

# Colossians 3

## The Truth about Christians and Spirituality

### I. Introduction

Skating in Circles

### II. Commentary

A verse-by-verse explanation of the chapter.

### III. Conclusion

Image Quest

### V. Life Application

No Categories Please

An overview of the principles and applications from the chapter.

### IV. Prayer

Tying the chapter to life with God.

### VI. Deeper Discoveries

Historical, geographical, and grammatical enrichment of the commentary.

### VII. Teaching Outline

Suggested step-by-step group study of the chapter.

### VIII. Issues for Discussion

Zeroing the chapter in on daily life.

#### Quote

“Spirituality involves the whole of human life; nothing is nonspiritual.... In fact, spirituality is to be expressed primarily in the ordinary everyday affairs and relationships of our lives.”

Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs

### In a Nutshell

*In chapter 3, Paul tells the Colossian believers: Fellow believers in Colosse, since you have been given new life by Christ, who is now exalted in heaven, it is only right that you focus your aspirations on heavenly things.*

*The new life you have because of your identification with Christ should cause you to discard the ugly remnants of your former lifestyle and display the Christlike character appropriate to your new life. The Word of Christ should take up comfortable residence in your hearts, and all your activities and relationships should be viewed with spiritual significance.*

# The Truth about Christians and Spirituality

## I. Introduction

### Skating in Circles

**D**an Jansen is an Olympic Gold Medal speed skater. You may remember him as the man whose sister, Jane, died of leukemia just before the 1988 Winter Games in Calgary. He desperately wanted to win the gold medal in honor of his sister. He failed in Calgary. In the 1992 games in Albertville, France, he again came away empty. Four years later, in Lillehammer, Norway, he won the gold in the one thousand meters and set a world record. It was an emotional moment when he skated his victory lap holding his nine-month-old daughter in his arms. Her name was Jane.

After the Olympics, Jansen was asked how he had overcome so much adversity and kept going. He reflected back to a time when he was twelve years old and had lost a meet. His father drove him home, and Dan pouted all the way. His father was silent until they arrived home. Then, as Dan was going to bed, his dad came into his room and said, "Son, life is more than skating in circles," and walked out. Jansen said that one comment changed his whole perspective on life.

Dan Jansen didn't quit skating in circles. He just had a bigger picture. His father's words gave him a higher perspective on life, and his skating took on new significance. Dan Jansen will be remembered for doing something ordinary in an extraordinary way.

Ever feel like your life is just skating in circles? The drudgery of the same old routines can make life seem like that. With an earthbound perspective, life really is little more than skating in circles. The repetitive cycles of infancy, adolescence, and old age; work, rest, and more work; marriage, children, and grandchildren; diapers and dishes; progress and regress can seem awfully ordinary and terribly tedious. God, however, does not want us simply to endure the tedium. Our ordinary activities can be infused with spiritual significance. Paul calls us to a bigger picture, a higher perspective in Colossians 3. He calls us to look as high as the heavens to gain perspective for our earthly endeavors.

## II. Commentary

### The Truth about Christians and Spirituality

**Main Idea:** *Knowing the truth about Christian living invites us to live an ordinary life in an extraordinary way.*

#### **A. The Foundation of Christian Living (vv. 1–4)**

**Supporting Idea:** *Genuine spiritual living is built on the believer's association with the risen Christ.*

**3:1.** Colossians 3:1–4 is a hinge between the primarily doctrinal section of chapters 1–2 and the primarily practical section of chapters 3–4. These verses conclude the polemic against the false teachers with further exaltation of the supremacy of Jesus, and they provide the starting point for the alternative to the false teaching with exhortation to make Christ central in all areas of life.

The false teachers at Colosse have attacked the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. They have made him less than fully God and have attempted to seduce believers into thinking that genuine spirituality is to be found in obtaining more knowledge, keeping more rules, or having more experiences. In chapter 2, Paul told us the truth about Christ (he is fully God) and Christians (we are given fullness in him). Now we learn the truth about Christians and spirituality.

Genuine spiritual experience begins with understanding our identification with Christ. Paul tells believers that they **have been raised with Christ**. The believer eagerly anticipates the future bodily resurrection mentioned in Romans 8:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:22–23, 50–55. This is not, however, what Paul has in mind here. This reference to resurrection refers to a past event: we **have been** raised. The reference is to our identification with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. Paul referred to this earlier in 2:12–13 and in Romans 6:1–10. He means that because of our identification with Jesus we have been granted new life which gives us the capacity to live a new kind of life. That new kind of life will be described in detail in the following verses.

