

Heavenly Affection
(Colossians 3:1-17)

Keywords: resurrection, mortify, affection, heart, perfect

Colossians 3:1-17 (KJV)

- ¹ If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.
- ² Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.
- ³ For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.
- ⁴ When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.
- ⁵ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:
- ⁶ For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:
- ⁷ In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.
- ⁸ But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.
- ⁹ Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;
- ¹⁰ And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:
- ¹¹ Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all.
- ¹² Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;
- ¹³ Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye.
- ¹⁴ And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.
- ¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.
- ¹⁶ Let 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.
- ¹⁷ And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Overview:

- This passage is about putting away the old sinful self, and putting on the new, spiritual self. The language is stark – we are told to put to death the sinful nature, and to be resurrected to walk a new life with Christ.
- It has a lot of overlap with Romans 6, 7, and 8. Any Christian who has bought into the doctrine of “cheap grace” – the idea that because we are saved by grace we can behave however we want – does not comprehend this chapter, or the chapters in Romans.
- **Striving:** While we are saved by Grace, and not by our own merit, it is clear from this passage, and many others, that the Christian life is one of constant striving – striving to against sin, striving to be like Christ, striving to be perfect. We strive, not to be saved, but because we are saved, because we have come to hate sin and love good, and because it is how we show our Love to God “If you love me, keep my commandments.”
- **Journey:** The Christian life is a journey of becoming more and more like Jesus.

- **Three lists:** There are two lists of sins – the first list is mostly (not entirely) sins of the heart and the mind, of desire. The second list is mostly sin of the tongue. There is then a list of virtues, or Christ-like behaviors we should put on instead. This list of virtues includes our attitudes, but also our interactions with others.
- The passage is overwhelming and could be more than a more than 20 sermons if you wanted to cover each virtue and each vice in detail – kindness, humbleness of mind, long suffering, forgiveness... fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, etc. I’m going take a different approach, and merely define a few of the words that may be less familiar to us, and go ahead and cover the whole passage in one sermon so that we get the broad arch of the passage.

- **The big picture is this:** put away your old sinful nature, and put on the new, spiritual nature of Christ. Set your affection on Christ, not on this earth. Paul addresses not only our dealings with God, but also our dealings with our fellow man, and covers not only our actions, but also our thoughts and motivations.

Colossians 3:1-25 (KJV)

¹ If ye then be risen with Christ, **seek those things which are above**, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

² **Set your affection on things above**, not on things on the earth.

Set your affection on things above / Seek those things which are above:

A reminder for us: The calling to set our affection in heaven, to seek things above, to have a spiritual mind is one that we need to be reminded of all the time. How easy is it to get distracted by this life, to get bogged down by the details, the challenges, the allure, and the pleasure of this world? How easy is it to spend all of my time and all of my thoughts on this life, and to only occasionally turn my thoughts to heavenly things?

What does it mean to “set your affections?”

- It means your thoughts, your focus, where your mind turns naturally. Your hope, your fondness.
- Do our thoughts and our hopes often turn to heaven, the Christ, and to our life with Him?
- Or do our thoughts always dwell on earthly things?
- Similarities with Romans:

Romans 8:5-9 (KJV)

⁵ For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

⁶ For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

⁷ Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

⁸ So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Christ preaches a powerful sermon about seeking God, which I think is similar to setting our affection on things above:

Luke 12:22-31 (KJV)

²² And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

²³ The life is more than meat, and the body *is more* than raiment.

²⁴ Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

²⁵ And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

²⁶ If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

²⁷ Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

²⁸ If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more *will he clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

²⁹ And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

³⁰ For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

³¹ But rather **seek ye the kingdom of God**; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Survival: This may be a good passage for us to read every day! One of the impediments to setting our affection on things above is worry, fretting about the future, fear for our financial survival.

2 Timothy 2:4 (KJV)

⁴ No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

This is one that convicts me. I find myself quite entangled. A soldier cannot simultaneously operate a bed and breakfast, or be going to college, or be an accountant or whatever. The soldier needs to be focused on soldiering! Being a soldier will take all of his time, all of his effort, all of this thought, all of passion. There isn't anything left for other pursuits.

How do we set our affections on things above?

- Cast cares upon Jesus / seek the kingdom (Matthew)
- Seek to reduce worldly distractions and cares (2 Timothy)
- Pray without ceasing / pray continually (1 Thessalonians, others)

Resurrection broadly: Getting back to our text passage, the first verse says to be risen with God... I want to take just a quick diversion to talk about resurrection broadly before we delve into this verse.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most significant events of all time, for many reasons. A few resurrection-related topics: Christ's resurrection versus Lazarus, Christ's resurrection the first, but we are to follow when he returns the 2nd time, and the spiritual resurrection following baptism – rising to walk a new life. It is this last one that is the focus of this passage.

