

CHAPTER 6

COLOSSIANS—THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Christian Life (3:5 - 4:6)

This has been called the practical section, or the paraenetic section, centering on exhortation to action. Paul uses the two parallel commands “put off” and “put on” (3:8, 10). Christians must do away with sinful, worldly habits and ways of life, and assume those ordered by God.

1. “Put off” (3:5-11)

At first the Christian life is negative, putting off the sinful practices of the former life.

v. 5, Therefore, put to death the members which are upon the earth,

“Put to death,” cf. 2:20; 3:3; the physical must follow the spiritual; term used only here & Rom 4:19; Heb 11:12.

“Members which are upon the earth,” cf. old man in vv. 9-10; viewed as members of the old nature (Matt 5:29; Rom. 7:23).

Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil lust, and covetousness, which is idolatry,

Accusatives, in apposition to “members.”

Pauline vice lists common: Rom 1:29-31; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3-4; Titus 3:3.

These sinful attitudes and actions marked the pagan life-style common in the Hellenistic world.

“Covetousness,” from *pleon* (more) + *echo* (have).

“Idolatry,” cf. Eph 5:5, putting one’s own will above God’s (Paul’s testimony regarding the idolatry of covetousness, Rom 7:7-13).

v. 6, On account of which things comes the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience;

God's wrath against pagan sins, esp. in Rom 1:18-32.

Text variant: "upon the sons of disobedience" UBS {C}; omitted in p^{46} B, perhaps taken from Eph 5:6; if left off, then some might take God's wrath to be directed against Christ at the crucifixion (cf. Cranfield on Rom 1); but context seems to favor wrath against unrepentant sinners.

"Sons of disobedience," genitive of characteristic quality.

v. 7, In which things you also once walked when you were living in them.

If previous variant maintained, then "among whom (masc.) you also once walked" is a possible translation.

Former practices of Gentile Christians, as in 1 Cor 6:9-11.

v. 8, But now you put off also all (these) things, wrath, anger, malice, slander, obscene speech out of your mouth;

"But now," assuming the more scandalous sins already departed from.

"You put off," "you" emphasized, personal responsibility; perhaps indicating the congregation guilty of these things.

"Put off," aor. impv., do it now.

Vices of the tongue (cf. Jas 3), especially attitudes toward one another in the church; perhaps attitudes of spiritual superiority on the part of some led to these uncharitable thoughts and words.

v. 9, Do not be lying unto one another,

Me + pres. impv., may indicate present practice, but not necessarily; present emphasizes need to make this a habit.

brotherly love a mark of the truly mature Christian (2:2).

Having put off the old man with his practices,

Aor. pt.; cf. impv. in 1 Thess 5:8; Rom 13:12; Eph 6:11.

Eph 4:22, 24; uses aor. inf. to describe putting off & on; aorists describe action as positional, not a process.

“Old man,” Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; cf. *eso anthropos*, “outer man” in Rom 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16.

v. 10, And having put on the new man which is being renewed unto knowledge

“Having put on,” aor. pt., at conversion.

“The new (man),” cf. inner man in 2 Cor 4:16; our new nature obtained in resurrection with Christ (v. 1).

“Which is being renewed,” pres. pt. of *anakainoo*, sanctification continues.

“Unto knowledge,” spiritual knowledge, sought by true Christians (as in Paul’s prayer in 1:9).

According to the image of the one who created him,

Image of God, Gen 1:27; fallen man to receive image of Christ, 1 Cor 15:45-49.

By seeking Christ, the Christian approaches more closely his image (2 Cor 3:18). This is far preferable to seeking spiritual growth by following proud human traditions.

v. 11, where there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free,

Common distinctions of class and race dissolve in the church, since all are one body in Christ. Cf. Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13.

For expansion of these contrasts, see B. 148-51.

Note, slave-free significant for Philemon and Onesimus.

But Christ is all things and in all things.

“Christ,” emphasized by being last word in sentence

Christ in the believers makes them one body, which in turn fills all things because of his own power and glory. They can rejoice in their fellowship in Christ.