The reality of our resurrection with Jesus should produce in us new motivations and new minds. Paul tells us that **since** we have been raised we are to **set [our] hearts on things above**. Believers are being urged literally to seek, pursue with diligence **things above**.

Paul continues his Christ-centered focus by assuring us that Christ is **above, seated at the right hand of God**. In contrast to the false teachers who demoted Jesus, Paul reminds us that Jesus is seated in the position of honor, majesty, and authority.

**3:2.** Coupled with our new motivation is a new mind. Believers are exhorted to **set [their] minds** on the same things their hearts were set on—**things above**. Paul expands his thought here by including the negative contrast—**not on earthly things**. This does not mean that believers are to live in a kind of mystical fog or neglect the affairs of earth with endless contemplation of eternity. This means that believers are not to be concerned only with the trivialities of the temporal. We are to be preoccupied with the things that get top billing in heaven. Heavenly values are to capture our imaginations, emotions, thoughts, feelings, ideas, and actions. The believer is to see everything, including **earthly things**, against the backdrop of eternity. With a new (resurrection) perspective on life, the eternal is to impact the temporal.

**3:3.** Paul now provides the basis for his preceding exhortations. The exhortations are based in a past reality, a present truth, and a future expectation. Paul begins with a glance back. He tells believers, **you died**. Believers have “died to sin” (Rom. 6:2), which means that the believer is no longer under the influence of sin’s dominating power. Paul told the Colossians one chapter earlier that they had **died with Christ to the basic principles of this world** (Col. 2:20), which means that the believer is not subject to the cosmic powers of darkness. The old order of things (slavery to sin and evil forces) is gone.

The glance back gives rise to the glimpse **now**. In the present our **life is hidden with Christ in God**. The reference to **hidden** can refer to “safety or secrecy.” In fact, both are probably in view. Our life is doubly secure since it is **with Christ in God**. This is a comforting reminder of the truth found in John 10:28–29: no one can snatch the believer out of Jesus’ hand or the Father’s hand. The believer is secure. The term **hidden** (*kekruptai*) can also mean “concealed, unseen.” This means that the believer’s life is unknown or not understood by the watching world (compare 1 John 3:1–2). The unseen realities will be revealed. Paul now turns his attention to that glorious truth.

**3:4.** Paul has taken a glance back and a glimpse at the present; his focus now shifts to a gaze ahead. The believer’s identification with Christ brings not only a past break with sin and a present security, it also means a glorious future. The believer awaits the time **when Christ ... appears**. **Appears** refers to an open display. **When Christ appears [we will] also appear with him in glory**. What has been **hidden** will be revealed. The secret will be out. As Barclay says, “Some day the verdicts of eternity will reverse the verdicts of time” (Barclay, 178).

Paul takes the idea of identification a step further. Not only is life shared by identification with Christ; Christ is life itself (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20). For the believer, life isn’t merely activity, details; life isn’t

acquisition or accomplishment. Life is Christ. He is the focus of our aspirations, the reason for our existence.

Four times in four verses, Paul mentioned Christ. Jesus is central and supreme. Paul doesn't want believers to forget that. Jesus is seated above in the position of honor. Believers are identified with him. With this solid foundation, the lives of believers can be transformed.

## B. The Transformation of Christian Living (vv. 5–17)

**Supporting Idea:** *Genuine spiritual living is behaving in accordance with the character of Christ.*

**3:5–7.** Paul's exhortation to **set our hearts and minds on things above** (v. 2) finds concrete expression in the verses which follow. With the old life gone and the new life a present and future reality, believers are to discard behaviors typical of the old life and display behaviors characteristic of new life. Paul is concerned that believers keep Christ (not angelic mediaries, not mystical experience, not legalistic ritual, not secret knowledge) at the center of their spiritual experience. Christ has given us new life, and the believer's objective is to conform his life to the image of Christ. The transformation of our lives is the genuine expression of spirituality.