- Christ raised up Lazarus from the dead, but that was different. Lazarus still died again later. Christ's resurrection is fundamentally different from Lazarus, because Christ rose from the dead, to die no more.
- Because Christ rose from the dead, we know He was the Son of God. There are many other ways we can know Christ is LORD, but for certain, His resurrection from the dead is a critical proof.
- Because Christ rose from the dead, He sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.
- Christ was the firstborn to rise from the dead, and we will someday follow Him – we too will rise from the dead, be given a new heavenly, eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (KJV)

¹³ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

¹⁷ Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

What an amazing day that will be! It will be the end of this life, and the beginning of the next.

Not about the 2nd coming: In Colossians 3:2, when Paul speaks of the resurrection, he isn't referring to the second coming resurrection, but rather to the spiritual resurrection that occurs while we are still alive on this earth.

First, we must die: And, we can't really talk about being raised with Christ, without first talking about being "dead to sin" which must come first.

³ For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

⁴ When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

⁵ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

This death to the old man followed by a spiritual resurrection shows up in many other places in scripture. We'll only read a few verses, but for a much more in-depth discussion of this topic, read Romans 6, 7, and 8.

Romans 6:1-5 (KJV)

¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

² God forbid. How shall we, that are **dead** to sin, live any longer therein?

³ Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were **baptized into his death**?

⁴ Therefore we **are buried with him by baptism into death**: that **like as Christ was raised** up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (*Again, this is not the second coming of Christ and the final resurrection, but rather a spiritual raising from the dead when we come to Christ*)

⁵ For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, **we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection**:

Before resurrection comes death! We begin the process of being like Christ, and imitating aspects of His resurrection after we kill the old man of sin. This resurrection occurs, not after our physical bodies dies but when our old man of sin is buried through baptism.

To be dead to a thing is a strong expression denoting that it has no influence over us. A man that is dead is uninfluenced and unaffected by the affairs of this life. When it is said that a Christian is dead to sin, the sense is, that it has lost its influence over him; he is not subject to it; he is in regard to sin, as the man in the grave is to the cares of this life

Colossians 2:12 (KJV)

¹² Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

The resurrection of Christ is often represented as the foundation of all our hopes. As he was raised from the grave to die no more, so we are raised from the death of sin to eternal spiritual life

Ephesians 2:4-6 (KJV)

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

⁵ Even when we were **dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ**, (by grace ye are saved;)

⁶ And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:

The word quickened means to be made alive, or to be animated. Further, it says that we sit together in heavenly place with Christ, figuratively, already.

The word "Mortify" means to put to death.

Galatians 5:24 (KJV)

²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

So

- **Romans tells us to be "Dead to sin."**
- **Colossians tells us to "mortify" our members**, or our body.
- **Galatians tells us to "crucify" the flesh** with its affections and lusts.

The language is pretty harsh! Kill it. Put it to death. Crucify it. The rest of our passage in Colossians details a few specific sins we should crucify, and conversely, a few specific virtues to add to our lives.

It's a Journey:

We could misinterpret this language to think that when we are baptized, the old man of sin dies, and the new spiritual life springs into full force immediately. This is only true in a limited sense. It is true in the sense that when we come Christ, **we come into contact with the God of the universe! His infinite power is now accessible to us. The Holy Spirit lives within us. In that sense, nothing is impossible.** Christ tells us "be perfect, even as my Father in Heaven is perfect." We like to say that means, "be mature." But that doesn't make as much sense – it says to be perfect as God is perfect. As an aside, we are told to be perfect in 1 Peter 5, James 1:4, Hebrews 13:21, 2 Titus 3:17, Colossian 1:28, Philippians 3:15, 2 Corinthians 13:11 So... God is perfect in the literal, complete sense, and that's what are instructed too be.

Grace covers our sins – no one is perfect. But the Holy Spirit, the indwelling of Jesus Christ in the heart of the believer, makes perfection possible. What is clear – the goal for the Christian is perfection. "Continue in sin that grace may abound?" No way. The opposite is true – Christ-like perfection is the goal.

However, from other writings, and from our own observations, we see that Christians do not generally become perfect the moment we rise from the grave of baptism. We see Peter making a few mistakes despite his belief in Christ and many works that highlight his faith. We read Paul's internal struggle with sin in Romans 7.

When we believe on Christ, and are baptized our walk with Him begins – it is the first step in a journey we will make for many years, perhaps throughout eternity. A miracle does happen when we come to Christ. The Holy Spirit enters into our hearts, and we become changed. A supernatural change occurs. But this doesn't mean that we no longer have temptation, or bad habits, or moments of weakness, or even some sinful behavior, thoughts, or words, that we don't even realize is sinful. When we come into Christ, we begin the journey of trying to be as Christ-like as we can be. **Our goal becomes "be perfect, even as my Father in Heaven is perfect." We are not Christ-like on the first day. But we begin the process of conforming our life to be like His.**

Broadly speaking, there are two categories

- 1) Putting off the old man and
- 2) Putting on the new man.