2. “Put on” (3:12-17)

After telling what the Colossians must “put off,” Paul has already introduced the fact that they must “put on” the new man. He now explains the qualities of that new man.

v. 12, Therefore, as the elect ones of God, holy and beloved,

Election includes being loved by God (1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13) and being holy (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:2)

Put on a compassionate heart, kindness, humility, gentleness, longsuffering,

Now a list of virtues; cf. Gal 5:22-23.

These virtues are the opposite of the vices condemned in v. 8.

“Compassionate heart,” better translation than “bowels of compassion.”

v. 13, Enduring one another, and forgiving yourselves if any should have a complaint against any; even as the Lord graciously forgave you, so also (do) you;

“Enduring,” pres. pt., continuing forbearance.

“Forgiving,” pres. pt., continuing forgiveness (Matt 18:22; Lord’s Prayer).

As the Lord, as in Eph 4:32; Col 2:13.

Note: we should not resort to church discipline against each other except in extreme cases; better to bear with one another.

v. 14, And above all these things (put on) love, which is the bond of perfection.

“Above all,” as in Luke 3:20; love includes all these as subordinate principles (1 Cor 13:13; Rom 13:9-10).

“Bond of perfection” = “perfect bond,” adjectival use of genitive; love keeps church together (2:2).

v. 15, And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, unto which also you have been called in one body; and be thankful.

Third person imperative

“Peace of Christ,” genitive of source; linked to “bond” idea in Eph 4:3.

“Let rule,” *brabeueto* (*hapax*) related to *katabrabeueto* in Col 2:18, “rule against, disqualify.”

“In one body,” the church as body of Christ (1:18).

“Unto which you have been called,” holiness the object of effectual calling.

“Be thankful,” cf. Rom 1:21, where thanklessness marks the pagan world, leading into hatred of God and man.

v. 16, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Another third person imperative.

“The word of Christ,” UBS {A}; some MSS have “of God” or “of the Lord”; genitive of source; identified in following context as OT Scripture and perhaps distinctly Christian hymns (perhaps similar to the one in Col 1:15-20).

“In all wisdom” is better punctuated with the following participles (as in UBS).

With all wisdom teaching and admonishing each other

Christians are to encourage each other in the faith (Rom 15:14; Heb 5:12).

“With all wisdom,” probably a reference to the wisdom of Scripture, as in the Psalms and Proverbs; cf. 1:28.

“Teaching,” positive; “admonishing,” negative.

With psalms, hymns, (and) spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to God;

Lack of conjunctions in series, “asyndeton” (*a + sun + deo*, “not bound together”).

Three terms probably overlap:

- “Psalms,” from OT Psalter.
- “Hymns,” particularly Christian songs; B. suggests such as the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis (Luke 1-2; p. 159, n. 156).
- “Spiritual songs,” could be songs given as a spiritual gift, or simply songs about spiritual subjects.

Those who say that the Christian worship should only have songs from Scripture insist that these three terms are synonyms, and refer only to the OT psalms; however, there is no indicator in the text itself that these terms are totally synonymous. See John Battle, “Scriptural Singing in the Church,” *WRS Journal* 7:2 (Summer 2000), 12-17.

We note that this singing had a twofold purpose: praise to God, “singing . . . to God”; and exhortation to man, “teaching and admonishing each other.” B. notes the prominence of singing in the early church, mentioned by Pliny the Younger and Tertullian (p. 158).

This passage is closely related to Eph 5:18-20.

v. 17, and everything whatever you do in word or in work, (do) all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Concluding sentence to putting on new man; all life affected.

“All things,” nominative absolute; as in Matt 10:32.

“In the name of,” by authority of; ties in with “word of Christ” in v. 16.

“Giving thanks through him,” i.e., through Christ; cf. Rom 1:8; Eph 5:20.

3. “Be subject” (3:18 - 4:1)

A major part of the new Christian life is the way the Christian relates to those about him, in the family, in work, in the church. These relationships require the attention of the believer, and the inculcation of new attitudes and habits, often being submissive against normal pride (cf. Eph 5:21-22). The Colossians need to concentrate on these more mundane things, instead of seeking great spiritual visions.