Christ changed our life (3:1–4); **therefore**, it is up to us to change our lifestyle. Change starts with discarding the old. Paul employs two graphic metaphors to convey his ideas: (1) putting to death, and (2) putting off old clothes and putting on new clothes.

We are to **put to death** the practices of the past. Several images are used in the New Testament to portray Christian living. The believer is a disciplined "athlete" who strives to win the prize (1 Cor. 9:24–27; 1 Tim. 4:7–9; 2 Tim. 2:5). The believer is a faithful "soldier" who endures hardship to please his commanding officer (2 Tim. 2:3–4). The believer is a tenacious "wrestler" engaged in a fierce struggle with a crafty foe (Eph. 6:12). Here Paul tells us that the believer is to be a ruthless "executioner" who eliminates the behaviors of the past.

In verses 5–7, Paul tells us what things are to be eliminated and gives us two reasons for their elimination. In telling believers to **put to death** certain behaviors, Paul is calling for complete extermination, not careful regulation. What must go? Paul gives us an "outside in" perspective. He starts with external actions and then moves to the internal drives which cause the conduct. In his "vice lists" Paul mentions three categories of behavior: (1) perverted passions, (2) hot tempers, (3) sharp tongues.

First on the list is **sexual immorality** (*porneia*), a broad, general term for all kinds of illicit sexual behavior. God created sex to be enjoyed by one woman and one man in the confines of marriage. Any sexual activity that does not fit that definition is not to be part of a believer's life. The perverted passion list continues with mention of **impurity**. This reminds us that immorality is "unclean" or dirty and incompatible with the purity of our Savior. Believers are not to be slaves of their **lust** or **evil desires**.

With his mention of **greed** (kjb "covetousness"), Paul moves outside the sexual arena and into broader, internal areas. The Greek *pleonexia* means "a desire to have (*echein*) more (*pleon*). "Greed is the assumption that all things and passions exist for our own benefit. John Chrysostom called it a "silly weakness about silver." Greed is the internal, sinful desire to satiate ourselves with more, more, more. Paul equates **greed** with **idolatry**. To act as if everything exists for us is to place ourselves in the place of God himself. All things were created **by him and for him** (Col. 1:16), not for any of us. To make the acquisition of things or the satiation of desires our ambition is to demonstrate that our aim is too low—**earthly things** rather than **things above**.

Paul wants believers to view these vices from a **things above** or divine perspective. Why are these behaviors and attitudes to be **put to death**? First, because they are the very things which will bring the **wrath of God**, which is his future judgment. Secondly, these behaviors and attitudes are to be eliminated

because they reflect the way we **once lived**. A transformed lifestyle should be the trademark of our new life.

**3:8.** In verse 8, Paul switches metaphors. The exhortation remains the same, but the picture changes. The imagery behind the call to **rid yourselves**, in verse 8, and **take off** and **put on**, in verses 9 and 10, is that of taking off clothes. Believers are to discard their old, repulsive habits like a set of worn-out clothes. They are then to adorn themselves with the kind of behaviors that will make them well dressed and appropriately fashionable.

Not only are perverted passions to be eliminated (vv. 5–7), believers must also **rid [themselves]** of a hot temper. **Anger** (*orge*) is a settled feeling, the slow, seething, smoldering emotion that boils below the surface. **Rage** (*thumos*) is a quick, sudden outburst, the blaze of emotion which flares up and burns with intensity.

Between the sins of the hot temper (anger, rage) and the sins of the sharp tongue (slander, filthy language), Paul mentions **malice**. The Greek term (*kakian*) refers to “ill will, the vicious, deliberate intention of doing harm to others.” This ill will may work itself out through angry outbursts or sinful speech.

**Slander** (*blasphemian*) is basically defamation of character. To slander someone is to injure their reputation. This term is sometimes used in reference to God; but in this context, it probably refers to slanderous speech against another person. **Filthy language** refers to “obscene or abusive speech.”

**3:9–11.** Perverted passions, hot tempers, and sharp tongues are to be removed as part of the life-transformation process. These things, along with **[lying] to each other**, are not appropriate behavior for our new life in Christ. The remnants of the former lifestyle are to be discarded **since [we] have taken off [our] old self with its practices**. What is the **old self** (literally “old man”) and the **new self** (literally “the new”)? The “old man” refers to more than an individual condition (“sinful nature”) and also has a corporate aspect. The corporate aspect of “the new” (man) is unmistakably seen in verse 11. What has been **put off** and what has been **put on**? Our former associations, the old humanity has been **put off**, and we now have a new association, the new community. As members of the new community, we are to conduct ourselves in ways which will enhance harmony in the community. Notice how the sins mentioned in the previous verses disrupt community and damage human relationships.

