

COLOSSIANS
CHAPTER THREE

1. Upon what do the following instructions depend?

“If then you were raised with Christ” (Colossians 3:1) refers to the resurrection which follows burial in baptism (Colossians 2:12). None of what comes next is relevant if a person has not first died to sin and arisen to new life.

2. Why should a Christian seek things above?

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is” (Colossians 3:1). Because one was raised with Christ, it necessarily follows that he seek out the things pertaining to Christ. If He is situated above, then that is where the disciple’s focus ought to be.

3. What is Christ doing now?

“Christ is sitting at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1). He is seated at God’s right hand. That location is a position of power and authority (Ephesians 1:20-23; 1st Peter 3:22) and that posture is one implying He finished what He set out to do (Hebrews 10:11-14).

4. Whose responsibility is one’s state of mind?

“Set your mind on things above” (Colossians 3:2) is an imperative directed to individuals. Mindset is a personal duty. Outside forces have influence on mindset, but each person must choose how to think.

5. What does a Christian not need to be mentally focused on?

“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). The world is passing away (1st John 2:15-17; Matthew 6:19-20).

6. Why should a Christian’s mindset be so?

“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). A Christian’s life is not his own (Galatians 2:20, but Christ’s (1st Corinthians 6:19-20).

7. What will happen to us at Christ’s next appearance?

“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). The hereafter affords us glorious bodies through transformation (Philippians 3:20-21). In heaven, we will shine like the sun (Matthew 13:41-43)!

8. What needs to happen to “your members which are on the earth?”

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth” (Colossians 3:5). Jesus has asserted that we should be willing to amputate body parts if we keep using them to sin (Matthew 5:7-30; 18:1-9). How much more should we be willing to sever thoughts and behaviors that interrupt godliness?

9. Which earthly members are enumerated by Paul?

“Your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

- 1) *“Fornication”*: Illicit sexual intercourse, including adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and heterosexual copulation without the benefit of marriage (1st Corinthians 6:12-7:5; 1st Thessalonians 4:3-8).
- 2) *“Uncleanness”*: In a physical sense, just dirtiness (Matthew 23:27), but applied to behavior with implications concerning morality (1st Thessalonians 2:3), almost always mentioned morally in the context of sexual purity (2nd Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 4:19; 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1st Thessalonians 4:7). It is an intentionally generic word meant to cover a broad range of immorality, especially conduct that would suggest sexuality without being specific. Thus, when an unmarried couple wonders if they’ve “gone too far,” the answer is almost certainly affirmative.
- 3) *“Passion”*: From the Greek *pathos*, it refers to “affection,” which may not seem sinful, but its only application in the New Testament is to sexual sin (1st Thessalonians 4:3-5), including homosexuality (Romans 1:26-27).
- 4) *“Evil desire”*: Not all desire is wrong (Luke 22:15; Philippians 1:23), but desire that is evil certainly is (Titus 2:11-12; 1st John 2:15-17).
- 5) *“Covetousness”* is the sinful desire to be constantly gaining in material wealth (Luke 12:13-34). It implies discontentment (Hebrews 13:5) based on ingratitude (2nd Timothy 3:1-2). In this one place in Scripture, covetousness is equated to *“idolatry,”* which ought to be run away from (1st Corinthians 10:14), because it sets an object as greater than the Lord.

“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:8-9).

- 1) *“Anger”*: It is not that anger is always wrong – of course, it isn’t (Mark 3:5), but it should be arrived at slowly and deliberately (James 1:19-20), and must not lead to sin (Ephesians 4:26). This anger generally belongs to God (Romans 12:9) and should not characterize any person.
- 2) *“Wrath”*: The Greek word literally means “hard breathing” and thus “fierceness.” It refers to passionate anger that has not been well thought out (Acts 19:28).
- 3) *“Malice”*: This is, very simply, badness. It is the opposite of innocence (1st Corinthians 14:40).
- 4) *“Blasphemy”*: Injurious speaking. The word often applies to vilification against God (Matthew 27:39-40; Luke 22:64-65; Revelation 13:6), but can certainly be used of vilifying men (Romans 3:8; Titus 3:2). It is not right under any circumstances inasmuch as Michael refused to blaspheme even Satan (Jude 9).
- 5) *“Filthy language”*: Exactly what it sounds like – obscenity, profanity, foul language. The exact words that qualify will vary across cultures and generations, so they are not specified, but we know what they are (Ephesians 4:29).
- 6) *“Lie”*: Speaking falsehood. To lie is to say something other than what is true (James 3:14; 1st John 1:6). It is to speak from the devil’s resources (John 8:44). Liars go to hell (Revelation 21:8).

10. Why should we “put to death” our earthly members?

“Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them” (Colossians 3:6-7).

First, earthly members must perish because God’s wrath will come down on sinners (John 3:36; Romans 1:18; 2:8-9). The fear of hell is a proper motive for repentance.

Second, earthly members must perish because it is out of character for the new man to keep the old man’s ways alive and active (1st Peter 4:1-3).

