

Colossians 3:9-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-3/colossians-39-11/>

Paul continues his description of behaviors that are not in alignment with the reality of Christ, or the true benefit of the Colossian believers, and exhorts the Colossian believers to stay away from them.

In the previous section ([see commentary on Colossians 3:5-8](#)), Paul establishes that there are two paths we can choose from—the one in alignment with who Christ is and who we are in Him, that leads to a life experience of abundance, or the way of evil and immorality (a misalignment with Christ and His Kingdom) which leads to misery and death.

As Paul continues to list some examples of what misalignment with Christ might look like and exhorts the Colossian believers to move away from these practices, it seems most likely that these are not arbitrary examples chosen at random. They are likely the specific issues prevalent in that community, which would have been communicated to Paul through his emissary Epaphras (Colossians 1:3-8).

It is worth noting that Paul's exhortation here is not to shame these believers with rules. It is rather to reorient them to their true station in Christ, and point out the terrible consequences of sin. Paul is leading the believers in Colossae to see reality as it is and acknowledge what is in their true best interest.

The first behavior listed in this section (which is really a continuation from the previous verses), says *do not lie to each other*. To *lie* is to communicate a falsehood deliberately. Some translations say “stop lying,” suggesting again that this is a real and present issue within the Colossian community. Notice the reciprocity inherent in this statement—to *each other*. Communicating truth is a shared responsibility. Each member has to steward their part. When people *lie to one another*, they put a veil between themselves and the truth. Thus, they create a separation (death) in their relationship. A barrier that invites them to detach a little from reality, which encourages people and communities to live in misalignment with Christ.

Paul tells the Colossians exactly why this is a foolishness to be avoided: *since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices*. The word for *laid aside* is the Greek word “apekdyomai.” It means “to spoil” or “to put off.” This word only occurs twice in all of Scripture, both in Colossians. The other occurrence was in verse 15 of Chapter 2: “[Christ] had **disarmed** the rulers and authorities”. So, to have *laid aside* something is to take away its power, to spoil it.

When believers are born into the Kingdom of Christ, they *have laid aside the old self*. In other words, they have set aside their sinful nature and received a new nature, becoming a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). In order to gain full benefit and experience the power of the new self, this is a continuous decision, not a one-off chore. It is something believers must actively decide to do over and over, every moment of every day.

Paul's usage of the past tense here is important. He is trying to encourage the Colossian believers by reminding them this is something they have done before. In essence, Paul is saying: "You've done this already! Just continue to be consistent!" It is a call to remembrance, to recall and commit to continue to walk in the path that has been chosen that leads to life and benefit.

The phrase *evil practices* is the Greek word "praxis." It refers to deeds, actions. The business of a thing. To *lie to one another* is one such practice of *evil*, of *the old self*.

Christian believers not only lay aside the old self in order to walk in newness of life, they replace it. What is inserted in place of the old self is the new self: *and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge*. To walk in this new self is an act of the will. It is a choice to be made, an action to be taken. That choice begins by trusting God (rather than *self*) and choosing a perspective that is true. Then it makes sense to continuously put off the old self, and *put on the new self*.

The word for *put on* is the Greek word "endyo." It means "to sink into," similar to when you drape yourself in a shirt and then put your hands through the sleeves. It means, in a metaphorical sense, to be clothed in something. To wear it.

So, the imagery here is of one who has taken off the clingy, ill-fitting clothes of *evil* and have *put on* a new outfit. In fact, *a new self*. The metaphor is the action of changing clothes, from the dirty to the clean. Just as we put on clothes each day, we are exhorted to put on this new nature each day.

This *new self is being renewed to a true knowledge*. The renewal is in process. It has happened, is happening, and will continue to happen. The only other time this word for *renewed* occurs in Scripture is the following verse:

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."
(2 Corinthians 4:16)

Each day *the new self* is put on, it is growing, maturing, becoming more and more like Christ. *The old self* is always destined for decay. It is dying, always dying. But *the new self* is progressing. It is constantly *being renewed*. Therefore, it always ought to be put on, and the old self set aside. This is a constant process, daily, moment by moment.

The new self is being renewed in (or into) a true knowledge. The thing the *new self* is progressing toward is truth. It is maturing into reality, learning how to think, perceive, and act within existence as it is rather than as our flesh would like it to be. It is not acquiring the false knowledge offered by the world. Rather it is acquiring a *true knowledge*, of what is real and right. It is important to note that the old self is not acquiring any of these positive traits. It is always old and corrupt. It is unreformable. The only proper place for it is in the "dirty clothes hamper" of life. To be set aside.

This renewal is being done *according to the image of the One who created him* [the new self]. So, we are back to the idea of alignment. The Creator made each self, each person, to live within reality and interact with that reality for the sake of God's Kingdom. God created each person to be fulfilled by contributing their gifts in ruling the earth in harmony and teamwork ([see commentary on Psalm 8](#)).

That is the transcendent mission of all persons—to live as we have been designed to live. The standard is the image of God the Creator. *The One*. The opportunity to be a new person and to live in accordance with this image of God is the great gift of Christ to the world. And *the new man* is constantly growing into that opportunity, living daily toward the Kingdom of God, being *renewed* and attaining the *true knowledge* that empowers him to live as he was designed to live.

