reason the present tense is used is to show that the wrath of God is so certain of coming due to

¹⁴ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 762.

¹⁵ John Calvin, **Calvin’s Commentaries**, Vol. 21 (Baker, 1993), p. 208.

¹⁶ Sproul, R. C., **The Reformation Study Bible**, p. 2126.

¹⁷ Bruce, p. 266.

people committing these sins, that is as if that wrath had already arrived.¹⁸ If we are Christians, we will deal with these, for we know that God's wrath is upon all who practice such things. This is what Paul had declared in Romans 2:

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Paul wrote of these matters to the church at Ephesus:

³But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, ***let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints***; ⁴neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵For this you know, that ***no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God***. ⁶***Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience***. ⁷***Therefore do not be partakers with them***. ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Eph. 5:3-8)

Now these Christians need to put to death these sins, for they were still troubled by them. Paul acknowledged this in **verse 7**, "***In these you too once walked, when you were living in them***." They were once living in them, but they had become Christians. But these sins still troubled them being committed occasionally by them. They must put a stop to this behavior.

And then in **verse 8** Paul set forth the other sins for which they needed to mortify. "***But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth***." The Christian should be different from non-Christians in the manner that they speak to others. The first three sins listed speak to attitudes of the heart. The last two are sins of speech, which are the expressions of the first three sins. If we are characterized by anger, wrath, and malice, wishing ill of people, we need to put these to death. They should not be seen or heard coming forth from a Christian. Indeed they cannot be. A true Christian must put these sins away from him.

A true Christian may be known by his speech. In fact, it will be a vital aspect of the judgment that each of us will undergo when the Lord returns. For not only will our actions be judged, but our speech also. And our Lord warned His disciples about this matter. He said that a man's speech will reveal what kind of man he is, whether he is of God or of the devil.

³³"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. ³⁶But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. ³⁷For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matt. 12:33-37)

One important source of evidence for our claim to be Christian that will be examined on the Day of Judgment will be the words that we have spoken.

We next read **verses 9 and 10**: "***Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator***." Again, a person's speech is the issue. Lying is not to be done by the Christian. Why? For you had denounced and turned away from that "old self", that person you were before your conversion and

¹⁸ Hendriksen, p. 147.

baptism. You had confessed and shown forth your new life that the Lord had created in you. And now you are attempting to become like Him, like Your Savior, who had redeemed you from your sin.

Paul concludes by setting forth the levelling effect of the death of Jesus Christ to redeem His people. He renders them all as His won with no distinction between them any longer, for they are in Christ who “is all and in all.” Verse 11 reads, “***Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.***”

B. Our union with Christ in His life directs us to “put on” holy practice that is consistent with His Person (3:12-17).

Paul wrote,

¹²Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. ¹⁴But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

In this paragraph before us there are a number of *character traits* that should be exemplified by us as Christians, a number of *attitudes* that should be manifest by us as Christians, and there are a number of *actions* that should be performed by us as Christians. Depending on how these many words and phrases are organized, we could say there are at least 11 directives or commands for us in these six verses.

Let us first look at **verse 12**, which reads, “***Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, (1) compassionate hearts, (2) kindness, (3) humility, (4) meekness, and patience.***” I take minor issue with the manner in which the translators of the English Standard Translation (ESV) have rendered the first few words: “***Put on then.***” They soften the connection of all of these commands with what goes before. For example, we read the opening words of 3:5, “***Put to death therefore...***” All of the commands in verse 5 are the result of, or flow from, what went before in verses 1 through 4--because of what Paul wrote in verses 1 through 4, we should therefore do everything that he commands us in verses 5 through 11. But Paul uses the same Greek word (οὖν) in verse 12 that he used in verse 5. But whereas the ESV translated it “therefore” in verse 5, they translate the same Greek word as “then” in verse 12. In doing so they obscure the connection, or the reason for doing these commands. But they should be seen as vitally connected—the reason that we do the commands in verses 12 through 17 is because of what God has done for us in our union with our Savior in His resurrection. And so for context, we can read again verses 1 through 4.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

