

Becoming Like Christ

Lesson 2: Putting Off the Old, Putting On the New -- Colossians 3:1–14

Every morning you do something so ordinary you barely notice it. You get dressed. You reach into the closet, and without much thought you take off whatever you slept in and put on what the day requires. You would not dream of walking out the door still wearing yesterday's rumpled clothes, or showing up to a wedding in your gardening rags. There is an old self to set aside and a new self to put on, and the act is so familiar it has become automatic. Paul reaches for exactly that picture to describe the deepest change a human being can undergo.

He tells the Christians at Colossae to put off the old self with its practices and to put on the new self. He lists the clothes that have to come off: anger, malice, slander, filthy talk, the old way of lying to one another. And he lists the clothes that go on: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and over all of them, like a coat that holds the whole outfit together, love. The Christian life, Paul is saying, involves a daily wardrobe change, a deliberate setting aside of one way of living and a deliberate taking up of another.

But notice where Paul begins, because everything depends on it. Before he tells anyone to take anything off or put anything on, he says something has already happened. You have died, he says, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. You were raised with Christ. This is not advice for people trying to improve themselves by sheer grit. It is a summons addressed to people who have already been made new, who went down into the waters of baptism and were buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3–4). The new clothes are not something you have to weave from scratch. They have been given to you in Christ. Your job is to put them on.

And there is the heart of this lesson, the truth we will turn over and over together. The new self is genuinely a gift, received in Christ, and yet putting it on is genuinely your daily work. You cannot earn the new life by changing your clothes, and you cannot enjoy the new life while you keep reaching for the old ones. So read this passage slowly. It tells you who you now are in Christ, what no longer fits the person you have become, and what you are to wear instead, every single day, until the wardrobe of the old self is finally and fully gone.

Group Discussion: Paul does not say try to become a new person; he says you have already died and been raised with Christ, so now put on the new self. Why does it matter so much that the change of behavior he commands is grounded in something God has already done for us in Christ? How might a person live differently if they understood holiness as putting on who they already are in Christ, rather than earning a status they do not yet have?

Personal Reflection: Think about the old clothes Paul says no longer fit a person who has been raised with Christ, the anger, the harsh words, the quiet dishonesty, the impure

thoughts. Which one of these old garments do you find yourself reaching for again and again, almost without thinking? As we begin this lesson, what is one new garment from Paul's list that you most long to see God help you put on in its place?

Read Colossians 3:1–14

Study Questions

1. Paul grounds the entire call to holy living in a past event: if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above (Colossians 3:1–3). What does it tell us about the nature of the Christian life that the command to change comes only after the declaration that we have already died and been raised with Christ? How does this connect to what Paul has just said about being buried and raised with Him in baptism (Colossians 2:12)?
2. Paul says, set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (Colossians 3:2). Honestly, where do your thoughts drift when they are free to wander, to worries, to grievances, to appetites, to ambitions? What would it look like this week to deliberately reset your mind toward Christ and the things above when you catch it sinking back to earth?
3. Paul commands us to put to death what is earthly in us, and he names it plainly: sexual immorality, impurity, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Why does Paul use such violent language, put to death, rather than gentler words like manage or moderate? What does this tell us about how seriously God takes the sins we are tempted to excuse?
4. Paul says these sins are why the wrath of God is coming (Colossians 3:6), and that we ourselves once walked in them (Colossians 3:7). Take one sin from his list that you know was part of your old way of living. How have you seen Christ begin to put it to death in you, and where does it still cling to you and need to be stripped off?

5. After the first list, Paul gives a second one: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk, along with lying to one another (Colossians 3:8–9). Why do you think Paul moves from sins of impurity and greed to sins of speech and temper, the sins that damage the community? What does this teach us about how the new self is meant to show up among brothers and sisters in the church?
6. Paul says, do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices (Colossians 3:9). Where are you tempted toward the small dishonesties, the exaggeration, the flattery, the convenient silence, the managed impression? What would it mean to let the truthfulness of your new self in Christ reshape the way you speak this week?
7. Paul says the new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator, and that in this new humanity the old divisions fall away, for Christ is all and in all (Colossians 3:10–11). What does it teach us about the church that putting on the new self also means putting off the divisions of race, status, and background the world clings to? How is this renewal connected to becoming like the One in whose image we were made?
8. Paul tells us to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, and to bear with one another and forgive as the Lord forgave us (Colossians 3:12–13). Think of one relationship where you are currently called to bear with someone, or to forgive a real wrong. What would it look like to actually put on Christ's forgiveness toward that person this week, rather than waiting until you feel like it?
9. Paul commands Christians to put off the old self and to put on the new (Colossians 3:9–10), language of deliberate, ongoing action. Yet some teach that once a person believes, holiness is entirely God's doing and the Christian simply rests in what Christ has done,

with no real effort required. How does Paul hold both truths together, that the new self is genuinely given to us in Christ in baptism (Colossians 2:12; 3:3) AND that we must actively, daily put off the old practices and put on the new (compare Philippians 2:12–13)? Why does this matter for how we pursue holiness?

10. Look back across Colossians 3:1–14 as a whole: raised with Christ, minds set above, the old garments stripped off, the new self put on, and love binding it all together. Name one specific old garment Jesus is asking you to take off in this season, and one specific new garment He is calling you to put on in its place. What concrete step will you take this week to make that wardrobe change real?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 6:3–7, buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life; Galatians 3:26–27, baptized into Christ and clothed with Christ; Ephesians 4:22–24, put off the old self and put on the new self created after God’s likeness; Philippians 2:12–13, work out your own salvation, for God works in you; Galatians 5:22–24, the fruit of the Spirit and crucifying the flesh with its passions.