

Series: Dwell	Reference: Colossians 3:1-17	Title: Better Together	Date: 11.07.2021
Website Writeup: Today we study how being new in Christ means living in light of God's Word. By studying Scripture in community, we grow to maturity in Christ with the help of fellow Christians.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Becoming new in Christ means living in light of God's Word. By studying Scripture in community, we grow to maturity in Christ with the help of fellow Christians.

We're familiar with the biblical concept of new birth as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:7 when He said, "...you must be born again." Ephesians describes it this way, 'you were dead in your transgressions & sins' (2:1), but then, 'But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved' (2:4-5). We've been reborn as a result of Jesus, something not of ourselves.

Birth's a singular moment. Growth's a lifetime. Like babies, we must grow up as we grow old - we don't become old infants. Relying solely on the fire insurance of salvation is indicative new birth hasn't occurred. A Christian's born into new life, marked by the heart & mind of God. We're transformed in thinking & lifestyle due to being in Christ.

Colossians states, once we are made new, the moment when we're restored to relationship with the Father due to the atoning work of the Son on the cross, the penalty of sin is satisfied, God's wrath on our sin is averted by Jesus & we've been hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Now the lingering effects of the Old Self must be cast off as we grow into maturity. Growth can only happen as we allow God's Word to inform & transform our lives while we live in community with others. Colossians 3, starting in v1 on p806 of your pew Bibles addresses this growth. Turn with me there...

*"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts** on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your minds** on things above, not on earthly things. **For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***

Our minds should be set on the things of God (vv. 1-3) due to our being raised in Christ & positioned in Him (v1 & 3). This isn't hyper-spiritualization making us out of touch with the here & now. Strangeness isn't our goal, godliness is. A rational pursuit of truth & love reflective of His heart & mind. Everything we do is viewed through the lens of Christ & His resurrection. Practically speaking, we attempt to live now as we'll live in heaven.

As a matter of fact, none of this can be understood without the understanding of the Kingdom of God - Jesus ushered in the first fruits of it, but it has yet to be fully

established as God continually calls people to Himself. Think of it as a kingdom which in the past had been overtaken with its people scattered far & wide. The king was still king, but had fled into isolation, constantly sending reminders & emissaries back to His people of what His kingdom had been & will be in the future. Now, he's returned, paid the ransom for his people by the sacrifice of his own son. As a result, he's taken his throne, established his kingdom once more, and has sent emissaries out to all the surrounding lands to say, it's safe to return. Currently the enemy having lost his power seeks to disrupt this renewal as best he can until the king will establish his kingdom in finality. So, the king has broken the back of his enemy, and given his people all they need for the journey home during this time.

On that journey, we have **personal responsibility** in spiritual formation as 1 Timothy 4:7-8 states, *"Have nothing to do with godless myths & old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life & the life to come."*

We've been given all we need for this life of godliness as 2 Peter 1:3-5 states, *"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory & goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great & precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."*

The penalty of sin has been paid, the wrath of God averted for us in Christ, but we still journey in a hostile land with the lingering effects of sin which need to be grown through. Thought & desire are reordered & redirected towards the heart of God in the Christian. What are these evil desires, and what's to be done about them?

Colossians elaborates further starting in v5 although we understand it's not an exhaustive list...*⁵**Put to death**, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires & greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.*

Let's be sober & honest about what this says within our current cultural context...sexual immorality in the Bible is defined as lustful thoughts towards another, sex outside the marriage covenant, homosexuality, bi-sexuality, bestiality, and the like, but other sins are no greater than these. Greed is also in this limited list. Having an evil desire doesn't make you evil, but what you do with it matters. I feel greedy sometimes, but to act on it would be to indulge a sinful desire not reflective of God's mind & heart. We're called to put to death such desires since they're damaging to the created order which God established. To say that any of these things are allowed under some revised Christian ethic deviating from common church doctrine throughout the ages is to say the Word of God isn't God-breathed & authoritative for life. An accommodation we must resist at all costs lest we lose the power of the Gospel at its core.