We then can read directly with verse 12, “***Put on then (or, therefore), as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, (1) compassionate hearts, (2) kindness, (3) humility, (4) meekness, and patience,...***”

Now Paul described Christians with three very rich terms. We are (a) “God’s chosen ones”, or “elect”; we are (b) “holy”; and we are (c) “beloved.”

a. We are ***God’s chosen ones***. The NKJV reads, “the elect of God.” Our election speaks of God having chosen us in eternity past that we would be the recipients of His grace in salvation. All who are saved

from sin throughout human history, are saved because God had individually chosen them in eternity that He would save them from their sin unto eternal life through His Son. God's election of us was not because He foresaw some good in us or that He knew beforehand who of their own "free will" would choose Him. Election was the act of God whereby He chose a people out of fallen humanity to be the recipients of His saving grace. Here is the biblical doctrine of election stated:

God has chosen certain persons from fallen humanity to be recipients of His salvation, having chosen them before creation in Christ, not based on any foreseen condition or response of them, but solely due to His own good pleasure according to the purpose of His will.

For clarification we might mention several points with respect to this doctrine for

(1) Election follows the understanding of man's total depravity, or total inability to come to God. Left on his own, even after having been instructed, admonished, persuaded, and pleaded with, man would still choose to reject God's rule over him, for he is spiritually dead, both incapable and unwilling to do the things God has commanded him. Man's salvation must originate from outside of himself. It originates in God's election.

(2) There is no indication in the Scriptures of a reason that God chose the ones He chose, passing over the others, other than it was good in His sight and it was in accord with His purpose to glorify Himself in His grace.

(3) Election is unto salvation. Although certainly God's election of some means His passing over others, hence, a doctrine of reprobation, nevertheless, election is always presented positively unto salvation. Persons are not elected to damnation; persons are elected to salvation. ***The First Baptist Confession*** states the matter well:

We affirm, that as Jesus Christ never intended to give remission of sins and eternal life unto any but His sheep (John 10:15; 17:2; Eph. 5:25,26,27; Rev. 5:9); so these sheep only have their sins washed away in the blood of Christ: The vessels of wrath, as they are none of Christ's sheep, nor ever believe in Him, so they have not the blood of Christ sprinkled upon them, neither are partakers of Him: And therefore have all their sins remaining upon them, and are not saved by Christ from any of them under any consideration whatsoever; but must lie under the intolerable burden of them eternally. The truth of this appears unto us by the light of these Scriptures compared together, Hebrews 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2; Hebrews 3:14; Matthew 7:23; Ephesians 5:6; 2 Timothy 1:9; John 8:24. (First London Confession of Faith with an appendix by Benjamin Cox, 1646.)

(4) To be precise in our speaking of these matters, we should distinguish between the doctrines of election and predestination. Predestination speaks of God's design for the ones He elected. He has predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29), to become His adopted sons (Eph. 1:5), and to be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:11).

Now the apostle Paul was declaring in Colossians 3:12 that this great privilege and blessing of being numbered among the elect brings responsibility to us. ***"Put on then (or, therefore), as God's chosen ones..."***

Secondly, we read that...

b. We are ***"holy."*** ***"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy..."***

Most of the time when we speak of being holy, we are speaking of being morally pure and living righteously. But the word actually conveys the idea of being "separated from" or "set apart." We are to be separated from the fallen world in our attitudes and actions; we are to be holy. That is ***practical*** holiness. But the Scriptures also speak of believers being ***positionally*** holy before God. Everything that belongs to God is ***set apart*** by Him for Him. We read in the Old Testament that the tabernacle, the articles of furniture

in the tabernacle, the utensils used in the tabernacle, the priests themselves who ministered in the tabernacle, were all sanctified for that purpose. They were set apart for God and His worship. In the same way God sanctifies every Christian. Each and every believer is one who has been singled out by God from the human race. All who belong to Jesus Christ have been sanctified. We have been separated, set apart, sanctified in the mind of God from all others. We who are in Christ stand in a covenant relationship with God having been chosen and set apart from the world as a unique people. In the mind and purpose of God we are separate (sanctified) from the fallen world and He has glorious and vastly different designs between them and us whom He has not sanctified. We might describe this as *positional* sanctification. We are sanctified in this sense in that we have been singled out and set apart because God has designs for us that are different from all others.