The imperative verbs in this section are in the present tense, referring to continuous action, a new way of life.

(1) Wives and husbands (3:18-19)

v. 18, Wives, be submissive to your husbands, as it is fitting in the Lord.

“Be submissive,” could be middle “submit yourselves”; cf. Eph 5:22; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5.

“As is fitting,” imperfect, as in Eph 5:4.

“In the Lord,” Christian “fittingness,” or propriety, not like that recommended by worldly philosophy.

Recognition of man as head over the woman; cf. 1 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 5:11-15.

v. 19, Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter against them.

“Be loving,” from *agapao*, sacrificial love which seeks the best interest of the wife (cf. Christ and the church in Eph 5).

“Be not bitter against,” B. translates “do not treat them harshly”; opposite is patience.

(2) Children and parents (3:20-21)

v. 20, Children, obey (your) parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the Lord.

Reiteration of the fifth commandment (as in Eph 6:1-3); contrast to last days (2 Tim 3:2).

“In all things,” assumes Christian home; however, true always unless required to sin (cf. Acts 4:19); L. “the exceptions are so few that they may be disregarded.”

v. 21, Fathers, do not irritate your children, lest they be disheartened.

Fathers addressed for parents; cf. Heb 11:23.

“Irritate,” *erethizo*, here & 2 Cor 9:2 (good); not same verb as in Eph 6:4.

“Disheartened,” give up trying; note words of Sir Robert Anderson, quoted in B. 165-66.

Eph 6:4 adds positive, “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

(3) Slaves and masters (3:22 - 4:1)

This section is longer than usual, especially the duties of slaves to masters. This is fitting, since Onesimus was sent back along with this letter, having escaped from Philemon. Paul wants the church to be sure that, even while Paul asks mercy for Onesimus, he does not approve of his actions. The positive attitude of service for Christ is far more effective than negative threats against disobedience.

v. 22, Slaves, obey in all things (your) masters according to the flesh,

“Obey in all things the masters,” same phraseology as for children in v. 20.

“Masters according to the flesh,” as opposed to their true Lord (v. 24).

Slave obedience, Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22-25; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; cf. 1 Pet 2:18-25.

Many Christian slaves had non-Christian masters (cf. 1 Tim 6:2).

Not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

“Eye-service,” *ophthalmo-doulia*; service which can be seen with the eye (word of Paul’s coinage, used here & Eph 6:6); working only when watched.

“Men-pleasers,” *anthrop-areskoi*, also here & Eph 6:6; LXX in Ps 52:6.

“Sincerity of heart,” cf. LXX 1 Chr 29:17, undivided, sincere service; doing best work cheerfully as Christian duty.

“Fearing the Lord,” who sees all things (Ps 139).

v. 23, Whatever you do, work whole-heartedly, as to the Lord and not to men,

“Whole-heartedly,” lit. “from the soul.”

“As to the Lord,” because of

(1) God’s providence, which placed master over slave.

(2) Value of honest work.

(3) Testimony to master and the world.

v. 24, Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.

“Knowing,” causal participle, explains reason for such service.

“You will receive,” future, at the judgment.

“Reward,” *antapodosin* (*hapax*) just payment which is due; cf. *antapodoma* in Luke 14:12 and Rom 11:9.

“Of the inheritance,” genitive of apposition; note contrast: slave will inherit.

You serve the Lord Christ;

The service of the slave is not primarily for the master, but is the slave’s Christian service. As such it will be rewarded by Christ, the great Lord (cf. 4:1).

v. 25, For the unrighteous one will obtain what he has unrighteously done, and there is no favoritism.

“The unrighteous one,” in this context the lazy slave; in Eph 6:8-9 emphasis is more on unrighteous masters; same principle applies to both.

“Will obtain,” recover or get back (2 Cor 5:10); middle voice, will do it for himself.