It continues...⁸*But now you must also **rid yourselves** of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have **taken off your old self** with its practices ¹⁰and have **put on the new self**, which is **being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.***

And if there's any doubt that the Christian life is against racism, all we need to do is end on v11...¹¹*Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

As a matter of fact, there's only one human race made up of various ethnic groups between which God has always called for love & respect. Language has power, looking at all peoples as part of the human race & not a conglomeration of races, better helps one to view all people as worthy of love & respect as God's created beings.

So, we're no longer marked by the old dead sinful self caught up in distorted sexual longings, jealousy, greed, anger, contempt & other vices which replaced God in our lives (vv. 3–9). Living in light of Christ means killing this stuff off as we're 'renewed in knowledge'. Like Romans 12:1-2 dictates, we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God - our true & proper worship. We don't conform to the pattern of this world, but are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Allowing the new self, transformed by Christ, to shine through. We don't take a light view of sin, rather we know how deeply damaging & harmful these things are to us, God & others. How they rob the life God intends to create & foster. So, we don't look at small infractions as harmless, but we repent consistently confessing our sin to one another (James 5:16) in order *not* to place ourselves back under sins bondage! No longer are we bound by labels & cultural belief systems, but are free in Christ who binds us all together in unity (vv. 10–11).

As holy & beloved in Christ, the new self is characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness & love (vv. 12–14). Do we always reflect these things? No, but there is grace for stumbling, and a higher calling to grow away from them together.

It's interesting to watch the prisoners in our Prison Fellowship class wrestle with a new Christian ethic. Maybe hearing for the first time about God's heart & mind, realizing their past actions, driven by errant evil desires, did them or anyone around them no good. Seeing now how they've been deceived, but also have a choice to follow Christ & better, not only their own life, but others around them! They know better than most where the life of the Old Self leads!

Let's recount...we must regard ourselves as having been hidden away with God in Christ, newly born, taking on His heart & mind. In our difficult journey through life, we're to put to death evil desires, to regard our Old Self as to having been taken off, to put on the New Self in Christ being renewed in the knowledge of the image of our Creator.

Notice how much of Scripture deals with our thinking, our minds being renewed. It's as if we were bitten by a poisonous viper & died, but Jesus breathed life back into our bodies. We're coming out of the stupor with the poison of the snake still coursing through our veins in a state of delirium, but Jesus cradles our heads on His lap whispering Truth as to who we are, and what we are to Him, as our thoughts become reordered to how they should be as we gaze up into His stare.

Colossians continues... *¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy & dearly loved, **clothe yourselves** with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness & patience. ¹³**Bear with each other & forgive one another** if any of you has a grievance against someone. **Forgive** as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues **put on love**, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

Listen to that language. Clothe yourselves, intentionally make the effort to pursue these things in your life. We wear clothes on the outside, they're often a source of pride & style. What we want others to see about ourselves. In Christ we desire people to see the heart of Christ when they look at us, indicative of His heart & desires. So we bear with & forgive each other because Christ forgave us, averting our eternal destruction, although we were hostile towards God in our former state!

We step forward in love, but love as defined by the Scriptures. Love with teeth. Active love beyond sentiment. Love doesn't mean agreement with just any thought or behavior, unity does. Love doesn't mean we can't have a sharp word. As a matter of fact, love means we should admonish one another when we see wrong thinking or behavior in another as we'll see next. Love is committed to the best for the person before us, which is sometimes contrary to their own evil desires they would want to indulge.

Anyone who's had a child knows it's possible to love someone while coming into sharp disagreement & even yelling at them for their wrong doing! Discipline is loving, acquiescence or tolerance of sin isn't, but that's not how the world defines love today.

Let's wrap up this passage starting in v15...*¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶**Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach & admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, **singing** to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷And 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.***"

NT Wright said, "The genuinely human existence which Paul commands can't be reached except through belief in the forgiving love of God. Nor can it be reached in isolation...Individualism, rightly prized by many Christians as a guard against the dangerous idea that membership in the church makes individual belief & conduct a matter of secondary importance [it is not], can easily be twisted in the equally dangerous notion that membership in the church itself is of comparative insignificance [it is not]."