As individuals, and as believing communities, our objective is to be a part of the transformation process of **being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator** (Christ). Within the new community all barriers are abolished. Distinctions which normally divide people—racial (**Greek or Jew**); religious (**circumcised or uncircumcised**); cultural (**barbarian or Scythian**); social (**slave or free**)—no longer have significance. The reason human categories no longer matter is that **Christ is all**, which means Christ is central and supreme. Our relationship with him is really all that matters. Unity within the community is based on the fact that **Christ is in all**. He indwells **all** believers and permeates all our relationships. This does not mean that people cease to be Jew or Greek, slave or free, etc. It does mean that within the new community those distinctions don’t matter. The false teachers at Colosse were fond of dividing people into categories—elite versus ordinary, spiritual versus not so spiritual. The truth is, all believers are equal; all believers are to discard any and all behaviors and attitudes which are inappropriate for our new life.

**3:12–14.** Verses 12–17 contain the virtues that stand in contrast to the vices mentioned in the preceding verses. With the old discarded, the character of Christ is to be displayed in its place. The transformation process includes more than don’ts. There are some dos as well.

**Since** the old humanity has been **put off** and the new community has been **put on**, believers are **therefore** to **clothe** themselves with the kind of behavioral apparel that fits their new life. The famous story “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen has many possible applications for believers. One of them would be the simple lesson that we are not to be foolish like the emperor and take off our old clothes and put nothing back on. Before listing the appropriate attire, Paul reminds believers that they are **God’s**

**chosen people, holy and dearly loved.** These are exalted titles formerly used as designations for the nation of Israel (Deut. 4:37; 7:7–8) but now applied to the new community in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

William Barclay has an insightful comment on the nature of the virtues listed now:

“It is most significant to note that every one of the virtues and graces listed has to do with personal relationships between man and man. There is no mention of virtues like efficiency, cleverness, even diligence and industry—not that these things are not important. But the great basic Christian virtues are the virtues which govern and set the tone of human relationships. Christianity is community” (Barclay, 188).

The first piece in the believer’s fashionable wardrobe is **compassion**, which refers to “heartfelt sympathy for those suffering or in need.” The next item in the believer’s wardrobe is **kindness**, the friendly and helpful spirit which meets needs through good deeds. This is the concrete action of compassion. If the believer is to be fully dressed, other Christlike characteristics are to be worn as well. The believer is to be clothed with **humility**, which is a proper estimation of oneself (Rom. 12:3). **Humility** is not a self-debasing attitude (like the “false humility” of 2:18 and 2:23) but an attitude that is free from pride and self assertion. The believer is to be clothed with **gentleness**, sometimes translated “meekness.” **Gentleness** has been described as “power under control”; the picture of a powerful horse under the control of its master is a helpful image. The attitude behind **gentleness** is an attitude of refusing to demand one’s rights. The believer is to be clothed with **patience** which is the capacity to bear injustice or injury without revenge or retaliation.

The idea of putting up with the abuses and offenses of others continues with Paul’s call to **bear with each other**. Believers are to go beyond quiet resignation positively to **forgive whatever grievances [they] may have against one another**. Believers have been fully forgiven by Christ (2:13–14), and the forgiven are obligated to become forgivers. The standard for this forgiveness is Christ himself.

Paul saves the most important item of clothing for last. Without love, all the other virtues may amount to mere moralism and little else (a thought found also in 1 Cor. 13:1–3). When love is present, there is harmony and unity in the community. It is not clear whether **love** binds the virtues together, completing a lovely garment of Christlike character, or whether **love** binds the members of the community together in mature oneness. Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional. Both ideas make good sense.

**3:15.** To maintain **perfect unity** (v. 14) believers are to **let the peace of Christ rule in [their] hearts**. **Rule** literally means “to act as umpire.” The Colossians were told earlier not to allow false teachers to “act as umpire against” them (2:18). However, when disputes arise, the believer is to let the **peace of Christ** make the call. Whatever will lead to peace must be the deciding factor so that peace will be preserved.