If we choose this perspective, then it will make a lot more sense to walk in the new man than to choose the old man. But the old man is wickedly deceptive. Along with the world, it feeds us lies. It speaks to us as a ventriloquist, assuring us that it is our true self. But Paul exhorts us to see reality and to see that this old self is a walking dead. It is a zombie, so to speak. So, it ought to be set aside and in its place the new creation should be chosen, the new self that is renewed day by day.

Paul next takes a parenthetical deviation from his main point, which is the opportunity for each believer to choose to walk in alignment with the Creator God who designed him or her. He decides that it is important to clarify that this is *a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all*.

The *distinction* Paul is making has nothing to do with race, gender, age, ritual, geography, or status. These are all worldly divisions that try to reduce the true knowledge of God to something strictly physical. Paul is calling for alignment with Christ, which any person of any station in any part of the world is capable of attaining—*Christ is all, and in all*.

The list Paul gives seems to be about full spectrums of peoples. There are *Jews*, the chosen people of God who dominate the storytelling in the Old Testament, and the *Greeks* (or, more properly, the Gentiles), which is the Biblical description of anyone who is not Jewish. This pair of opposites infers all people. The *Greeks* (or Gentiles) are newcomers to the Christian world in which Paul is speaking; their way to Christ opened by the life and death of Jesus and the work of the early church apostles. The *Jews* are still God's chosen people, but that does not disqualify Gentiles from being grafted into the Kingdom. The key to the kingdom is faith. This is a message Paul is fighting for every day of his life.

Similarly, the distinction between *circumcised* and *uncircumcised* is a pair of opposites that includes all peoples. It is also a reference to a discussion that dominated the early church period. There was great conflict among *Jews* over the question of whether Gentiles need to be circumcised (as the Jews were) in order to be welcomed into the community of believers (Acts 15:5). Circumcision had always been a physical marker designating the people of God (*Jews*) from the rest of the world. But Paul argues throughout his writing that it is the circumcision of

the heart by faith that really matters. He exhorts his Gentile converts not to trust in ritual or rules (Galatians 5:2-6).

The next pair on the list are *barbarian* and *Scythian*. The word for *barbarian* literally means “one whose speech is rough” and is often a term used for wild and foreign peoples who are rough around the edges. In Romans 1:14, Paul pairs “barbarians” with “Greeks” which would indicate all Gentiles, from highly educated to completely uneducated.

The *Scythian* people were nomadic and lived in the area of modern-day Russia. The Scythians were among the most notable barbarians. So this pair might be “general to specific” or “anonymous to notorious” implying “all barbarians.” Together with the previous pair *Greek and Jew* this list would cover every nationality, hence every person on earth. Paul’s point then is that there is *no distinction* between any person on earth with respect to how their hearts are renewed. The spiritual *renewal* for every single person is the same, it comes through *Christ*, who *is all, and in all*.

The last pairing in the list is *slave and freeman*. The previous pairings covered “every person of every nationality on earth.” This now clarifies there is likewise no regard for social standing.

It is difficult to get ourselves into the early church mindset of the Roman era, in which slavery was a part of life and not really questioned in any significant way. Early believers would have thought about slavery the same way we think of a professional athlete having their contract sold, a business executive’s actions being dictated by an employment contract, or a union agreement requiring a worker to stop working (go on strike). To them this would all be business as usual. In some of Paul’s letters, slaves and “masters” are warned and encouraged in the same manner, which would likely have been controversial for the times, since it asserts that slaves and masters have the same standing and value in God’s eyes. Their gifts and contribution to the Body of Christ is equal.

The focus of Paul’s message is to follow Christ, no matter what your circumstances. The distinctions and rewards of this world are of no effect in God’s kingdom and economy. The currency of God’s economy is truth, love, and service. The treasure or reward is spiritual rather than material.

No matter what your station is in life, we are all invited to love God and live in accordance with His Kingdom. *Christ is all, and in all*. The phrase *Christ is all* hearkens back to the phrases in Chapter 1, where Paul stated of Christ “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). This also reflects the name God gave for Himself to Moses, which means “I AM,” which is a claim that God is the source and substance of existence itself (Exodus 3:14).

God has granted to each person who believes in Christ the amazing reality of being in Christ. But in order to gain the full benefit of that grant, it must be possessed by walking in that spiritual reality, through the obedience of faith. In doing so, the spiritual reality becomes a physical reality. This is a pattern in scripture, and applies to the chosen of the New Testament as well as the Old.

Israel was unconditionally granted the Promised Land by God. But God required the Israelites to walk in obedience to Him in order to possess the Land. In order to experience the benefit of the grant, they had to walk in obedience and possess the grant (Genesis 15:18; Joshua 1:1-3).

In like manner, New Testament believers are granted the gift of being in Christ solely based on faith, but are required to set aside the old nature and put on the new nature in order to experientially possess the benefits of God's grant of new life.

Biblical Text

⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him — ¹¹ a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.