

Righteousness

THE WAY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS
Focal Verses • COLOSSIANS 3:1-3, 5-17

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson we will: **EVALUATE** how to be Christ's representative in our daily lives; **DESIRE** to represent Christ well; and **PURSUE** lives of righteousness that honor the Lord.

In Focus

Brandon and Breana were in charge of leading the adult Sunday School class. Breana started the class by saying, "Today, let's talk about righteousness and what it means to live a new life in Christ." Brandon said, "Let me share with you an example. Most creatures in the animal kingdom shed something periodically. The most commonly known creatures that experience shedding are snakes. Snakes shed their skin because it doesn't fit anymore. Most science museums have a display of a snakeskin abandoned by a snake after it was shed. It is usually a hard outer layer of skin shaped like a snake. If the snake decided to return to the outer skin, it would have difficulty getting its body back into the dead shell because it's old and worn out."

Breana continued, "We can imagine a similar situation with a butterfly trying to return to its cocoon. It would no doubt damage its beautiful wings, trying to get back into the hole of the cocoon. The butterfly no longer fits the old form."

"Even dogs and cats," Brandon continued, "usually shed their hair all over the place. It would be odd and foolish for a pet owner to gather up the hair and then attempt to paste it back on the dog or cat. That hair is dead and old; it no longer belongs on the animal. Right?" As the group nodded in agreement with Brandon, Breana said, "What is God calling you to leave behind for the sake of righteousness?"

In our lesson today, Paul is exhorting the church at Colossae to take off the old life and put on the new one in Christ. Just like in the above examples, our old life before Christ should no longer appeal to us or fit our new life in Christ. What aspects of your old life before Christ is God calling you to leave behind for the sake of righteousness?

SCAN FOR VIDEO



Keep in Mind

"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."
 (Colossians 3:14, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Colossians 3:1** If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

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

The People, Places, and Times

Barbarians. The word inhabited (earth) was used for the world inhabited by Greeks in contrast to what Greeks and Romans perceived as “unsettled” lands. In the Old Testament, the word indicated the cities and towns in contrast to the wilderness where the nomads roam. It also set apart those who could not speak the Greek language. The term “barbarian” is very problematic, as it was used by Greeks and Romans to marginalize people. Here, Paul is stating that this former way of marginalizing people outside of the Greco-Roman world is now done away with in Christ.

Scythian. A native of Scythia. The Greeks despised the Jews; a barbarian scorned a Scythian. They were seen as the lowest of the low.

Background

In the final two chapters of Colossians, Paul challenged the Colossians to make practical application of the doctrines he had been preaching. Paul believed Christians should not just know the truth and be able to defend it, but that truth must also be lived out in their daily lives. The pagan religions of Paul's day said little or nothing about personal morality. A worshiper could bow before an idol, put his offering on the altar, and go back to live the

same old life of sin. What a person believed had no direct relationship with how he behaved. No one would attempt to correct the person for his behavior. The Christian faith brought a whole new concept into pagan society. Faith in Christ meant being united with Him. If Christians share His life, they must follow His example. If Christ lives in the believer, he or she cannot continue in sin. Thus, Paul concluded his letter to the Colossians with specific instructions about Christian conduct.

At-A-Glance

1. Seek Things Above (Colossians 3:1-3)
2. New Life in Christ (vv. 5-9)
3. Renewal Procedures (vv. 10-11)
4. Walking New (vv. 12-17)

In Depth

1. Seek Things Above (Colossians 3:1-3)

The first thing Paul encouraged the Colossians to do was to seek heavenly things continually. "To set their heart on things above" meant to set their interest on Christ-centered things. One's attitudes, ambitions, and whole outlook on life are molded by Christ's relation to the believer, and that allegiance to Him takes precedence over all other allegiances.

The description of Christ as "seated at the right hand of God" is another implied reminder to those seeking to diminish Christ's role as mediator. The right hand of God is a place of supreme privilege and divine authority.

In other words, Paul said the Christian should not just seek to go to heaven but set his mind on the things above. Give God, and the things of God, a large central place in one's thought life. One cannot withdraw from daily activities. But everything a believer does should be seen from the backdrop of eternity.

2. New Life in Christ (vv. 5-9)

Paul speaks forthrightly about the demands of the new life and our urgent need to curb all the degrading tendencies of the old nature. The old life is dead. The believer has to let it die. We are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes but to wipe them out completely. Exterminate the old way of life. The action is to be undertaken decisively, with a sense of urgency. It suggests a vigorous, painful act of personal determination. Paul is calling for a slaying of evil passions, desires, and practices that root themselves in our lives. Paul goes on to list sins. In the New International Version of Colossians 3:5, "impurity" is not just physical impurity but uncleanness in thought, word, and act. "Lust" essentially means a feeling or experience from an uncontrolled desire. "Greed" suggests a ruthless desire in pursuit of material things. This attitude is identified with idolatry because it puts self-interest and material things in the place of God.

Paul warned that God's judgment would fall on the disobedient. He reminded the Colossians that this is the way they used to live. He said this ungodly life belongs to the past and that the Christian should be done with it. Paul firmly encourages getting "rid" of this past life (from v. 8, NIV). The phrase "but now" marks a new beginning. The Christian is to take off the filth of the past. Paul specifically names anger, rage (a sudden and passionate outburst of displeasure), malice, and slander (insulting talk against one's fellow man or woman). Filthy language is "bad or abusive speech."