Practically, these two things occur simultaneously and in concert. Putting off the old man involves purging sin and selfishness from our lives. This is the "stop doing the bad stuff." Putting on the new man is where we add virtues to our lives – the fruits of the spirit – love, joy, gentleness, goodness, selflessness, and patience. These two steps do not occur separately. You don't complete step one, then complete step two. We must do both concurrently. We cannot kill the old sinful man unless we replace him with the new man. We kill off greed by being generous. We kill off selfishness by becoming a servant. We kill off bitterness by developing the attitude of gratefulness. Etc. The good displaces the bad.

⁵ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

⁶ For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:

⁷ In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

Before the power of Christ came into our lives, sin ruled us. We were the subjects of sin.

The list of sins here does include some physical sins, but mostly they are sins of the mind, sins of desire, of lust, of covetousness, of a longing for the forbidden:

- Fornication: Sexual sin (which Christ tells us begins in the mind)
- Uncleanness: impurity, physical or moral
- Inordinate affection: Lust
- Evil Concupiscence: Evil Desire – a longing for that which is forbidden
- Covetousness: Greediness, avarice.
- Idolatry: Image worship, figurative or literal. Covetousness is called idolatry – the worship of, or a yearning for "things" is idolatry.

- **God cares about what we think:** We know from this passage, and from many others, that God not only cares what we do, or what we say – but he cares what we think. **He cares where our heart is.** He cares where our affection, our focus, and our attention are directed. Christ highlighted for us, on the sermon on the mount, the incredibly exacting and demanding standard of the **new Law, one focused on the heart, and the mind, and not just the actions.** But while this standard seems impossibly high, the only way that we can achieve perfection is through a change of heart. **Attempting to control our actions, but with no control of our thoughts, is doomed to fail. And the only way to change our heart is through the power of Jesus!**
- James 1 tells us that sin begins in the heart. Christ doesn't make it harder than it has to be when tells us to focus on our hearts and thoughts. Rather, He gives us the key to success.

⁸ But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

⁹ Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

This next list is a bit more external – blasphemy, filthy communication, lying – **all sins of the tongue.**

¹⁰ And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

We've heard the phrase "knowledge is power." I think that's what Paul is saying here – that we may be renewed in knowledge

¹¹ Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all.

We are the beneficiaries of the Christian gospel expanding beyond just the Jews. Salvation has been extended to all races, praise God!

Turning from the putting away sins, Paul now turns to the putting on of Christian virtues. Becoming like Jesus involves not only ceasing to sin, but also adding righteous characteristics.

¹² Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

¹³ Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye.

¹⁴ And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

These are all traits which Christ himself personified. The greatest human to ever live was in fact God himself, the creator of heaven and earth, yet he was humble. Can you imagine that?! Christ, the all powerful, all knowing, eternal being, is also humble, and meek, longsuffering.

Matthew 11:29-30 (KJV)

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 21:5 (KJV)

⁵ Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

"And above all these things, put on Charity"

- Agape love is that virtue that encompasses and bolsters every other virtue. Christ himself sums up the law "love God and love your neighbor."
- Agape love is self sacrificial, other-focused

¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

WE talked about striving in the first part of the lesson, and I truly do believe the Christian life has a lot of striving. Its likened to battle, spiritual warfare, both within and without.
But even in the battle, there is peace. Let the Peace of God rule in your heart.

¹⁶ Let 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.

This brings us back full circle – setting our affection on things above: Let the words, the wisdom of Christ, psalms and spiritual songs occupy our minds.

¹⁷ And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

This is more than an acknowledgment of reality! Of course, all that we do, in word or deed, is done through allowance or will of Jesus.

When we do all in the name of Jesus, we are doing it for HIS GLORY, with a desire to honor Him. All of actions are to be accompanied by thankfulness.

In Conclusion:

- The passage teaches us about death and life – death to sin, and life in Christ Jesus. Christians mortify, or put to death our sinful tendencies, and we rise to walk a new life with Christ.
- This is not an event, but rather a process, and the ultimate goal is to be as Christ-like as possible, even to the point of perfection.
- God cares, not only about our actions, but also our words and our thoughts. Sin springs from the heart, and the only way to mortify, or put to death, the deeds of the body is to focus on the heart.
- Christians not only put to death the old nature, but we simultaneously put on the new man – meek, humble, gentle, kind, and bound together with love.
- While this life transformation requires spiritual striving, it also generates the Peace of God in our hearts.
- Finally, brothers and sisters, set your affection, your aim, your purpose, on things above. Let the Word of Christ Dwell in you richly – think about spiritual things, sing spiritual songs in your heart, to the Lord.