This positional sanctification was a work of grace on our behalf. Our *positional sanctification occurred once for all time* for each of us at the time of salvation, or, perhaps more specifically when Christ Jesus purchased His people on His cross. We were purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ and set apart as the unique people of God. **Hebrews 10:14** reads, “*For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*” This was a work of grace that was accomplished on our behalf apart from us, apart from our work or effort. This was a work of grace that Christ performed on behalf of each of His own. Because God regards us as holy, this brings both privilege and responsibility to us. “**Put on then (or, therefore), as God’s holy ones...**”

Thirdly, Paul described true believers that...

c. We are “*beloved*” of God. Christians are the beloved ones of God. Not all people are beloved of God. Oh yes, God is loving toward all people, in that He does loving things for them and to them. But it is because His very nature is love, not because He loves them as His own. However there is a distinction between His people from all others. He loves His own people with an everlasting love. They are His beloved. God loves His people who are in Jesus Christ with an everlasting covenant love, even the same love that God the Father has for His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (Cf. John 17:26).

We might look at Paul’s words in Romans 9 in which we read of God’s covenantal love for His people.

²²What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? ²⁵As He says also in Hosea: “I will call them My people, *who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved.*” ²⁶And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there they shall be called sons of the living God.” (Rom. 9:22-26)

In verses 23 and 24 the apostle wrote of God’s elect as “vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory.” He then described those vessels of mercy as ones that He called, but then he includes these words, “*not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*” Here Paul begins to relate God’s decree to make vessels of mercy out of more than just those from the Jewish people. He cited Old Testament Scripture to show that it was indeed God’s plan and purpose. The first quotation is from **Hosea 2:23**, which is found in **Romans 9:25**, which reads, “*As indeed He says in Hosea, ‘Those who were not My people I will call “my people,” and her who was not beloved I will call “beloved.”’*” It is clear from Paul’s usage of this verse in this context, “Those who were not My people” is a reference to Gentiles who became believers in Jesus Christ. Paul declared, therefore, that God has designated believing Gentiles as “My people”, in other words, God’s covenantal people. Formerly they had not been “beloved” of God. But the time came that even Gentiles would be “beloved” of God. God loves His people with a love that all others outside of Jesus Christ will never know.

And so, in verse 12, before Paul set forth the commands of God for His people, declared of them, “Christians, you are *God’s chosen ones (elect), God’s holy ones, and God’s beloved ones; therefore, put on “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,...*”

Let us now consider these commandments by which we are to order our lives.

(1) “Put on compassionate hearts.”

Paul gives the command, “Put on.” He did not express this in a present tense form of the verb, that might be translated, “Be continually putting on” compassionate hearts--just as you put on your clothing every morning so you should clothe yourself with a compassionate heart every morning. Rather, he is saying that we should put these graces on and wear them continually. We should dress ourselves with these qualities as we live in the world in which our Lord has placed us. We should always be characterized by these traits.

“**Put on** compassionate hearts.” In verse 8 Paul had written, “But now you yourselves are to **put off** all these: anger, wrath, malice.” But we are not only to put off of us that which is wrong or negative, we are in its place put on that which is right or positive.

We must not only put off anger and wrath (as v. 8), but we must put on compassion and kindness; not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well; not only not do hurt to any, but do what good we can to all.¹⁹

The Lord tells us through the hand of Paul that we Christians should be clothed or characterized as ones with compassionate hearts. This speaks of the deep feeling of concern and desire for the well-being of others. This is not to be only toward those that have this same kind of regard for us, but this should be our general regard for all others, regardless of how they regard us or treat us. We are to have a general benevolence for all people everywhere, desiring their wellbeing before God.