Take notice that it is possible to live in sin. It is a poor defense against the truth of Jesus’ doctrine on divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) to say that the adultery committed is a one-and-done deed and to suggest adultery cannot be lived in, thus permitting the adulterers to continue in their sinful marriage. Unrighteous behavior can, and most often is, lived in.

11. What is the primary characteristic of *“the new man?”*

“The new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:10).

Ongoing renewal (Romans 12:2; 2nd Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 4:23) according to Christ’s image (Romans 8:29; 2nd Corinthians 3:18) is the chief quality of a Christian.

12. Why are there no ethnic nor social distinctions in Christ?

“There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” (Colossians 3:11). The Lord is everything. He fills in all the gaps (Galatians 3:26-28). Cultural and racial differences are meaningless in His presence, so that, in Him there is unity (1st Corinthians 12:13).

13. In contrast to what has been “put off,” what do God’s elect “put on?”

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 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. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:12-14).

- 1) *“Tender mercies”* is more accurately translated *“bowels of mercies”* (KJV). The word is once in the New Testament used in the literal sense (Acts 1:18), but in all other cases is figurative (2nd Corinthians 7:15; 1st John 3:17), indicating whatever quality being described comes from the guts. Mercy is that quality which might spare another punishment (Hebrews 10:28).
- 2) *“Kindness”*: Moral goodness, integrity, benignity. It is this quality on God’s part that makes man’s salvation possible (Romans 11:22; Titus 3:4).
- 3) *“Humility”*: Whereas Paul has previously criticized false humility in this epistle (2:18, 23), here he encourages the genuine article. It is a quality of character that pursues the interest of others above one’s own (Philippians 2:3-4). It is in contrast to self-exaltation
- 4) *“Meekness”*: Manuscripts vary on this word, with different Greek words, both meaning meekness, being supplied. The term used in the manuscript upon which the King James is based is not one used elsewhere. The one employed by the manuscript behind the ESV and NASB use a word that does appear in other verses. It is the opposite of sternness or harshness, but only coming from

someone capable of those qualities (1st Corinthians 4:21). It is the trait needed in restoring wayward souls to prevent one's own stumbling (Galatians 6:1).

- 5) *"Longsuffering"*: Forbearance, endurance. It means putting up with ill treatment, not out of acceptance or approval, but in order to eventually forgive, as God has done (1st Timothy 1:12-16). We look to Job and the prophets for our human examples (James 5:10-11).
- 6) *"Bearing with one another"*: To forbear is literally to "put up with" (Strong), "to bear with, endure" (Vine). It refers to endurance under persecution (1st Corinthians 4:12; 2nd Thessalonians 1:4), patience to receive the word (2nd Timothy 4:3; Hebrews 13:22), and tolerance of fellow Christians (Ephesians 4:2) while awaiting another's repentance.
- 7) *"Forgiving one another"*: By definition, it is "to grant as a favor" (Strong), and is thus used to mean giving in many instances (Romans 8:32; 1st Corinthians 2:12). It also applies, as it does here, to the granting of pardon for wrongdoing (Luke 7:41-43; 1st Corinthians 2:7; Colossians 2:13).

Forgiveness is to be done *"even as Christ forgave you"* (cf. Ephesians 4:32), which requires us to be eager to forgive (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35).

Nevertheless, His grace is not irresistible, nor his election unconditional. The Lord forgives those who meet His conditions of pardon – namely faith, confession, repentance, and baptism. Similarly, Christians forgive when certain conditions are fulfilled – namely repentance (Luke 17:3-4). To forgive immediately and unconditionally is to extend false hope to the erring, implying they have nothing further to do to make right.

We cannot rightly set the terms of forgiveness as lower than what God requires because forgiveness belongs to Him (Daniel 9:9).

8) “Love”: Love is best described by Paul to the Corinthians (1st Corinthians 13:1-8) when it is described as “*more excellent*” than spiritual gifts (12:31) because it outlasts them (13:8).

14. Why is love “*above all these?*”

“*Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection*” (Colossians 3:14). It is the glue that holds everything else together, being the fulfillment of every law (Romans 13:8-10), which is why it comprises the first and second greatest commandments (Matthew 22:36-40). It is described in this “*above all*” way elsewhere because it “*covers a multitude of sins*” (1st Peter 4:8), which fits its placement in Colossians 3 relative to longsuffering, forbearance, and forgiveness.

15. Where should the peace of God prevail?

“*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts*” (Colossians 3:15). Peace must rule over the heart first since the issues of life spring from it (Proverbs 4:23). The Lord’s peace is in the heart because it is unlike the peace of others (John 14:27); it does not depend on outside conditions.

16. Where are the elect called to?

“*You were called in one body*” (Colossians 3:15). The oneness of the body is as basic as the oneness of the Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God (Ephesians 4:4-6) and this body is Christ’s church over which He is head (Colossians 1:18, 24). We have been called to peace in a united body. Our relations with brethren matter!

17. Before moving on from the list of put-ons, what else is commanded?

“Be thankful” (Colossians 3:15). Paul has already provided the Colossians with prompts for gratitude (1:3-6, 12; 2:6-7), mostly focusing on their saving faith and hope.