**3:16.** If believers are to be transformed into the character of Christ, the **word of Christ** should find a home in our hearts. It should not come and go, show up occasionally, or be something we visit like a vacation spot. As Eugene Peterson translates this phrase, “Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives” (Peterson, 504).

The parallel between Colossians 3:16–4:1 and Ephesians 5:18–6:9 must not be missed. The structure and terminology are almost identical. The Ephesians passage exhorts believers to be filled with the Spirit, whereas the Colossians passage exhorts believers to let the Word of Christ dwell in them. The two concepts must be synonymous. The external results are the same. The internal effect is the same. The believer is to be “under the influence” of the **word of Christ** and the indwelling Holy Spirit. The reason for the Colossians’ emphasis on Christ is expected in a book so devoted to his centrality and supremacy. **Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in hearts to God** (v. 16). When the **word of Christ** finds a comfortable home in individual believers and in the new community, there will be teaching (positive instruction), admonishing **one another** (negative correction), and thankful worship, evidenced by singing and **gratitude**.

**3:17.** The life transformation process is to include any and all areas and activities of life. In all places, in all ways, the believer is to honor the **name of the Lord Jesus**. Genuine spirituality is not found by following false teaching which leads away from Christ. Genuine spirituality is found in having our lives transformed into the character of Christ.

### C. The Relationships of Christian Living (vv. 18–4:1)

**Supporting Idea:** *Genuine spiritual living is bringing relationships into compliance with the example of Christ.*

**3:18.** The arena of relationships is our best testing ground for spiritual authenticity. Thinking above has practical results here below. True spirituality deals with “real life.” The false teachers promoted ideas which made spirituality the possession of the special few who tapped into “higher” knowledge, engaged in mystical experiences, or conformed to a code of rules. Paul points believers in another direction. Spirituality is nothing grand, romantic, or impossible. It is submitting to the supremacy of Christ which will transform our character and revolutionize our relationships.

When Paul penned Colossians, the “household” consisted of three sets of relationships: (1) husband and wife, (2) parent and child, (3) master and slave. Paul addresses each relationship and gives instructions for each party. **Wives** are to **submit to [their] husbands**. **Submit** is a call to recognize and respond to the God-ordained authority of the husband. Submission does not diminish the equality or destroy the dignity of the wife. Christ himself is the model for equality with God and submission to the one with whom he is equal (1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28; Phil. 2). To function properly, any institution must have clear lines of authority and submission. The family is no different. The wife’s submission is **fitting in the Lord**. **Fitting** means “proper or appropriate.” Submission is God’s desire and design for Christian wives, so it is to be obeyed by those who belong to the Lord.

**3:19.** The husband, though given a role of authority, is not to treat his wife as a “subject.” The husband’s call is to sacrificial **love**. Love is meeting the needs of others regardless of the cost to self. Again, the model for this is Christ himself. The parallel passage in Ephesians 5:22–33 makes this clear. The husband is to love his wife “just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). When husbands lead with love, the submission of the wife will more naturally follow. In contrast to the **love** to which he calls husbands, Paul commands that the Christian husband **not be harsh** with his wife. He is not to use his authority to be overbearing, critical, or bitter.

**3:20.** **Children** are charged to **obey [their] parents**. Obedience is the simple process of hearing, understanding, and responding. Once more, Christ provides the example (see John 6:38; 15:10). God is the one who commanded obedience to parents (Exod. 20:12), so naturally obedience **pleases the Lord**.

**3:21.** Just as the authority of the husband is not to lead to harshness with the wife, the authority of **fathers** is not to lead to the kind of behavior that will **embitter [their] children**. **Embitter** means “to provoke or irritate.” The Christian father is not to overcorrect or harass his children, **or they will become discouraged**, which refers to “a listless, sullen resignation—a broken spirit.” To be discouraged as a child means to think things like, *I’ll never get it right, or, All he does is criticize, or, He’ll never love me*. John Newton is reported to have said, “I know that my father loved me—but he did not seem to wish me to see it.” Christian fathers should be sure their children are as sure of their love as they are of their authority.

**3:22–25.** The section on servants and masters is somewhat expanded in comparison to the “family” section. This may be due to the unique situation in the church at Colosse, where the runaway slave, Onesimus, was returning to his master, Philemon (Col. 4:9; Phlm.). The category of slave-master would be equivalent to our modern employee-employers. The arena is the workplace.