Did not our Lord teach this very thing in his parable of the Good Samaritan? He told of the Samaritan, who was despised of the Jews, nevertheless, when he saw the man who had “fell among thieves, who had stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead”, the Lord said that this Samaritan had compassion when he saw him (Luke 10:33). This word, “compassion”, is the same word that we have here in Colossians 3:12. We are to put on, that is, we are to be characterized as having hearts of compassion for others.

(2) “Put on kindness.”

One might say that this second quality flows from the first. We should not only have compassionate hearts toward people, but it ought to move us to show “kindness” to them. This, too, characterized the Good Samaritan. Our Lord said of him, that he

set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ (Luke 10:34-35)

John wrote, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:17). Similarly, if a man says he has “put on” a “compassionate heart”, but is devoid of “kindness”, his claim is a sham.

(3) “Put on humility,”

One might say that this quality is joined with two that preceded it. To condescend to one in need, commonly requires an act of humility, or humbling oneself in order to help another.

¹⁹ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell), p. 763.

Humbleness of mind, in submission to those above us, and condescension to those below us. There must not only be a humbleness of demeanor, but of a mind.²⁰

Our Lord Jesus taught us, “Learn of Me for I am meek and lowly of heart” (Matthew 11:29). If he was so, should we not also put on this quality of humility?

(4) “Put on meekness,”

Meekness is when a person denies himself of what he perceives to be his right to expect or demand from another or others. A meek man is one who does not insist on what he thinks that he deserves, but he is resolved to be content with what the Lord has given him or not given him. Actuality, as fallen creatures made in the image of God, we do not possess rights. We forfeited any good that we deserved when we rebelled against our Creator. We have many responsibilities before God and toward people about us, but our rights have been forfeited by us through our sin. Oh yes, we may desire and enjoy liberty and we should value freedom and seek for it and fight for it when necessary, but we should see liberty as an opportunity to fulfil our responsibilities and to enjoy that life that God gives graciously to a people.

We read in James, “Receive with meekness the engrafted Word” (James 1:21). Meekness in this context is a submissive frame of heart to the Word--a willingness to hear the counsels and reproofs of the Word. Proud men, and guilty men, cannot endure to hear of their faults. May we lay aside our pride and stubbornness, receive the Word in meekness.

(5) “Put on patience,”

Patience is a sense of quiet serenity while waiting either for an end to difficulty or the anticipation of a delayed blessing. A patient man does not feel compelled to insist on having his way. To be patient is to endure difficult circumstances without anxiety or anger. Patience is seen when one is steadfast and unshaken through prolonged difficulty.

This quality would be in contrast to that of impatience. An impatient man is a troubled man. He is angered easily. He is discontent. He will always be complaining. Contentment will be elusive to him, for he will not be happy with what he has and he will not be happy with what he does not have. He will not be easily pleased or satisfied except with perhaps quick sensual pleasure or due to an external stimulant which is short-lived. May our Lord help us all to be patient Christians, waiting upon the Lord to do His good will in His good time.

Let us now look at **verse 13**, which is a continuation of the sentence that began in verse 12:

(6) “Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

It might appear that, rather than this being one quality that characterizes us, these phrases should be divided up and considered as individual matters, each being a separate command of God. But actually this should be seen as a single word of instruction. We may know this by recognizing that the words “bearing with one another” and “forgiving each other” are linked together.²¹ We are to be ones who forbear with one

²⁰ Ibid, p. 764.

²¹ Both Greek words “forbearing” and “forgiving” are the same verbal forms. They are both present tense, middle voice, nominative case, and masculine participles. Also, in the Greek text they are together linked with the conjunction translated “and” (ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων καὶ χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς), or in English, “bearing with one another and forgiving one another”, just as the New King James Version (NKJV) correctly translates and orders these words. It is unfortunate that the ESV divided these two words from one another by inserting between them the clause that should have followed them both, “if one has a complaint against another.”

another and are quick to forgive one another. The NKJV renders this better than the ESV, in my opinion: “*bearing with one another, and forgiving one another*, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.”