“What he has unrighteously done,” NIV “will be repaid for his wrong.”

“No favoritism,” cf. Gal 2:6; in Eph 6:8, applies to both.

4:1, Masters, the just and the equitable thing be doing with (your) slaves, knowing that you yourselves also have a master in heaven.

“Just,” before God as well as men.

“Equitable,” *isoteta*, equal; not slave/master equality, but fairness; Eph 6:9, “do the same things to them” (cf. 6:7, goodwill); cf. *isosceles* triangle, two equal sides.

“Knowing,” causal participle as in 3:24.

“Master in heaven,” equality of all men before God.

Paul does not tell masters to liberate their slaves, but he “Christianizes” the institution. The ideals of Christian responsibility and fellowship transcend the man-made barriers and classes of society.

4. “Watch and pray” (4:2-6)

Having told the Colossians that the Christian faith entails putting off the old man, putting on the new man, and living in Christian submission, Paul concludes the practical section of his epistle with the exhortation to be praying for him and themselves, to be watchful against Satan’s wiles, and to be watchful for opportunities to witness to others.

v. 2, Be persisting in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving.

Present impv. emphasizes persistence in prayer; “cling closely to, remain constant,” Mark 3:9; Acts 8:13; 10:7.

- Other examples of “continuing” in prayer, Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Rom 12:12; cf. Eph. 6:18.

“Watching,” first participle after “persisting,” modal; 1 Thess 5:6; 1 Cor 16:13; especially important in times of persecution; similar to Matt 26:41.

“With thanksgiving,” prayer and thanksgiving always combined, as in 1:3.

v. 3, Praying together also concerning us.

“Praying,” the second participle after “persisting,” modal.

“Concerning us,” the point of the second participle; “us,” Paul and his companions; cf. “me” in Eph 6:19.

That God would open for us a door of the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am even bound,

Hina with the subjunctive shows content of the prayer (similar use to *hoti* with indicative).

“Open a door,” as in 1 Cor 16:9 (Ephesus), and 2 Cor 2:12 (Troas); also the church in Philadelphia (Rev 3:8).

- A particularly apt expression as Paul writes from prison; yet these doors can be figurative as well as literal; his epistles and personal contacts and prayers counted much, perhaps more than his personal presence.

“To speak,” infinitive of purpose, reason for opening door.

“Mystery of Christ,” as in 1:26; 2:2, genitive of apposition; Christ is the mystery (in his corporate personality).

“On account of which,” Paul’s ministry to Gentiles is what led to his arrest in Jerusalem.

“Am bound,” pf.; Acts 28:16.

v. 4, That I might manifest it as it is necessary for me to speak.

Second *hina* clause, explains the infinitive clause “to speak”; God to open door so that Paul can proclaim mystery.

“It is necessary,” Paul commissioned by Christ (Acts 9, etc.), and under personal constraint (1 Cor 9:16).

v. 5, In wisdom be walking toward those outside, redeeming the time.

“Be walking,” common Jewish-Christian term for way of life.

“In wisdom,” true wisdom from the Christian tradition, not the heretics (pride, asceticism, etc.); God’s wisdom directs life, as in Prov 8.

“Those outside”; Jewish usage, testimony to the world, as in 1 Thess 4:12; 1 Cor. 5:12-13; 1 Tim 3:7.

“Redeeming the time,” making the most of each opportunity, buying the time; Eph 5:15.

“Redeem,” from *agora*, “marketplace.”

“Time,” *kairon*, season, opportunity.

v. 6, Your word (let be) always with grace, seasoned with salt, to know how it is necessary for you to answer each one.

The Colossians needed to control their speech, not only among themselves (as in 3:8-9), but among the non-Christian community.

“(Let be),” understood 3rd person impv.; verb’s absence emphasizes the subject

“Grace,” led by the Spirit of God (cf. Luke 21:15; Acts 6:10), and healing to the people

“Salt,” opposite of corruption (cf. Matt 5:13; Eph 4:29)

“To know how to answer,” apologetics the job of all Christians (1 Pet 3:15)