The sin of falsehood is singled out. Lying is given separate treatment and a strong exhortation: "Do not lie" (from v. 9, NIV). The Christian is to have a totally new life change in which he or she has put off the old self with its practices, habits, or characteristics and put on the new. This is like the resurrection of Christ, who pulled off the grave clothes and then left

them behind in the tomb. Christians now have a new life in Christ; the old deeds and desires must be put off.

3. Renewal Procedures (vv. 10–11)

Paul talked about becoming a new creature in Christ and taking off the old self, but how can that be done? Bad habits and ungodly conduct are not simply going to fall away like dirty clothes. Paul used the word “knowledge” to explain how a person changes (v. 10, KJV)—not through the knowledge of more rules and laws, but the knowledge of Christ. Our minds must be renewed. As believers grow in knowledge of the Word of God, when we learn, read, and study His Word, God’s Spirit changes us. God transforms Christians by washing old thoughts, desires, and intentions out of our minds and replacing them with new ones.

In verse 11, Paul gives examples of this kind of mind change when he speaks about human distinctions and differences. In Christ, there are no nationalities (neither Greek nor Jew), religious differences (circumcised or uncircumcised), and no cultural differences (Barbarian or Scythian). The Greeks considered all non-Greeks to be barbarians and the Scythians to be the lowest barbarians of all. Yet, in Jesus Christ, a person’s cultural status has no advantage or disadvantage. Nor is economic or political status helpful (“bond nor free”). Slaves should try to get their freedom, but if they do not, that does not make them any less in Christ’s sight. All of these kinds of distinctions belong to the old person and the old way of thinking.

4. Walking New (vv. 12–17)

Christians are chosen, set apart, and loved by God. These are privileges God gave to His people in the Old Testament that are made available to Christians as well. Because God gave these blessings to His people, Paul encourages them

to walk in compassion (a tenderness expressed toward those suffering), kindness, goodness, graciousness (a sweet disposition), humility (thinking humbly of oneself), gentleness (delicate consideration for the rights and feelings of others), and patience (self-restraint that allows one to bear injury and insult without resorting to retaliation). It also means bearing with and forgiving one another (“putting up” with things we don’t like). The final word is “love” (from v. 14, NIV). Love is unconditional giving and caring that goes beyond the call of duty.

Peace is another characteristic that Paul exhorts the believer to put on. Not just peace with each other but peace of mind, unruffled by difficulties and confusion. As usual, Paul weaves an attitude of thanksgiving in this section of the letter. Thankfulness to God and to our brothers and sisters promotes inward and outward peace. The Colossians are told to allow the word of God, the Gospel, and the messages about Christ to be a rich treasure for them that becomes so deeply implanted that it controls thinking, attitudes, and actions. When God’s Word is deep down in our hearts, Christ’s presence causes us to conduct ourselves in a wise manner, influenced by God’s insight and instruction. Paul writes that God’s Word dwelling in our hearts will also cause us to sing psalms from the Old Testament and hymns and spiritual songs based on the New Testament truths. Paul concludes with “Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (from v. 17, KJV). We are to always act as Christ’s representatives. Christ is to live through God’s children, those who have trusted in Him for their salvation and are eternally thankful.

Search the Scriptures

1. _____ those things which are _____ (Colossians 3:1).
2. Mortify ... your _____ ..., fornication, _____, inordinate affection,

evil _____, and covetousness, which is _____ (3:5).

3. _____ not to one another (3:9).

4. _____ one another, and _____ one another, ... even as _____ forgave you (3:13)

5. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the _____ of the _____ Jesus (3:17)

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do we constantly “seek things above” when we have to live and participate in daily activities here on Earth?

2. How do we get rid of old habits and lifestyles and put on new ones?

3. Why are forgiveness and love two key elements in a life that pleases God?

4. How can an attitude of thanksgiving help us in our relationship with God and with people?

Liberating Lesson

In our society today, for many people, lying is common. Some people believe that if the truth is going to hurt, make you uncomfortable, ruin your reputation, get you in trouble, or cause you to pay money, then lying is OK. We justify lying or find creative ways to do it by calling it something else. In popular culture—TV, movies, politics, etc.—how does lying manifest itself, and how do we participate? In the midst of this kind of society, the Christian is exhorted to tell the truth. Lying

in any form is considered part of our old life and needs to be discarded.

Application for Activation

Complete two lists with characteristics, each from your old life and from the new, as described in Colossians 3:5–17. Remember, you cannot change yourself or your ways. Pray and ask God to change you in His own timing and in His own way to see positive changes in your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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New Testament Greek Lexicon. Bible Study Tools.com. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/> (accessed November 2, 2011).

Unger, Merrill F. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988.

Say It Correctly

Concupiscence. kon-KYOO-pi-sens.
Scythian. SITH-e-en.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 295

Acts 13:1–52

Psalm 123

DAY 296

Acts 14:1–28; 15:1–21

Psalm 124

DAY 297

Acts 15:22–41; 16:1–24

Psalm 125

DAY 298

Acts 16:25–40; 17:1–34

Psalm 126

DAY 299

Acts 18:1–28

Psalm 127

DAY 300

Acts 19:1–41

Psalm 128

DAY 301

Acts 20:1–38

Psalm 129

Notes