Now we must extend mercy to others, for God has promised if we do so, He will extend mercy to us. Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt. 5:7). But if we refuse to extend mercy to others, we will forfeit His mercy; He will not grant us mercy in that day. As James wrote, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:12f).

(7) “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (3:14)

Love is the grace that beautifies all of these actions that we take in our relations with people about us. It provides us with motivation. It renders our actions as attractive to observers. Love that motivates us and shapes our attitudes and actions commends before others but most importantly before our God. Love is central and essential, without which nothing we do can be acceptable to God.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

(8) “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.” (3:15a)

And so, verse 15 is not instruction for how an individual makes personal determinations of the will of God, as he looks for a sense of peace in his soul as the rule. No, it is speaking of the state of peace that Christ has secured for His church. This state of peace should be a standard which governs us. We should seek and purpose to be at peace and live in peace with one another in the church, because it was this peace, “*to which indeed you were called in one body.*”

Matthew Henry stated the matter well:

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, that is, God’s being at peace with you, and the comfortable sense of his acceptance and favour: or, a disposition to peace among yourselves, a peaceable spirit, that keeps the peace, and makes peace. This is called the *peace of God*, because it is of his working in all who are his. The *kingdom of God is righteousness and peace* (Rom. 14:17). “Let this peace *rule in your heart*—prevail and govern there, or as an umpire decide all matters of difference among you.”—*To which you are called in one body*. We are called to this peace, to peace with God as our privilege and peace with our brethren as our duty. Being united in one body, we are called to be at peace one with another, as the members of the natural body; for *we are the body of Christ, and members in particular* (1 Cor. 12:27).²²

And so, the bottom line is this: Colossians 3:15 is not advocating a subjective sense of peace to be the determiner of how you should live. It is saying that the peace that Christ has secured for His church should be a governing principle in the relationships of His people in His church.

Let us consider the next command that the apostle set forth in our text. It is a simple command.

²² Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 764.

(9) ***“And be thankful.”*** (3:15b)

Now in my opinion, our *English Standard Version* once again fails to serve us rightly. The ESV sets forth this command as a separate sentence, not entirely detached, but significantly so from what went before. They have it rendered as though Paul were simply adding one more separate command to this long list of commands. But actually the command, “And be thankful” is part of the sentence we have just considered.

Paul had just set forth the importance of the peace of God to be the ruling principle that governs our relationship with one another. A thankful man will be a cooperative man, relating well with others who have received freely the abundance of the mercy and grace of God. We may call on **Matthew Henry** again, who tied this command with what went before.

To preserve in us this peaceable disposition, we must be thankful. The work of thanksgiving to God is such a sweet and pleasant work that it will help to make us sweet and pleasant towards all men. “Instead of envying one another upon account of any particular favours and excellence, be thankful for his mercies, which are common to all of you.”²³

After having commanded the Christians at Colossae to be thankful, this theme of thanksgiving is repeated in the subsequent commands. The tenth command in this list reads:

(10) ***“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,
teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,
singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*** (Col. 1:16)

It is the word of Christ that is to inform our thinking, guide our actions, and inspire our hearts. We may assume immediately that the “word of Christ” is a reference to the Holy Scriptures. And certainly the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, should dwell in each of us richly. But Paul is directing his readers specifically to the message of Jesus Christ. Let the truth of Jesus Christ dwell in you richly.

(11) ***“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him.”***

We live for our Lord Jesus. All that we do should be done with the desire and design to please Him, to make Him known, to lead people to regard Him highly. Here we have a principle with which a Christian can broadly apply across much of his life in making ethical and spiritual decisions.

²³ Henry, vol. 6, p. 764.