**Slaves** are to **obey their earthly masters**. Paul reminds those under authority that they have a master in heaven who observes their internal attitude and external performance (vv. 24–25). Christian employees are to render sincere service. The employee is not to work only when the boss is looking. The employee

is to recognize that in the final analysis he is **working for the Lord, not for men** and so do his best. Such work will be rewarded. Remember, God does not play favorites. He “rewards” wrong motives and work as well as good.

**4:1.** All Scripture is God breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). Chapter divisions are another story. The separation of Colossians 4:1 from the preceding context is obviously one case where the line was drawn too early. The admonition to **masters** clearly belongs with the section dealing with relationships. **Masters** (those in authority), like husbands and fathers, are not to abuse their authority. They are to treat their workers fairly with justice. Why? They, too, **have a Master in heaven**.

Paul began chapter 3 by urging believers to “look above.” He has closed the chapter in the same way. Wives are to “look above” to Christ as their example of submission; husbands are to “look above” to Christ as their example of love; children are to “look above” to Christ as their example of obedience; slaves are to “look above” to Christ as their impartial rewarder; masters are to “look above” to Christ as their heavenly judge.

Spirituality is a matter of understanding our identification with Christ, having our lifestyle transformed, and honoring Christ in our relationships. Ordinary sounding stuff, but with Christ at the center, it becomes extraordinary indeed.

**Main Idea Review:** *Knowing the truth about Christian living invites us to live an ordinary life in an extraordinary way.*

### III. Conclusion

#### Image Quest

Sir Robert Ballard had a quest. His quest was the *Titanic*. He wrote, “My lifelong dream was to find this great ship, and during the past thirteen years the quest for her had dominated my life.” The false teachers were on a quest. Their quest was for “something more.” For them, Jesus was not supreme and hardly sufficient to provide the full experience of spirituality. So they set off on a quest for something more.

What is a “quest”? It’s a pursuit, a search, an adventurous journey. Robert Ballard would understand that and so would the false teachers at Colosse. What about you? What’s your quest? Or better yet, what is God’s quest? God does have a quest. His is an “image quest”—the adventurous journey of seeing us conformed to his Son’s image. We read about that in Romans 8:29: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” And see it in Colossians 3:10 where we are **being renewed in knowledge in the image of [our] Creator [Christ]**. Character qualities in his children—that is God’s quest (Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *The Finishing Touch: Becoming God’s Masterpiece*, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994, 464–6).

God’s quest is to see the character of his Son in his children. Our quest should be the same.

The truth about Christians and spirituality is that Christians have been given new life, and spirituality is living that new life in everyday activities.

#### Principles

- Jesus Christ has the position of highest honor and authority.
- All believers are identified with Christ and given new life.
- A heavenly perspective impacts our earthly activities.
- Jesus Christ indwells all believers.
- Christ is our model of love and obedience in our relationships with others.

- The categories of “spiritual” and “nonspiritual” are false. All of life is spiritual.
- Spirituality is obedience in the ordinary.

### Applications

- Do some personal inventory. Based on what you think about most and how you spend your money and time, honestly evaluate whether you have set your heart and mind on things above.
- Which area needs your immediate attention: perverted passion, hot temper, sharp tongue? Begin working on it today. Don’t make excuses. Ask for assistance from a trusted friend.
- We all live in a web of relationships. Give regular time each week to pray for each of your relationships.
  - Monday—with your spouse
  - Tuesday—with your children
  - Wednesday—with your parents
  - Thursday—with your boss
  - Friday—with your workers or coworkers

## IV. Life Application

### No Categories Please

In her devotional book *Diamonds in the Dust*, Joni Eareckson Tada clarifies the nature of spirituality:

Have you noticed how some activities seem more spiritual, more sacred than others? Singing hymns, teaching church school, or preparing a care basket for a sick friend—all of these seem exalted. But what about when you drive to the gas station for a fill-up? Or when you count up coupons for the clerk at the supermarket? Or while you’re waiting for the salesperson to wrap what you’ve bought?