God intends Christian behavior to be reinforced & upheld by friendship, company, teaching, counseling & living criticism of other Christians. Not to appreciate this is to lapse into arrogant independence of one's fellow human beings - worse, one's fellow Christians - which is a sign not of the new life but of the old"¹ Love without Truth lies, Truth without love kills, and both are reinforced & maintained in Christian community.

We're called to one body (v. 15). It's through this body we learn to let the word of Christ dwell in us. Through community we teach, encourage, worship & sing. We grow toward maturity together, so that in all things, not just our church life, we do them in the name of the Lord Jesus (vv. 15-17). Growing in maturity isn't meant to be done alone but in community.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Help must come from the outside, and it has come & comes daily & anew in the Word of Jesus Christ, bringing redemption, righteousness, innocence & blessedness. But God has put this Word into the mouth of [people] in order that it may be communicated to other [people]. When one person is struck by the Word, [they] speak it to others. God has willed we should seek & find His living Word in the witness of a brother [or sister], in the mouth of a [person]. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to [them]. [They] need [them] again & again when [they] become uncertain & discouraged, for by [themselves they] can't help [themselves] without belying the truth. [They] need [their] brother [or sister] as a bearer & proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. [They] need [their brother or sister] solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in [their] own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of [their] brother; [their] own heart is uncertain, [their] brother's is sure."²

There's great value in studying God's Word together. Like the Berean Jews in Acts 17:11 who sought to examine the Scriptures daily to make sure what Paul said was true, we should seek to test the words of others in light of the Bible & desire to reach a reasonable level of biblical literacy. Unity is found in agreement, which is the beauty of the true Christian life, given we see the Scriptures as the final authority on life & faith. Not that every detail is clear, but we defer to the Scriptures & have agreement on the major issues, which gives room to bear with each other in exploration of the minors.

The sad truth is that even though the biblical text is more available than at any time in history, we interact with it less & less. Studies reveal that "only 45% of those who regularly attend church read the Bible more than once a week. Over 40% of the people attending are reading their Bibles occasionally - maybe once or twice a month, if at all. In fact, 18 percent of attenders say they never read the Bible."³

¹ (N. T. Wright, "Instead Live in Accordance with the New Age (3:1-4:6)," in "Colossians," *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 12 [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986], ePub).

² (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954], 22-23)

³ (Ed Stetzer, "Biblical Illiteracy by the Numbers Part 1: The Challenge," *Christianity Today*, October 17, 2014, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/october/biblical-illiteracy-by-numbers.html>)

This is a far cry than the intensity of the ministers in Zurich during the 1500s who met together to examine the Latin Vulgate, Hebrew & Greek texts & to report on scholarship from rabbis & commentators across the spectrum.⁴ One thing I noticed when visiting Vinny & Mary's church in Georgia, since it was 2 miles from a seminary, many of the people were seminarians. It was evident they were well versed in the Scriptures.

Often the best way to build habits is to invite others to share the journey. The encouragement, knowledge & accountability of fellow believers can make all the difference. **You have all the tools you need at your fingertips to be well versed! Sunday mornings. Wednesday night Community Group. Commentaries & books for group study at the touch of a button. RightNow Media to study alongside a friend via video & questions. Bible Apps which give you opportunity to study along with others. There's really no excuse in this day & age for not being well versed in our study of the Word together.**

As we talked about in week 1, our time with God & in His Word should be transformative, that it affects how we live & engage the world. Remember the practice of meditation & memorization leads to silence & action, hearing & doing.

What we hear from Scripture should help us in becoming that New Self. Not only filling us up with knowledge, but living it out. As we gather together to learn from God's Word, we don't become a clique with just the right answers. We don't strive to be pridefully intellectual about all things Bible-related. Rather we desire to become "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). We seek to become people who worship the God the Bible points us to (John 5:39). We persevere together to become people who "hear the word of God & keep it!" (Luke 11:28). The Biblical worldview becomes the lens with which we view all of life.

Because becoming new in Christ means living in light of God's Word. And by studying Scripture in community, we grow to maturity in Christ with the help of fellow Christians.

⁴ ("How They Studied the Bible," *The Gospel Coalition*, January 12, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/how-they-studied-bible/>)