18. Comparing Colossians 3:16-17 with Ephesians 5:18-20, what is the equivalent of *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom?”*

<i>“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16_a).</i>	<i>“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).</i>
<i>“Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16_b).</i>	<i>“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).</i>
<i>And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).</i>	<i>“Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20).</i>

By reviewing these texts side by side, we can see that this is the same as being filled with the Spirit.

19. What kind of music is authorized in New Testament worship?

“Singing,” specifically “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16). Although musical instruments were readily available (Matthew 11:17; 1st Corinthians 13:1; 14:7-8), there is no New Testament example of their use in worship. Singing, though, is both exemplified (Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25) and commanded (Romans 15:9; 1st Corinthians 14:15; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13).

20. To whom should singing be directed?

“Teaching and admonishing one another” and “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16). Songs can be addressed to our fellow worshipers in order to teach them, which demands lyrical scrutiny (James 3:1), and they can be addressed to the Lord, expressing grace – meaning gratitude (Luke 17:9; 1st Corinthians 15:57; 2nd Corinthians 8:16; 9:15).

21. Explain what is meant by doing all in Jesus’ *“name.”*

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17). As both this verse and its parallel (Ephesians 5:20) indicate, this includes praying in the name of Jesus, but that is only part of it. Paul here commands all action to be undertaken in this name, which means by His authority. This includes baptizing (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5), preaching (Acts 9:27, 29), withdrawing from the erring (1st Corinthians 5:4; 2nd Thessalonians 3:6), and ministering to the sick (James 5:14). Simply pronouncing His name over a certain deed is meaningless (Acts 19:13-16). His name deserves reverence (Philippians 2:9-10).

22. How should prayer be addressed?

“Giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17). Prayer should be addressed to God, in Jesus’ name (Romans 7:25). Jesus, specifically, does not want to be prayed to (John 16:23). Any examples that appear to contradict this should be examined carefully to observe that those who spoke directly to Jesus were people to whom Jesus appeared (Acts 7:56, 59).

The biblical method of praying to the Father, through Christ or in Christ's name, along with praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20; Romans 8:26) involves the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In contrast, praying to anyone but the Father excludes the rest of the divine nature.

23. What is the duty of wives?

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18). This subject is repeatedly addressed in the New Testament (Titus 2:5; 1st Peter 3:1), which is consistent with the general theme of female subjection (1st Corinthians 11:3; 14:34-35; 1st Timothy 2:11-14), as was established at the beginning (Genesis 3:16). In this passage, as in its parallel (Ephesians 5:22), the emphasis is the submission owed by the woman to her *"own husband"*. Generally, women should not be pursuing leadership, but this is especially out of place in the home.

That this is *"fitting in the Lord"* means that it is not a mere social construct, only relevant in certain cultures. Rather, wherever the Lord holds authority, women need to submit to their husbands.

24. What is the duty of husbands?

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Colossians 3:19). Paul's admonition to the Colossians in this regard is quite succinct compared to the parallel instruction provided to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:25-29), which he was counting on them to read. This love is to be selfless and sacrificial.

While women are required to submit to men, men should not turn that into an excuse to be domineering or unkind. He must not be *"bitter"*, which is simply the

negative way of expressing the prior positive commandment to “love”. Husbands must practice “*understanding*” in marriage (1st Peter 3:7).

25. What is the duty of children?

“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord” (Colossians 3:20). Children require structure and guidance, which is why God gave them mothers and fathers (Hebrews 12:9-11). This verse presents the command as absolute, whereas the parallel (Ephesians 6:1) is clear that “*in all things*” should be understood as all things “*in the Lord*”.

Since the Lord is pleased by children obeying parents, disobedience would be disastrous.

26. What is the duty of fathers?

“Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21). Corporal punishment is certainly necessary (Proverbs 23:13-14), but so is verbal correction (Proverbs 29:15). It is incumbent upon fathers to recognize which is needed in the moment. It is also important to be involved beyond discipline.

27. What is the duty of bondservants?

“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God” (Colossians 3:22). While it is preferable to seek emancipation (1st Corinthians 7:21), the reality is that many peoples in many countries across the ages have been in bondage. Christians need to honor Christ in whatever circumstance they find themselves, including servitude (Ephesians 6:5-8; 1st Timothy 6:1-6; Titus 2:9-10).

28. Why should every action be done *“heartily?”*

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24). This is the summary of the preceding instructions. Wives must submit *“as is fitting in the Lord”* (18), children must obey because *this is well pleasing to the Lord* (20), and servants must obey, *“fearing God”* (22). Every role must be fulfilled with diligence (Ecclesiastes 9:10), and the knowledge that whomever we serve, whether they know it or not, is a proxy for serving the Lord. When it is challenging to obey a husband, a parent, or a boss, just remember that doing so is really a way to obey God.

29. What will become of the wrongdoer?

“But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality” (Colossians 3:25). Knowing that the Lord will *“reward”* those who do as they should (24) is good motivation, but so is knowing He will repay wrongdoers! We can submit even when those we submit to are wrong, not seeking our own vengeance, neither rebelling, because we know God will settle it.