We do it all the time—separate “religious” activities into one group and “regular” into another. But Leviticus 19 addresses that problem. In one verse Moses says, “Do not steal,” yet the verse next to it states, “Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen” (Leviticus 19:10). Again he says in one verse, “Love your neighbor as yourself” and the verse following, “Do not mate different kinds of animals” (Leviticus 19:18–19).

Why didn’t Moses group together all the spiritual activities and leave those nonessential things for another chapter? It’s no mistake that God spoke these commands in one breath, mingling “spiritual” and “nonspiritual.” In God’s eyes, all of life’s activities are sacred. (*Diamonds in the Dust*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

Everyday affairs are the arena of spirituality. Spirituality is not esoteric knowledge, nor exciting experience, nor extreme legalism. Spirituality is the development of character. Spirituality is integrity in relationships. Spirituality is obedience in the ordinary. It’s wives respecting their husbands, husbands loving their wives; kids honoring their parents, parents loving their kids; workers doing good work, bosses being fair. All of life is spiritual with no categories. As Joni says, “Remember that, the next time you wash dishes.”

Without a heavenly perspective ordinary activities can seem an awful lot like skating in circles. By looking above and obeying below, ordinary activities take on grand significance. Who knows? We may even win the gold. After all, God promised to reward us in “whatever we do.”

## V. Prayer

Reigning Christ, renew us daily so that our relationship with you will have an impact on every relationship we have. Amen.

## VI. Deeper Discoveries

### A. Since, then, you have been raised with Christ (v. 1)

The Greek language provides a number of options for framing an “if ... then” sentence. The manner in which a sentence is framed makes it either a first-class condition, a second-class condition, or a third-class condition. This Greek sentence is a first-class condition. The first-class condition is a sentence in which the first part of the sentence—the condition—is assumed to be true for the sake of argument. (See Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, 679–712 for an excellent discussion of conditional sentences.) The context of the sentence determines whether the statement is actually true. Clearly, in this context the condition is actually true. Paul makes that point clear (v. 3) by stating the fact: they died with Christ. The Colossian believers have been raised with Christ; therefore, it is natural to assume that they will be setting their hearts on things above.

### B. Set your hearts (v. 1)

**Set your hearts** (*zeteite*) literally means “seek” and has a broad range of meanings: trying to find the location of something or someone (Mark 1:37), trying to find information by careful investigation (John 7:52), desiring something (Rom. 9:6), or attempting to obtain something (Mark 8:11). This context certainly points to an attempt to obtain the virtues which Paul will set forth as belonging to the things above. The emphasis of this entire chapter is on the changed lifestyle that should grow out of identification with Christ.

The way we live is the ultimate test of maturity. This is not a once-for-all effort that transforms a believer into a saint in a day. The present imperative used here emphasizes the continual nature of the activity. Constant attention must be paid to focus on the changed life which Paul sets forth.

### C. Things above, earthly things (vv. 1–2)

“Things above” (*ano*) as opposed to “earthly things” (*ges*) are not spatial references asking us to focus on the events in heaven rather than events on earth. Rather, “things above” are to be seen as ethical qualities set forth in the following lists. **The things above** are the virtues which the believer is to put on (3:12–4:1). The things of earth have an ethical character as well; the earth is presented as the theater of sin where the vices of life are played out.

### D. Christ is seated at the right hand of God (v. 1)

To be seated at a person’s right hand was to occupy a place of special honor. This is likely a quote of Psalm 110:1 and shows again the supremacy of Christ, the only one qualified to sit beside the divine throne in heaven (compare Eph. 1:20).

### E. Put to death (v. 5)

Paul changes from present to aorist imperatives at this point. Earlier the believer is encouraged with present imperatives continually to keep seeking and thinking about a heavenly perspective. The aorist imperative here emphasizes the “action as a whole, without focusing on duration, repetition, etc.” (Wallace, 485). The force of this word is strong. Louw and Nida indicate that when the word is used figuratively it means: “to cease completely from activity, with the implication of extreme measures taken to guarantee cessation—‘to stop completely, to cease completely’ ” (Louw and Nida, New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, I, 661). The niv’s **put to death** captures the strength of Paul’s expression more clearly than the nasb’s “consider.”

## **F. Whatever belongs to your earthly nature (v. 5)**

This very unusual phrase can be translated literally: “the members which are upon the earth.” Bodily members can be presented to sin as instruments of wickedness, or they can be presented to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13, 19). The members themselves are not the problem. The problem lies in the use of the members. To complicate matters, the members have a bent toward sin; they are oriented toward the earth, rather than toward things above (vv. 1–2). The “law of sin” is in the “members of my body” (Rom. 7:23). This earthly orientation must be put to death.

## **G. Vice lists (v. 5)**

Vice lists and virtue lists are common in Pauline literature (Rom. 1:29–32; 1 Cor. 5:9–11; 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–23; Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). These lists were common in nonbiblical literature as well. Paul’s lists seem to have been adapted for each individual situation.

## **H. Image (v. 10)**

By repeating a word he used earlier, Paul ties his argument together in an interesting fashion: While Christ is the image (*eikon*) of God (1:15), the believer is being renewed to the image (*eikon*) of God. Man was created in the image of God and thus bears certain similarities to God (Gen. 1:27): man is rational, moral, volitional, emotional, and relational, just as God is. In the fall the image of God was marred but not lost (Gen. 3:1–24). In identification with Christ, the believer is in the process of becoming more and more like Christ and thus is having the image renewed (compare Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21). Here Paul is setting forth the logical extension of 2:9. Christ is the image of God in all its fullness. We have been given fullness in Christ. Therefore, we are being renewed into the image of God. That should impact the way we live.

## **I. Chosen people (v. 12)**

(See “Deeper Discoveries” on Ephesians 1:4.)

## **J. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly (vv. 16–17)**

Scripture closely connects the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the function of the Word of God, and the goal of becoming like Christ as can be seen in a comparison of four passages:

1. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (vv. 6–17).
2. “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:18–20). These two passages show that being “filled with the Spirit” and letting “the word of Christ dwell in you richly” result in the same lifestyle change. The person will be teaching others, singing praise to God, and offering thanks. The verses following both of these passages show that an impact will be seen in all the believer’s relationships. What then is the connection between being filled with the Spirit and letting the word of Christ dwell richly within us?
3. “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:16).
4. “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Rom. 13:14).

Galatians shows us the key to controlling the sinful nature is living by the Spirit. Romans makes the key clothing yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ. What is the connection between the ministry of the Spirit and Christlikeness in the life of a believer? The answer seems to come in understanding the ministry of the Spirit.

In *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, J. I. Packer describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit as a “Floodlight for Fools.” The Spirit is always pointing us toward Christ and showing us what he is like (John 15:26). In similar fashion Scripture contains the record of what Christ was like here on earth. When Scripture and Spirit come together, the picture becomes clear. The Holy Spirit is always pointing us to Christ. Therefore, if we are filled with the Spirit, we will be conformed to the image of Christ (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984, 65–6).

## VII. Teaching Outline

### A. Introduction

1. Lead story: Skating in Circles
2. Context: In the third chapter of Colossians, Paul makes the nature of true spiritual experience very clear. Having warned the Colossian believers against enticing, but empty, portrayals of spirituality—secret knowledge, hard-line legalism, exciting experiences, rigid self-denial—Paul gives a straightforward description of true spirituality. True spirituality is a changed life and Christlike relationships in every arena of life.
3. Transition: As we look at this chapter, we see the need to allow the Word of Christ to take up comfortable residence in our lives, so that we may develop in Christlike character and so our relationships with others please God. Spirituality is living an ordinary life in an extraordinary way. That is only possible through the power of the new life we have in Christ.

### B. Commentary

1. The Foundation of Christian Living (vv. 1–4)
2. The Transformation of Christian Living (vv. 5–17)
  - a. Discard the remnants of your former life (vv. 5–11)
  - b. Display the character of your new life (vv. 12–17)
3. The Relationships of Christian Living (vv. 18–4:1)
  - a. Christian living at home (vv. 18–21)
  - b. Christian living at work (vv. 22–4:1)

### C. Conclusion: No Categories Please

## VIII. Issues for Discussion

1. Where is your mind set? Why?
2. What is the greatest hope you have in life?
3. What habits and practices do you need to put to death?

4. What characteristics do you need to clothe yourself with? What Christian clothing are you already wearing?

5. Describe the relationships within a Christian household? Why are these superior to the relationships the world advocates?

Holman New Testament Commentary Anders, M. (1999). [\*Galatians-Colossians\*](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 334–340). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.